

# AT-RISK YOUTH

**PART I**

♦ **Understanding Students At-Risk**

## At-Risk Youth

### PART I: Understanding Students At-Risk Preventing & Reducing Incidence of At-Risk

Editor's Notes	Robert C. Morris	1
Foreword	Cecil F. Carter	2
Understanding Students At-Risk	Evelyn Baker Dandy	5
Identification of Potential School Dropouts and Implications for Prevention	Jerry Trusty and Katherine Dooley-Dickey	6
Elementary Teachers' Beliefs About Who is Responsible for Learning	Ellen M. Tomchin and Steven M. Culver	9
Consequences of Ignoring Specific Dialect Differences	Evelyn Baker Dandy	11
At-Risk College Students: They Can Survive	Beatrice L. Logan and Deborah H. Najee-ullah	14
Prevention and Reducing Incidence of At-Risk Students	Zelda B. Tenenbaum	18
Reducing the Risk Through the School Discipline Program	George J. Fero	19
Restructuring the K-2 Grades for the Prevention of Failure	William P. Deighan	22
Rhyme, Rhythm, and Reading for At-Risk Students	Wynton H. Hadley and Richard T. Hadley	25
Study Skills: One High School's Alternative to Special Education: An Intervention Program that Works	Donald E. Kersemeir	28
A Selected Annotated Bibliography of Current At-Risk Readings	Nancy Norton and Christopher Scott Chalker	30

#### THRESHOLDS IN EDUCATION FOUNDATION

##### BOARD OF DIRECTORS 1989-90

Dr. Frank P. Bazeli  
Ms. Marcia Bollendorf  
Dr. G. Robb Cooper  
Dr. Wilma Miranda  
Dr. Jeffrey Mirel  
Dr. Roberta Nauman  
Dr. John A. Niemi  
Ms. Frances O'Neill  
Dr. Byron F. Radebaugh  
Ms. Ann Reid  
Dr. Homer C. Sherman  
Mr. Dennis Sheriff

##### ISSUE EDITOR

Robert C. Morris

##### EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Byron F. Radebaugh

##### THEMATIC EDITORS

Jeffrey E. Mirel  
Frances O'Neill

##### SPECIAL FEATURES EDITOR

Frank P. Bazeli

##### ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Millie Radebaugh

#### CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS

College of Education  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, Illinois 60115  
Dean: Charles E. Stegman  
Office for Vocational, Technical,  
and Career Education, Northern Il-  
linois University, DeKalb, IL 60115

Department of Leadership and  
Educational Policy Studies  
College of Education  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, Illinois 60115  
Chair: L. Glenn Smith

#### TECHNICAL PRODUCTION MANAGER

Thomas L. Erikson

#### COVER

Art by Linda Vodick

#### TECHNICAL ASSISTANT

Paula Propst

#### EDITORIAL BOARD

Louise E. Dieterle  
Naperville, Illinois  
Thomas L. Erikson  
The University of Maryland  
Carlos H. Lepiz  
Universidad Nacional  
Campus Omar Dengo  
Heredia, Costa Rica  
Gloria Kinney  
Palatine, Illinois  
Patricia Krus  
Arizona State University  
Donald Potter  
University of Nevada  
William W. Purkey  
University of North Carolina  
Greensboro  
Galen Saylor  
University of Nebraska  
Gary Taylor  
University of Arkansas  
Robert Wendel  
Miami University

Views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or the editorial board of *Thresholds*.

**Manuscripts.** Submit manuscripts to Editor, *Thresholds in Education*, P.O. Box 771, DeKalb, Illinois 60115. Suggested length - 900-5,000 words. Typed double spaced include author's vita.

The *Publications Manual* of the American Psychological Association (Sec. Ed. 1974) should be followed in preparing manuscripts.

Advertising rates: 1 page \$200; half page ads \$110.00; classified ads: up to 50 words, \$8.00, 51-100 words, \$15.00. Address: Business Manager *Thresholds in Education*, P.O. Box 771, DeKalb, IL 60115

*Thresholds* is entered as Third Class Mail at the Post Office in DeKalb, Illinois under permit number 120.

Copyright: 1990 by *Thresholds in Education Foundation*. All rights reserved.

**Subscription Information.** Subscription rates are as follows: one year \$20.00, two years \$39.00, three years, \$57.00. For foreign subscriptions other than Canadian add \$4.00 more per year. Send to Editor, *Thresholds in Education*, P.O. Box 771, DeKalb, IL 60115.

*Thresholds* is a refereed journal published quarterly in February, May, August and November.

## Editor's Notes

by Robert C. Morris

Perhaps at no other time in the history of American education has it been more critical that understanding and working with youth at risk be not only encouraged, but focused and designed in such a way that many various segments of our communities can be brought together and used. With this thought in mind, this two part issue of *Thresholds* was developed. Part I, May, 1990, will focus on Understanding Students At-risk and Preventing and Reducing Incidence of At-risk; Part II, August, 1990, will focus on Changing the System and Utilizing Community. All of the articles and comments contained within these two issues are direct outgrowths of a two-day National Conference on 'At-Risk Youth' held in Savannah, Georgia, on February 2-3, 1990. This conference was co-sponsored by the Chatham County Schools of Savannah, Georgia, Armstrong State College, Georgia Southern College, and Savannah State College. Over 100

presentations were made during this two-day conference, with educators and parents from throughout the United States attending.

The twenty odd articles identified for these two issues were selected from a pool of 39 submitted articles. They were drafted by actual presenters from the At-Risk Conference. It was felt that by presenting a selection of those presentations made at the conference, readers of *Thresholds* would not only have a picture of the variety of problems and issues associated with At-Risk Youth, but that the broader representation of ideas, research, and solutions made at the conference could be examined. Finally, Part I contains an up-to-date Selected Annotated Bibliography of Current At-Risk Readings, which many will find extremely helpful.

As in any publication or endeavor, such as a major conference, certain individuals step forward to assist. Initial proposal reviewers included Otis Johnson, Director of the Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority; Evelyn Dandy, Professor at Armstrong State College; Zelda Tenenbaum, Director of Human Resource Develop-

ment and Sharon Darley, Administrative Coordinator for the Chatham County At-Risk Program.

Additionally, the Assistance of Daniel Washington, from Savannah State College and the Chatham County School Board, along with Cecil Carter, Superintendent of Chatham County Schools and Judith Krug from the Savannah Compact of the Chamber of Commerce were likewise essential for both conference and follow-up activities.

To better understand, as well as, introduce the concepts of 'At-Risk Youth' Dr. Cecil Carter's closing remarks to those 900 plus participants of the At-Risk Conference in Savannah are summarized in the following 'Foreword' to Part I. Superintendent Carter's observations and insights about the overall impact of the conference and it's four invited keynote speakers offers the *Thresholds* reader a unique perspective of the thoughtfulness needed by those individuals who must face the problems and issues connected with At-Risk Youth. To those who are attempting, we salute you!



---

Robert C. Morris is Department Head, Educational Leadership Technology and Research, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia.

# Foreword

by Cecil F. Carter

I have been handed a very difficult assignment. I am supposed to sum up what we have seen, heard and learned during the course of this conference. When you consider we had over 100 breakout sessions during this conference, in addition to the distinguished speakers who addressed our general sessions, you will grasp how difficult my assignment is. I am sure that, depending on which sessions we were able to attend, we all carry away with us some slightly different pieces of the puzzle of how to deal with at-risk students.

But I think I can safely say we all carry away as well a new sense of urgency about what we are doing. Time is running out, and we have had plenty of reminders of that.

First, there was Dr. James Comer, the Yale psychiatrist who explained his innovative school model for educating at-risk youth. He pointed out to us that we really didn't have a problem dealing with those who did not thrive in our schools until 40 years ago or so. Until then, there was work for willing but uneducated hands. That has changed radically and quickly.

Those of you who shared lunch with us here yesterday remember Dr. Comer's chilling prediction that we have just one more decade to solve this problem before it simply becomes too big to be dealt with. There is a point, he reminded us, when social problems become so severe they defy solution.

Dr. Comer told us, and I quote,

If our children, our families under stress, don't achieve, this is going to be a very different country in 30 years.

Warnings sounded from just one quarter are sometimes easy to ignore, but we got the same message from another distinguished speaker, re-

searcher Dennis P. Doyle. These two achievers started from different backgrounds, they speak from the viewpoints of different professions, but they say strikingly similar things.

Doyle spoke of American education in general, not just that of the at-risk, and he told us of the specter of third world status for this nation in science and math. That would be a terrible and ironic fate for the country which showed the world what industry and technology can do.

Doyle told us about our Japanese competitors—competitors from a country with a 93% high school graduation rate. He identified the Japanese secret trade weapon—and it is education.

The Japanese go to school for longer days and more days, and by the time they are 18, they have spent as much time in class as an American in the third or fourth year of college.

When Doyle was describing Japanese education, one statement he made impressed me more than the others. He talked about the fast-track, demanding schools there, and how Americans insisted those schools be democratized after World War II. The Japanese went along with that demand but, Doyle pointed out and I quote,

they did it by making all Japanese youngsters march to the pace of the best and the brightest.

We cannot compete with those students if our schools agree to "get along, get by, anything goes," which Doyle characterized as a dangerous lesson our schools often teach.

If you are looking for intimidating educational goals, you don't have to look as far as Asia, Doyle told us. Remember his comments about the pan-European degree which will require demonstrated mastery of three languages? In the face of such a goal, can we not at least expect all of our children to know and use standard English?

This morning's session was heartening, because so many parents were there. We heard a challenging, no-nonsense assessment from Dr. Sue Phelps about dropouts. She told us that while it will be difficult, it is realistic to aim for a 90% graduation rate by the year 2000. You may remember that President Bush said the same thing last week.

Dr. Phelps also used an analogy familiar from Doyle's speech. She told us we are selling learning and our customers are students. Our goal is to keep our customers in our store, and keeping them 'buying' the learning we offer.

It is clear that we face serious challenges, and it is time we resolved some fundamental questions about what we expect and demand from our schools and our students.

Do we send our children to school to be educated or to be trained?

That is the central question in the schooling of at-risk youth, in fact, the central question in all of schooling.

If you are a caring and thoughtful parent, you instinctively will answer that you want your child to be educated, not trained. It is the educated person who has access to careers; it is the trained person who has access to a job.

When we call a child at-risk, we mean he or she is at risk of dropping out of school. Our local community has decided to do something about this problem, and we have now launched a major and expensive program designed to keep these children in school and see that they get a high school diploma.

Sure, I want to see these children get a diploma, but more than that, I want to see them get an education.

Your challenge, as parents and citizens concerned about at-risk youth, is to see that we do not fall into the trap of producing a generation of employable, but unenlightened, graduates. It goes without saying that employable beats unemployable, but we must remember that the goal of education is higher than just getting our graduates a

---

Cecil F. Carter is the Superintendent of Savannah Schools, Chatham County, Savannah, Georgia.

job. Education should aim to produce independent and creative thinkers who are able to identify and achieve their own personal goals, not just trained workers who fit in well in the high tech assembly line and are able to earn enough to make credit card payments.

Thomas Jefferson told us centuries ago that

worth and genius should be sought out from every condition of life and should be prepared by education for defeating the competition of wealth and birth for public trusts.

He also said

we hope to avail the nation of those talents which nature has sown as liberally among the poor as among the rich, but which perish without use, if not sought for and cultivated.

Those are the words of a man who grasped that we are born with equal abilities, but lose that equality in the face of unequal opportunities.

What Jefferson is telling us has to be true in a democracy. If all men are created equal—and that is a founding premise of this nation—they must have equal opportunities to maintain the equality they were born with. This means education for all—the rich and the poor, no matter where they live or who they are.

But it is not enough to offer everyone the chance to go to school. We have to assure equal access to a quality education—to a good education—or we sell democracy short.

And we are already doing this. We are telling young teen-agers—kids too young to vote or sign a legally binding contract or even stay home by themselves at night—we are telling young teen-agers

You are not college material. You need to take in high school what the state requires us to offer as the vocational track or the general track. We won't expect you to know and use standard English, to read as much literature, to hone your thinking skills on algebra or calculus. No, we will teach you how to earn a paycheck, because that is all we expect of you.

If that does not frustrate you, it ought to.

Mortimer Adler, in the Paideia Proposal, stated:

The democratic promise of equal educational opportunity, half fulfilled, is worse than a promise broken. It is an ideal betrayed. Equality of educational opportunity is not, in fact, provided if it means no more than taking all the children into the public schools for the same number of hours, days and years. If once there, they are divided into the sheep and the goats, into those destined solely for toil and those destined for economic and political leadership and for a quality of life to which all should have access, then the democratic purpose has been undermined by an inadequate system of public schooling.

The point Adler is making is that in a democracy one cannot look at two children and say to one "you will be an automotive engineer" and to another "you will be an automotive mechanic."

---

*It takes real education, not training, to feed the soul and extend to young people the chance to reach a potential within themselves that only they—not a bureaucracy—can know is there.*

---

I am not saying it is wrong to be a mechanic. I am saying that is a choice the individual should make. Furthermore, our schools should produce men and women who, if they choose to become mechanics, are also thinking, active, vibrant people who are capable of lifelong learning and who just might decide to become automotive engineers when they hit thirty.

We have been privileged to have speak to us at this conference a number

of experts. I want to refer back to one of them, Dennis Doyle, who addressed this group Friday.

I'm quoting now from Doyle's book *Winning the Brain Race*. Here is what co-author David Kearns said:

Lest readers think that I'm interested in vocational education, let me assure you that nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, the last thing Xerox and other high-tech companies need is vocational education. We need employees who are broadly and deeply educated, men and women who are liberally educated.

A liberal education not only imparts the great lessons of history, citizenship and science, it teaches people to think, to solve problems, to take risks. A liberal education prepares the individual to think independently, to step back from problems and the crowd, to be an entrepreneur and innovator. The virtues of a liberal education are the virtues of free enterprise in general and the high-tech, knowledge-based society in particular—flexibility, adaptability, inventiveness, even playfulness.

I believe what that man has written. What business in particular and society in general need are critical thinkers, not well-trained drones.

In *High Schools and the Changing Workplace: The Employers' View*, a study by the National Academy of Sciences, the panel observed:

...the education needed for the workplace does not differ in its essentials from that needed for college or advanced technical training.

When you start talking like this, someone will tell you you are unrealistic. They will say that not all children are capable of a truly challenging academic course of study. Mortimer Adler has an answer for these people.

He wrote:

Those who think the proposed course of study cannot be successfully followed by all children fail to realize that the children of whom they are thinking have never had their minds challenged by require-

ments such as these.

It is natural for children to rise to meet higher expectations; but only if those expectations are set before them and made both reasonable and attractive.

The bottom line is that all children can learn. That is what Dr. Comer told us so eloquently yesterday. Do not expect less or you will get less. Do not offer a child a shopping mall of easy trade-oriented courses because you think he cannot do anything else. It is not the place of any human to set limits on what a child is capable of achieving. We must offer to each child the education—not training, education—which makes available to him all the possibilities a democracy can offer its citizens. The child of an unemployed millworker deserves the same challenging education as the child of a neurosurgeon. We should not say that the children of unemployed millworkers

will automatically grow up to be unemployed millworkers unless we train them for something 'useful.'

No. Demand the same basic quality education for both of those children. Expect them to succeed, both of them. And when they are grown, let each of their individual initiatives determine what their role in society will be. That is not a decision to be made by educators, by advisory panels to educators, by businesses which need a docile workforce, or any body else.

Training can keep a person out of the underclass—which is the term we use for that group of people who have little now and little realistic prospect of getting anything; who live blighted lives and are unable to look much beyond simple survival. Yes, training will feed your body, and to those who are now trapped in the underclass, it looks like a good way out. But it is only a temporary solution.

It takes real education, not training, to feed the soul and extend to young

people the chance to reach a potential within themselves that only they—not a bureaucracy—can know is there.

Hold out for an education for your child. Those who would offer you training in its place are not helping you or the community.

It is like the dilemma faced by foreign aid programs. Feed a hungry man today, and he is hungry again tomorrow. Teach that man to produce food, and he will never be hungry again. Train a student for a job, and you will retrain that person over and over again as job demands change in today's high-tech world. Educate a student, and he will adapt, change, grow and continue to learn on his own. It is the educated student who will control his own life, support and lead others and achieve the potential with which he was born, not assigned. This is the end to which I am committed, and I invite you to join me.



# Understanding Students At-risk

by Evelyn Baker Dandy

The articles in this section address the need for teachers to seek a greater understanding of students who are at risk of dropping out of school. The consequence for those who do not seek to learn about their students could be the self-fulfilling prophecy: students will live up—or down—to meet those low performance expectations commonly held by their teachers.

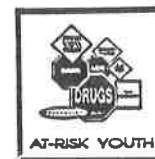
Trusty and Dooly-Dickey use a self-rated inventory of commonly held predictors to identify at-risk students. They found a discrepancy between teacher ratings and student perceptions, particularly in the area of perceived dislike from teachers with accompanying feelings of stress and isolation on the part of students.

Tomchin and Culver found that teachers of low achievers not only blame the students for their poor performance, but teachers also absolve themselves of the responsibility to improve that performance. Dandy suggests that one reason for low expectations could be teachers' naivete about the language and culture of the students they serve. A serious consequence of that lack of knowledge could be an inaccurate assessment of student performance. Teacher training institutions are admonished to provide appropriate training and experience to acquaint teachers with dialects and culture differences.

Logan and Najee-ullah provide evidence that at risk students can succeed—even as late as the college level—if post secondary institutions ensure appropriate access to educational opportunity. Students with academic deficiencies have the potential for performing beyond their predicted levels of

achievement at the college level if they are enrolled in a program that builds positive self-concepts, emphasizes study skills and instruction in basic academic subject areas, provides students with accurate assessments of their strengths and limitations and acquaints them with additional resources available at the university level for long-term retention and subsequent graduation.

Educators at all levels should re-examine their current curricula and make appropriate changes by infusing cultural content and presenting teachers with information about the communication styles of their students. Continued efforts must be made to raise teachers' expectations so that they can seek a better understanding of those students who are at risk of dropping out of school.



---

*Evelyn Baker Dandy is a Professor of Education at Armstrong State College, Savannah, Georgia.*

# Identification of Potential School Dropouts and Implications for Prevention

by Jerry Trusty and Katherine Dooley-Dickey

The school dropout problem continues to gain attention on national, state, and local levels, as schools attempt to respond to the complex dimensions of the problem. The task is complicated by concurrent efforts to raise performance standards throughout the American educational system (Hamilton, 1986). The amount of empirical data related to the social, economic, and psychological consequences of dropping out of school is growing, and research on causes of the problem is expanding (Catterall, 1987).

Rumberger (1987), in a review of research concerning dropout prevention-recovery programs, found that the literature points to several basic elements present in successful programs. Four of these elements are a) individualized programs; b) inclusion of educational and non-educational components; c) effective identification of potential dropouts; and d) programs aimed at each stage in the dropout process, including recovery.

This study explored methods of identification of students at risk of dropping out and implications toward prevention strategies derived from identification results. Students in grades six through twelve completed the Dropout Alert Scale (DAS) developed by Mathis (1976). This is a 30-item scale assessing attitudes, demographic factors, and behaviors related to performance and adjustment in school. Several weeks after the administration of the DAS, teachers were asked to give a dropout potential rating on students with whom

they had contact. The results of the measures were compared.

## Sample

The subjects were 525 students in grades six through twelve in a small rural school in Mississippi. The school is located in an economically depressed, sparsely populated area of the state and is representative of most rural Mississippi schools. The percentage of black students (30%) is lower than the mean average for the rest of the state. Approximately half of the students qualify for the free lunch program, indicating that many families are below the poverty level.

## Dropout Alert Scale

The DAS is a self-rated inventory developed by Debely Mathis (1976) with scoring and editorial changes by Harlan & Sykes (Puckett & Purvis, 1988). The instrument is similar to a Likert-type scale in assessment of student attitudes. The DAS was adopted by the Mississippi State Department of Education as a potential dropout identification instrument for students in grades six through twelve.

Estimates of predictive ability (70% to 80% accuracy) by the instrument's author (Mathis, 1976) are consistent with other findings on similar instruments (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Items on the inventory reflect those areas identified in the literature as being indicators of dropout potential. Although readily apparent relationships between cause and effect are difficult to identify in potential dropouts (Rumberger, 1983), the DAS measures several factors associated with dropping out, e.g., academic performance (Tidwell, 1988), absenteeism (Wehlage &

Rutter, 1986), attitudes toward school and teachers (Pittman, 1986), social adjustment (Gallagher, 1985; Svec, 1987), family setting (Rumberger, 1983; Gadwa & Griggs, 1985), physical and psychological well-being (Tidwell, 1988), importance attached to finishing school (Dunham & Alpert, 1987), and work outside of school (Tidwell, 1988). The instrument assesses the student to be more at risk if the student is engaged in work outside of school. However, some studies (Hargroves, 1986; Timberlake, 1982) show that work experience may help keep students in school. There are a few factors not addressed by the instrument: Alpert & Dunham (1986) identified five significant predictors of dropping out. Two of the five are not included in the instrument, viz., the extent to which parents monitor the child's activities, and the student's association with peers who have dropped out.

The scoring guidelines provided with the instrument (Puckett & Purvis, 1988) suggest that a student scoring 39 or greater has a strong potential to drop out. A score of 19 to 38 indicates moderate potential. Several items in the scale are more heavily weighted than other items. The family setting (education of parents, attitudes of parents, and family constellation) is represented by several items, many of which are weighted.

## Teacher Ratings

Teachers were informed of those factors generally accepted as being related to dropping out of school. The content of the teacher instructions was similar to the items in the DAS, except that teachers were asked to consider socioeconomic status, while the scale only indirectly questioned this aspect of

---

*Jerry Trusty is a counselor at Ackerman High School, Ackerman, Mississippi.*

*Katherine Dooley-Dickey is Professor in Counselor Education at Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, Mississippi.*



the student's lives. Teachers placed students in one of three categories (e.g., low dropout potential, moderate dropout potential, high dropout potential). Students (grades 6–12) attend classes with a minimum of four teachers each school day, therefore, at least three teacher ratings of each student were obtained. If more than three ratings were obtained on a student, three were randomly selected. Teachers were instructed to respond only on students with whom they were familiar.

The teacher ratings were then transformed to numerical scores (i.e., low = 1, moderate = 2, high = 3). For the purposes of this study, a compiled score of 3 to 4 was considered low risk; 5 to 7 considered moderate risk; and 8 to 9 considered high risk. A score of 8 or 9 placed the student in the at risk category.

## Results

The teacher rating and DAS results were compared using Pearson's Product Moment  $r = .58$ , indicating that there was a moderate positive correlation between the two measures. To further clarify the data from the DAS a qualitative analysis was attempted. The individual questions were grouped into domains and collapsed into appropriate categories that students identified as at risk ( $N = 76$ ) had most often identified.

Academic problems obviously are definitive indicators of students at risk. Over 63% of students identified as at risk had failed a grade, furthermore fully three-fourths (75%) indicated that they had a poor academic history.

The area of disruptions in interpersonal relationships appeared as an indicator for the at risk student. Approximately 58% of all these students indicated that they felt that their teachers disliked them and over 51% of identified sixth graders believed that their teachers disliked them. Over half (59%) of these students indicated that they had trouble with friends and

teachers and another 25% indicated that they lacked friends and positive relationships with others. Another third (35%) indicated significant difficulties with parents and caretakers.

---

### *The most effective identification procedure may be a combination of teacher ratings, referral, and a student-completed scale.*

---

Negative attitudes toward school was another area that appeared as an indicator. Participation in school activities and clubs enhances academic experience and is often evidence of positive identification with the school population. Approximately 60% of these students indicated that they do not participate in any school related activities. Furthermore, more than 60% indicated that they disliked school.

The most interesting finding was that a large number of students indicated that they often experienced physiological factors that might be interpreted as stress related. Fully 59% of these students indicated that they were tired often and 55% indicated that they were sick often. Over 50% of the sixth graders and 86% of the eighth graders indicated that they were often fatigued. Fatigue and psychosomatic complaints are often associated with stress related processes in children.

## Conclusions

Accurate, early identification of potential school dropouts in small rural

schools may need to be of high priority, since these schools are frequently unable to offer a wide choice of alternatives for the at risk student.

Teacher referral is the remaining type of potential dropout identification process, but this method seems likely to be less comprehensive than teacher ratings or the use of an identification instrument. In this study teachers seemed to under-rate students' dropout potential ( $N$  identified by teacher ratings = 25). The dropout rate at this school has historically been much higher. The DAS may under-rate dropout potential to a lesser extent. The DAS identified 51 students that the teacher ratings did not identify, and the teacher ratings identified 9 students that the DAS failed to identify.

The moderate positive correlation ( $r = .58$ ) between the DAS and the teacher ratings seems to indicate some discrepancy between teacher and student perceptions. The most effective identification procedure may be a combination of teacher ratings, referral, and a student-completed scale. Administrators, teachers, counselors, and students will also have knowledge (of particular students) that could be useful to personnel working with an at risk population.

Disruptions in interpersonal relationships are reasons often given by students for dropping out of school (Tidwell, 1988). The high percentage of students in this study that indicated perceived dislike from teachers seems to point toward the need for programs and changes that alleviate isolation of at risk students. Assertiveness training and elimination of self defeating behaviors may also benefit this group.

Even though the presence of specific depression in at risk students does not imply causality (Svec, 1987), the high percentage of students that indicated symptoms that may be related to depression or stress warrants further investigation.

## References

- Alpert, G.P., & Dunham, R.G. (1986). Keeping academically marginal youths in school: A prediction model. Youth and Society, *17*, 346-361.
- Catterall, J.S. (1987). An intensive group counseling dropout prevention intervention: Some cautions on isolating at risk adolescents within high schools. American Educational Research Journal, *24*, 521-540.
- Dunham, R.G., & Alpert, G.P. (1987). Keeping juvenile delinquents in school: A prediction model. Adolescence, *22*, 45-58.
- Gadwa, K., & Griggs, S.A. (1985). The school dropout: Implications for counselors. The School Counselor, *33*, 9-17.
- Gallagher, V. (1985). The dropout: A new challenge to Catholic education. Momentum, *16*, 40-41.
- Hamilton, S.F. (1986). Raising standards and reducing dropout rates. Teachers College Record, *87*, 410-429.
- Hargroves, J.S. (1986). The Boston compact: A community response to school dropouts. The Urban Review, *18*, 207-217.
- Mathis, D. (1976). The dropout proneness scale: The development of an instrument to predict a dropout. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Mississippi, 1976). Dissertation Abstracts International, *76*, 20, 532.
- Pittman, R.B. (1986). Importance of personal, social factors as potential means for reducing high school dropout rate. The High School Journal, *70*, 7-13.
- Puckett, S.R., & Purvis, J.R. (1988). Educational alternatives for the student at-risk in Mississippi. (Available from Mississippi State Department of Education, Jackson, Mississippi).
- Rumberger, R.W. (1983). Dropping out of high school: The influence of race, sex, and family background. American Educational Research Journal, *20*, 199-220.
- Rumberger, R.W. (1987). High school dropouts: A review of issues and evidence. Review of Educational Research, *57*, 101-121.
- Svec, H. (1987). Youth advocacy and high school dropout. The High School Journal, *70*, 185-192.
- Tidwell, R. (1988). Dropouts speak out: Qualitative data on early school departures. Adolescence, *23*, 939-954.
- Timberlake, C.H. (1982). Demographic factors and personal resources that black female students identified as being supportive in attaining their high school diplomas. Adolescence, *17*, 109-115.
- Wehlage, G.G., & Rutter, R.A. (1986). Dropping out: How much do schools contribute to the problem? Teachers College Record, *87*, 374-392.



# Elementary Teachers' Beliefs About Who Is Responsible for Learning

by Ellen M. Tomchin and Steven M. Culver

This study focuses on elementary teachers' beliefs about responsibility for learning and perceptions of influence over learning. The source of the data was the Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) Students At Risk Survey (Frymier, 1989). A total of 9,652 teachers in 276 schools nationwide responded to a 116-item survey about at-risk students and school practices. Of those, 2,123 (22%) were elementary teachers. Teachers were asked information about themselves and their students, rating student abilities on ten items, including reading comprehension, mathematics skills, writing skills, attitude toward school, homework completion, and higher order thinking skills. Teachers were also asked a) who was most responsible for these student outcomes—the teachers, the parents, or the students themselves, b) how responsible they as teachers felt for these outcomes, and c) how influential they as teachers felt for student outcomes in the ten areas.

As shown in Table I, most teachers feel that parents should be responsible for a student's daily attendance, attitude toward school, general behavior, and homework completion. Classroom attention is seen as being the joint responsibility of students and teachers.

Student Outcome	Who Is Most Responsible? (%)		
	Teachers	Parents	Students
Reading comprehension	90	4	6
Math skills	92	3	7
Writing skills	90	2	8
Listening skills	49	28	24
Higher order thinking skills	81	7	12
Daily attendance	2	94	4
General behavior	28	38	34
Attitude toward school	23	58	19
Homework completion	7	54	39
Classroom attention	48	5	47

Teachers feel that they themselves should be responsible for five of the ten: reading comprehension, math skills, writing skills, higher order thinking skills, and listening skills. These five skills for which teachers feel most responsibility are the focus of the rest of this paper.

Teachers were also asked to respond on a one-to-four (not very to very responsible) scale to the question: How responsible do you feel for specific learnings or behaviors of the students you teach? Teachers were deemed to exhibit feelings of responsibility for a given behavior if they selected a three or four on the four-point response scale. For the five student outcomes for which teachers felt they were more responsible than parents or students, Table II shows that more teachers (90%) indicated responsibility for reading comprehension than for any of the other four skills.

Student Outcomes	By Level of Students (%)			
	For all students	Below average	Average	Above average
Math skills	87.7	78.9	89.1	93.8
Reading comprehension	90.0	85.5	90.8	95.9
Writing skills	85.6	81.1	88.0	91.7
Listening skills	87.2	83.6	89.4	93.6
Higher order thinking	81.9	76.2	85.8	91.4

The fewest teachers (81.9%) indicated responsibility for higher order thinking skills. Even for this student outcome, over eight out of ten teachers felt responsibility for its development in their students. Clearly, these elementary teachers felt a sense of responsibility for all five of the student outcomes listed.

These high feelings of responsibility, however, vary according to the teachers' perceived abilities of their students in each of the areas. As Table II illustrates, teachers report feeling less responsibility for an outcome when they consider the students to be below

average in that particular area. For example, 78.9% of those who felt their students were below average in mathematical skills said they felt responsible for their students' learning in math. A higher percentage (89.1%) of those who felt their students were average in math felt responsible, and a still higher percentage (93.8%) of those who ranked their students above average felt responsibility for student learning in math. The more skilled the teachers perceived their students to be, the more willing they were to be considered responsible for student learning. This trend is consistent across all five skills listed in Table II and is graphically depicted in Figure 1.

Teachers were also asked about how influential they were in the development of these student outcomes. Teachers were again asked to respond on a four-point scale indicating degrees of influence, with four representing the most and one representing the least. As shown in Table III, more teachers felt they had an influence on math skills (84.6%) and reading comprehension (83.4%) of their students. Just as teachers demonstrated feelings of responsibility in all five areas, so too did the teachers indicate that they were also influential in those areas.

These feelings of influence, like the feelings of responsibility, however, vary according to teachers' perceptions

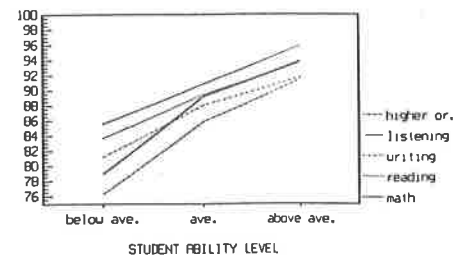


FIGURE 1  
PERCENT OF TEACHERS WHO FELT RESPONSIBILITY FOR EACH OUTCOME BY PERCEIVED ABILITY LEVEL OF STUDENTS

Ellen M. Tomchin is a Research Associate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Steven M. Culver is the Director of Student Assessment Programs at Radford University, Radford, Virginia.

of student ability. For all five of the outcomes, as perceived ability level of student increases, so too do teachers' perceptions of their influence over those students. For instance, 74.3% of teachers who had students below average in writing ability felt that they were influential in the development of their students' writing skills. Of teachers of average students, 83.6% felt they were influential in developing these skills. And finally, of teachers who perceived their students to be above average in writing, 90.4% felt influential in the development of their students' writing skills. As was the case with teacher responsibility, teacher influence over these student outcomes exhibits a clear trend when teacher responses are categorized by perceived ability level of student. This trend is illustrated in Figure 2.

These findings suggest that even in areas for which teachers feel primarily responsible, such as reading and math, they believe they are less responsible and less influential with low-achieving students than they are with average or high-achieving students. Unfortunately, it is those students who are perceived

to be of lower ability that are more likely to be at-risk in our schools. When teachers attribute student difficulties to factors such as low ability, low motiva-

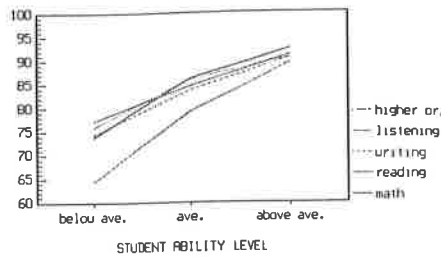


FIGURE 2  
PERCENT OF TEACHERS WHO FELT  
INFLUENCE OVER EACH OUTCOME BY  
PERCEIVED ABILITY LEVEL OF STUDENTS

tion, or poor home environment, responsibility or blame for poor performance shifts back to the students. This then offers little direction for effective

intervention at school. Elementary school programs that have reported improved performance of at-risk students typically include a component aimed at raising the self-concept of students and helping them feel that they can be successful at school-related tasks (Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989). Making them feel successful may be difficult to accomplish if teachers do not believe they can influence student performance or are responsible for it. As we look to ways of delivering effective instruction to at-risk students throughout the schooling process, goals must focus on shared responsibility for student outcomes among teachers, students, and parents. Programs that focus on enhancing student potential, need to dovetail with programs that foster appropriate teachers' beliefs about student learning and with programs that encourage parent participation in the schooling process.

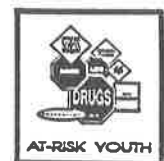
Table III  
Teacher's Perceptions about How Much Influence They Have Over Each Student Outcome by Ability Level of Students

Student Outcome	By Level of Students (%)		
	For all students	Below average	Above average
Math skills	84.6	73.7	86.1
Reading comprehension	83.4	77.2	84.5
Writing skills	80.8	74.3	83.6
Listening skills	81.6	75.8	85.9
Higher order thinking	73.4	64.3	79.1

## References

Frymier, J. (1989). A study of students at risk: Collaborating to do research. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Slavin, R.E., Karweit, N.L., & Madden, N.A. (1989). Effective programs for students at risk. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.



# Consequences of Ignoring Specific Dialect Differences

by Evelyn Baker Dandy

According to Nelson-Barber and Meier (1990) and Taylor (1987), a significant number of at-risk children speak a dialect of English and identify with a culture that is different from that of the teacher. Studies conducted by Shuy (1975), Cunningham (1976), Harris-Wright (1987), and Nelson-Barber and Meier (1990) conclude that teachers are largely unaware of dialects and cultures that are different from their own. Indeed, teacher training institutions rarely provide preservice and inservice teachers with in-depth knowledge of other cultures (Banks, 1989, and Pine and Hilliard, 1990). Yet, Hill (1989) predicts that, because of the current demographic trends, teachers who enter the profession in the 1990s and beyond will simply have to teach 'minorities,' most of whom speak a dialect of English.

Foster (1986) contends that there is a persistent dilemma in the schools, and it stems from the teachers' naivete about the dialects of the children they teach. This lack of knowledge can have a negative effect on teachers' assessment of children's competence. Taylor (1987) speaks of several consequences:

Students with different cultural norms are at-risk if teachers have little knowledge, sensitivity or appreciation of the diversity of communication styles. Such teachers may respond to students' diversity with negative attitudes, lowered expectations, culturally inappropriate teaching and perceptions of differences as problems.

The following dialect rejection describes one such consequence. As

you read this vignette, put yourself in Joey's place.

## A Dialect Rejection

All eight members of Joey's group were more eager than usual to go to reading group. Today was special. Alice, the student from the university, was going to read with them. All semester she had been working individually with these third graders, helping them with handwriting and spelling, and correcting their papers. But today she was going to 'teach' the highest reading group—the best readers in the class...

Joey rushed back to the table to get the seat next to Alice. He wanted to ask her if he could be the first to read.

"Have you ever felt as if nobody loved you?" asked Alice, as a means of introducing the story. Various students responded with times they had felt rejected. Lamar reported about the time he ran away from home. Tanya told of the time she got mad at her sister. Joey wiggled in anticipation.

At last Alice called Joey to read. Confidently he began: "Maxie. Maxie lived in three small rooms on the top floor of an old brownstone house on Orange Skreet. She..."

"Not skreet, Joey, say 'street.'"

"Skreet."

"Read the sentence again."

"Maxie lived in three small rooms on the top floor of an old brownstone house on Orange Skreet. She had lived..."

"Joey, you're not pronouncing the word correctly. I'll read

it for you. 'Maxie lived in three small rooms on the top floor of an old brownstone house on Orange Street. She had lived there for many years, and every day was the same for Maxie.' Now continue, Joey."

Joey, looking puzzled, proceeded cautiously: "Every morning at exactly 7:10, Maxie's large orange cat jumped onto the middle window-sill and skretched out..."

"No, Joey, You're doing it again. Say 'stretched.'"

"Skretched." Joey was speaking in a muffled tone now.

"Go ahead, Joey," coaxed Alice.

But Joey could not be coaxed. He did not read any more of the story. Suddenly, he had lost his place (Dandy, 1982).

What will Joey do the next time he is called upon to read? The experience has probably made him self-conscious about what he reads as well as how he reads. He will be hesitant to volunteer for fear of embarrassment. He was 'puzzled' because he was not sure of exactly why Alice made him repeat words he already knew. Half of Joey's classmates pronounced *str* as Joey did. But Alice rejected Joey's rendition of *str*. She heard a different pronunciation and assessed that difference as 'wrong.' Her constant interruptions broke the flow of the storyline, brought attention to word by word reading, and much more seriously, demoralized Joey in front of the class. Now, Joey was correct in reading for meaning, so he should not have been interrupted.

Goodman (1983) uses the term 'miscue' to describe the reading of any word other than what is printed on the page. Miscues that do not change the word order or meaning of the sentence are not considered incorrect.

---

*Evelyn Baker Dandy is a Professor of Education at Armstrong State College, Savannah, Georgia.*

Johnson (1975) calls Joey's alteration of *skr* for *str* during oral reading a 'dialect shift'—a translation without a loss in comprehension. According to Johnson, a dialect shift occurs whenever the reader's response is

1. Different from what actually appears in print—Joey said *skreet* instead of *street* and *skretch* instead of *stretch*;

2. Consistent with the sounds, meaning and word order features of the dialect, *skr* for *str* is a phonological (sound) feature of black communications; and

3. Does not result in a loss of comprehension—the printed message remains the same—Joey's translation was a direct one. He did not change the meaning of the sentence.

There is evidence that the pronunciation *skr* for *str* comes from the Gullah dialect that is spoken in the coastal areas of Georgia and South Carolina by African Americans who are direct descendants of Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and other countries in West Africa.

Joey understood street and stretched. He was switching the visual code he read to the verbal code he uses. Asking him to instantly rearrange his phonemic inventory and produce a sound he does not habitually use for the symbols *str* would be like asking a southern dialect speaker to say /pen/ instead of /pin/ in "Pick up your pen and write the word." or asking an Hispanic

American dialect speaker to say /shoos/ instead of /choos/ in "I want to buy some shoes"; or asking a Bostonian dialect speaker to say /car/ instead of /cah/ in "The car is in the garage."

---

*...poorer readers receive qualitatively different instruction from their higher performing classmates.*

---

Alice's lack of knowledge about one seemingly insignificant dialect difference could cause serious damage to the self-esteem of an otherwise confident child. Consequently, Joey may begin to avoid oral reading activities and shy away from reading all together. His reading achievement could suffer.

Alice's naivete about the dialect prohibited her from making an accurate assessment of Joey's dialect rendering. How many inaccurate assessments will Alice and other educators make without adequate knowledge of the culture of the children they teach?

The vast majority of children who are categorized as low achievers, poor readers, and at-risk students come from low SES and 'minority' populations. Yet, the vast majority of teachers are white, middle class females (Pine & Hilliard, 1990; Hill, 1989). There are tremendous possibilities for miscommunication between cultures.

Research by Good and Brophy (1987), Allington (1983) and Cunningham (1976) reveals that teachers are more likely to interrupt, provide less discussion time and ask less challenging questions to those students they perceive as less capable readers. Indeed, Applebee and others (1988) found that poorer readers receive qualitatively different instruction from their higher performing classmates. Teachers who lack knowledge of the language and culture of the children they teach are in danger of making inaccurate assessments as they interact with children on numerous occasions throughout the school year.

Naivete about dialects and cultural differences could have a serious impact, especially upon those children teachers perceive as at-risk. School systems and preservice and inservice teacher training institutions must evaluate their curricula and add appropriate courses as well as provide teachers with firsthand experiences in classrooms that have children whose culture differs from that of teachers.

## References

- Allington, R. (1983). The Reading Institution provided readers of differing reading ability. *Elementary School Journal*, (83), 548-559./
- Applebee, A.N., Langer, J.A. & Mullis, I. (1988). *Who reads best? Factors related to reading achievement in grades 3-7 and 11*. Princeton, NJ: Education Testing Service, Report No. 17-R-01.
- Banks, J.A. (1988). *Multiethnic education—theory and practice*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Cunningham, P.M. (1976). Teachers' correction responses to black-dialect miscues which are non-meaning-changing. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 12(4), 637-653.
- Dandy, E.B. (1982). Dialect rejection. *Georgia Journal of Reading*, (7), 22.
- Foster, H.L. (1986). *Ribbin', jivin', & playin' the dozens: The persistent dilemma in our schools*, 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company.
- Good, T.L., & Brophy, J.E. (1987). *Looking in classrooms* 4th ed. New York: Harper & Row.
- Goodman, K. & Buck, C. (1983, October). Dialect barriers to reading comprehension revisited. *The Reading Teacher*, 27, 6-12.
- Harris-Wright, K. (1987). The challenge of educational coalescence: Teaching nonmainstream English-speaking students. *The Division for Children with Communication Disorders*, 209-213.
- Hill, H.D. (1989). *Effective strategies for teaching minority students*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
- Johnson, K. (1975, April). Black dialect shift in oral reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 28, 535-540.
- Nelson-Barber, S. & Meier, T. (1990). Multicultural context a key factor in teaching. *Academic Connections*. New York: Office of Academic Affairs, the College Board, 1-5, 9-11.



Taylor, O. (1987). Cross-cultural communication—An essential dimension of effective education. Washington, DC: Mid-Atlantic Center for Race Equity.

Pine, G.J. & Hilliard, A.G. (1990). Rx for racism: Imperatives for America's schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 593-600.

Shuy, R. (1975). Teacher training and urban language problems. In Stroller, P. (Ed.) Black American English: Its background and its usage in schools and in literature. New York: Dell Publishing, pp. 168-185.



## *The John Dewey Society*

*Founded 1935*

*Cordially invites you to join in membership*

THE JOHN DEWEY SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE encourages, through its publications and programs careful and responsible examination of our most basic educational and cultural commitments. Membership includes receiving the following publications annually: *The John Dewey Lecture*; issues of "Insight of the Members"; and various *Current Issues* publications.

----- (cut and mail) -----

<b>DUES:</b>	1 yr.	2 yrs.
	<u>1990</u>	<u>1990/91</u>
Students/Retired	\$20.00	\$ 40.00
Fellows	30.00	60.00
Institutional Members	40.00	80.00
Patrons of the Society	50.00	100.00

### 1990 Membership Application

(type or print)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Affiliation/Position \_\_\_\_\_

Members may subscribe to *Educational Theory* at the special rate of \$11.00 per year.

Enclosed is a check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
to cover  dues, or  dues plus a subscription to *Educational Theory*.

Checks for dues, and for subscriptions, should be sent to:

Dr. Robert C. Morris (Secretary-Treasurer)  
Dept. of Ed. Leadership, Research  
and Technology  
Georgia Southern College  
Landrum Box 8143  
Statesboro, GA 30460

**New members receive a complimentary copy of one of the following:**

*Current Issues in Education*: (check one)

- "School, Church and State Reconsidered," Fall, 1983, 35 pages.
- "Varieties of Pluralism," Fall, 1985, 30 pages.
- "Women, Schooling and Labor Force Participation," Fall, 1986, 37 pages.
- "Keeping Education A Professional and Liberal Study," Fall 1988, 41 pages.

# At-Risk College Students: They Can Survive

by Beatrice L. Logan and Deborah H. Najee-ullah

Graduation from high school is not an indication that students have the requisite skills to commence college-level work. Each year an increasing number of underprepared high school graduates enroll in college without adequate academic preparation. As a matter of fact, in recent years, many states have found that an unprecedented number, in some cases one half of their beginning college students are not prepared to perform college-level work. These students are commonly referred to as 'at-risk' students. Typically, they have lower high school grades, low scores on standardized tests, a history of poor academic performance and, generally, have below average self concepts; nevertheless, many have the potential for satisfactory academic performance.

The past two decades have witnessed a striking increase in developmental programs in postsecondary institutions. This increase can be attributed to the nation's commitment to make higher education accessible to all who have the potential to succeed in college. As a result of this access, with the academic odds stacked against them, at-risk students enter college facing overwhelming barriers—crossing academic hurdles without diminishing their self concepts. They enter the starting blocks to compete in an academic race without the necessary scholastic preparation required of successful competitors—basic academic skills. Of course, many of these at-risk students fall before they leave the starting blocks, with a quick, academic failure and annihilated self concept.

Admission of at-risk students has generated major concerns among college administrators. Consequently,

postsecondary institutions are faced with answering many difficult questions that will either allow or deny at-risk students access to college. Some questions that must be answered:

- Can postsecondary institutions admit at-risk students without setting them up for a quick-failure, without further undermining their self-concepts, and without diluting curriculum?
- Should colleges provide academic-support programs to help at-risk students?
- Should at-risk students be denied access to college?

Georgia State University, an urban public institution, with over 23,000 students (approximately 2,000 at-risk students) has answered a resounding NO to denying at-risk students access to college (GSU, 1988). The purpose of this article is to briefly discuss an effective developmental program that has helped at-risk students develop basic academic skills for college survival.

## Program Purpose

The primary purpose of the Developmental Studies Program at Georgia State University is to provide an academic support program to meet the needs of students who enter the university with inadequate academic preparation. Another purpose of the program is to enhance the confidence level of students placed in the program since students' negative perceptions of themselves in a competitive academic setting is attributable to low academic skills.

The major objectives are the following:

1. To create a favorable milieu conducive to building positive self-concepts.

2. To improve academic progress through effective study skills.

3. To increase basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills to college academic survival levels.

4. To increase students' awareness of their personal strengths and limitations.

5. To inform students of available resources at the university.

## Academic Placement

Applicants who meet the minimum university admission requirements, but do not meet the regular entrance requirements for admission to a degree program, are accepted into the Division of Developmental Studies. This decision is based on the SAT/ACT composite scores and predicted grade-point average (determined by high school transcripts and SAT/ACT scores). Students with composite scores of less than 800 on the SAT and less than 19 on the ACT (with a minimum SAT of 250 verbal/280 mathematics or ACT of 11, PGA of 1.8) are involved in parts, or all, of the Developmental Program: study skills, reading, composition, and mathematics. To determine students' proficiencies in reading, composition, and mathematics, all students must complete a battery of collegiate placement exams to be accepted into the Division of Developmental Studies

## Program Plan

The program offers, on a non-credit basis, a three-course sequence in mathematics, a two-course sequence in both composition reading, and a study-skills course. All students admitted to the program have a personalized course of study designed to meet their individual needs. The personalized course of study is determined by a thorough evaluation of the prematriculation data (SAT/ACT scores, a high school

---

Beatrice L. Logan is Counselor and Assistant Professor of Study Skills, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.

Deborah H. Najee-ullah is Assistant Professor of Mathematics, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.



transcript and predicted grade point average) and collegiate placement examination results. This evaluation is utilized to determine whether students will be required to take all developmental courses or a combination of developmental and degree-credit courses.

Students are awarded institutional credit for the developmental studies courses they successfully complete. These credits cannot be used to fulfill degree requirements. Students can, however, enroll concurrently in credit courses and developmental courses provided they have met the developmental prerequisites for the credit courses.

### Exit Criteria

Students are allowed four attempts per academic area (reading, mathematics, and composition) to complete requirements specified in their personalized course of study. Any grades earned (A,B,C, WF, F, W, IP) other than a W count as an attempt. A grade of IP is awarded students who show significant improvement in the course but do not meet the requisites for passing the course. Students earning grades of IP, WF and F must repeat the course.

Once all specific requirements are satisfactorily completed, students are required to pass a standardized exit examination with a score of 75 or higher; students enrolled in the exit-level composition course must also pass a writing examination. Students who score less than 75 on the standardized exit examination, or fail the composition examination, are required to repeat the course provided they have not exhausted their four attempts. Students who fail to meet all requirements within the specified time frame are suspended from the program.

### Academic Advisement

Academic advisement for all new students is mandatory. During the initial advisement, students are given an explanation of the developmental program as well as a written analysis of their developmental course requirements. They are also informed of the number of attempts they have to exit each academic area. Students are given an opportunity to ask questions regarding the program and are required to sign a

statement as evidence of their understanding of the policies governing their continued participation in the program. Academic advisors maintain periodic contact with students during the quarter; in particular, advisors are concerned with those students who have failed a course and have been issued an academic warning.

### Support Services

Developmental Studies operates a learning lab to supplement classroom instruction. Instructors and peer tutors offer homework assistance and tutoring in the academic areas. Computer-assisted instruction and tutorials are also available for those students with specific areas of deficiencies who wish to work at their own pace.

---

*...can at-risk students with barriers such as poor high school grades, low standardized test scores, and below average self concepts succeed in college? The answer to this question is a resounding YES...*

---

Counselors and academic advisors are available to assist students with a wide array of personal and academic problems and to monitor the progress of students. Counseling is also provided on an individual basis and in small groups. Counseling is designed to provide staff an opportunity to develop rapport with students; to maintain an active role in the personal development of students involved; to allow students the opportunity for positive interactions with, and support from, peers and professional staff; and to enable students to initiate and maintain contact with members of the university community who can

provide educational support and resources. In addition, workshops designed to help each student improve his/her self concept, ameliorate study skills, and to promote social and professional growth are provided.

### Program Evaluation

This article, thus far, has included a brief description of selected elements of the Developmental Studies Program at Georgia State University and the criteria required for exiting the program. There are two questions that remain to be answered: 1) How effective is the program? and 2) How is the effectiveness determined?

Important concerns of the program are its effectiveness and its accountability which are determined through program evaluation. The use of program evaluation signifies a certain amount of commitment by the university to monitor performance of its participants, to assess outcomes based on the results of their endeavors, and to make improvements in the program.

To test the efficacy of the program, a cohort analysis methodology was employed to provide information regarding the extent to which at-risk students who completed the developmental program were adequately prepared to perform college-level work. At-risk students who entered GSU in the fall quarter, 1982, were included in the study since many of them are still enrolled.

Table I shows the progress of former at-risk Developmental Studies students who completed credit English, mathematics, and reading courses (history, political science, psychology, etc.,) with those of non-developmental students. The figures reveal that at-risk students performed at an adequate level, on their first attempt, in core credit courses except in English. This difference in English can probably be attributed to the fact that passing status in English requires a grade of C or better, while a passing grade in the other courses requires a D or better. The higher criterion in composition may account for the variance in the rates for the three areas. It should be noted, however, that at-risk students passed credit reading and mathematics courses even though their predicted grade point averages suggested they would not succeed in col-

**Table I**  
**Success of At-Risk DS/Non-DS Students in Freshman Courses\***  
**Spring 88 – Winter 89**

	% of former at-risk DS students who registered for and passed first attempt in reporting period		% of non-DS students who registered for and passed freshman courses, first freshman courses, attempted in reporting period	
	Total	Passed	Total	Passed
English	526	360 68.4%	1033	848 82.1%
Math	377	276 73.2%	1325	1090 82.3%
Reading	1182	1017 86.0%	5434	5054 93.0%

\*Cited from *The Developmental Studies Annual Report*, Georgia State University, 1988-89.

lege-level courses. The performance of at-risk students further indicates that underprepared students can increase their academic skills to the level required for success in college level courses, if they are provided the opportunity and support through an effective developmental program. The staff of the Developmental Studies Program at Georgia State University is committed to monitoring of the performance of students in each of the core areas, especially English. It is also dedicated to making program improvements to better meet the needs of students.

Fifty-five percent (55%) of students enrolled at Georgia State University attend school part-time; consequently, students are enrolled for longer periods of time prior to graduation (GSU, 1988). Table II shows a comparison of the progress toward graduation of previous at-risk developmental enrollees and nondevelopmental students. While regularly admitted students are enrolled in degree-credit courses right away, at-risk students must complete required non-credit courses in Developmental Studies which frequently defers their college graduation at least one or more academic years. It is, therefore, fair to compare former at-risk developmental students who are juniors with the regularly admitted students who are seniors. The arrow, hence, draws attention to the correlation between former

at-risk developmental students and regularly admitted students who are separated by a year in their progress toward graduation. The data reveal that students who were predicted to fail

have, in fact, performed at a comparable level to those who were predicted to succeed.

## Conclusion

The academic hurdles that at-risk students must cross before they can succeed in college are numerous and complex. In the face of such obstacles, can at-risk students with barriers such as poor high school grades, low standardized test scores, and below average self concepts succeed in college? The answer to this question is a resounding YES, as demonstrated by many of the students who were enrolled in the Developmental Studies Program at Georgia State University in the class of 1982. Considering the incessant trend of a catastrophic decline in student literacy, the continuance of developmental programs is tantamount to the survival of at-risk students' access to college. Lamenting the interminable illiteracy, we as educators must continue to engage in the battle to improve developmental studies programs and contribute achievers to our nation sore-

**Table II \*\*\*\***

Class of 1982	Graduated/Applied Graduation Spring, 1988*	Reached Senior Status	Reached Junior Status
Developmental Studies (At-risk)**	61 (20.5%)	94 (31.5%)	138 (46.3%)
Regular Freshmen**	202 (32.9%)	251 (40.9%)	315 (51.7%)
National Graduation Rate***	43.0%		

\*\*\*\*Cited from *The Developmental Studies Annual Report*, Georgia State University, 1988-89.

\*Graduates are delineated as those students who have already graduated or who were scheduled to graduate Spring Quarter, 1988. Senior rank is delineated as having acquired 135 or more credit hours. Junior status as having acquired 90 or more credit hours.

\*\*Developmental Studies students based on 254 students who finished the program in 1980; and 298 who completed in 1982. Regular freshmen represent 683 entering freshmen in 1980; and 613 entering freshmen in 1982.

\*\*\*The national graduate rate of 43.0% is extracted from the 1981 National Center for Educational Statistics comprehensive study of the class of 1982. The percentage reflects the number of students who graduated from the institutions where they matriculated as freshmen.

ly in need of their potential contributions.

This article indicates that developmental education can represent access to educational opportunity that bridges the gap between at-risk students and successful college-level work. Equally important, the data indicate that with

academic supports, students with academic deficiencies have the potential for performing beyond their predicted levels of achievement. In this regard, it is important to remember that with recent increases in the number of at-risk students entering college, there is a greater need for effective and effi-

cient developmental programs to prepare them for college-level work. Effective developmental programs represent a bridge that closes the gap between at-risk students and access to college.

## References

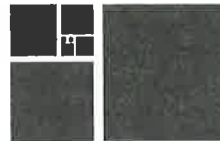
Georgia State University. (1988-89). Developmental studies annual report. Georgia State University.

Georgia State University. (1988-89). Fact book. Georgia State University.



### EDUCATIONAL THEORY

EDUCATION BUILDING  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
1310 South Sixth Street  
Champaign, Illinois 61820  
217-333-3003



Published quarterly by the John Dewey Society, the Philosophy of Education Society, the College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the College of Education, University of Illinois at Chicago. EDUCATIONAL THEORY is a scholarly journal devoted to fostering the continued development of educational theory and to encouraging the disciplined discussion of problems that arise within the educational profession.

#### In recent issues—

"T.L.O. and the Student's Right to Privacy," by Jeffery L. Johnson and Donald W. Crowley (Vol. 36, No. 3, Summer 1986)

"Toward a Sociological Perspective on Learning Disabilities," by Carol A. Christensen, Michael M. Gerber, and Robert B. Everhart (Vol. 36, No. 4, Fall 1986)

"Student Questions and Individual Learning," by J. T. Dillon (Vol. 36, No. 4, Fall 1986)

"A Dialogical Approach to Understanding: Horizontal Evaluation," by Andrew Gitlin and Stanley Goldstein (Vol. 37, No. 1, Winter 1987)

"Unresolved Issues in Defining Educational Goals," by Robert M. W. Travers (Vol. 37, No. 1, Winter 1987)

"Can Progressivism Be Revived?" by James E. McClellan (Vol. 37, No. 2, Spring 1987)

"Citizenship, Public Philosophy, and the Retreat from Democracy," by Henry A. Giroux (Vol. 37, No. 2, Spring 1987)

#### Subscription Rates:

Libraries and individuals, United States and Canada	\$20.00
Libraries and individuals, foreign	\$22.00
Back copies	\$ 5.50

(Prepayment is required for orders and subscriptions)

# Prevention and Reducing Incidence of At-Risk Students

by Zelda B. Tenenbaum

**T**he primary goal of teaching is to help all students learn, but good teachers find some students hard to teach. Educators know their subject, be it math, English, or history, but do they know how to teach that subject to students who may learn differently from their natural teaching style? Teachers will help prevent and reduce the incidence of at-risk students if they teach through their natural style but expand their repertoire.

The articles in this section indicate the need to rethink our plan for presenting lessons to students. To prevent and reduce at-risk students, change must occur. As John Kennedy put it:

Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.

G. Fero's article defines at-risk students as those who are not likely to successfully complete school for one reason or another. He refers to discipline problems as planned or unplanned offenses, citing planned offenders more likely to be at-risk than students who violate school rules with unplanned offenses. Fero points out that our traditional discipline has been to punish students in ways that promote low self-esteem and dropping out.

Many students need to learn ways to cope, to adapt, and to handle frustrations. What is right for one student may seem unnatural for another. Perhaps some of the behavioral problems are due to frustrations of students who think and

feel differently than their teachers, or who are stressed because they don't know how to act 'good.' Seemingly wayward actions are often judged by teachers as flaws or deficiencies.

The article by W. Hadley and R. Hadley points to the need to restructure our schools and early intervention programs in order to ensure success in academic achievement. They state that many restructured programs have included modifications in curricular offerings to enhance self-esteem in students. They are on target by referring to studies that indicate the need for individualized attention, variations in teaching strategies and flexibility for students who prefer less structure in their learning process.

According to the Center for Application of Psychological Type (CAPT) in Gainesville, Florida, 76% of students need sensory data in the learning process. The techniques discussed in the article by W. Hadley and R. Hadley, and the article by D. Kersemeir provide opportunities for active learning. Music, poetry, cooperative learning, videotapes, and role modeling are presented as optional ways to present the curriculum.

Accommodating individual differences in the classroom requires awareness of teacher's preferences and student's preferences. By identifying individual strengths, teachers, parents, and friends can help children strengthen self-esteem, improve performance, and understand themselves. Learning about psychological type or learning styles of children could prevent frustrations in relationships at home and at school. Understanding individual differences in children is important in helping them

better understand themselves and others and in furthering their development in healthy, functional ways.

In looking at students as individuals with different learning styles, teachers and parents would be less irritated and could learn to appreciate and even nurture the differences. *Deighan's* article in this section uses the term 'teacher empowerment' which one gains by restructuring programs to meet the needs of the children, and having staff cooperate as a team. Kersemeir's article mentions the need to help students gain insight and control over their personal lives so that they can better concentrate on their studies. Fero discusses skills development (not ability) and self-esteem as necessary for students to feel success.

Learning to appreciate different styles and needs in children is the central theme of the following articles. Children are different, and they process data differently. If we expect children to learn the same, to think and feel the same, or to behave the same, we are fighting the differences, not working with them. Knowing a child's individual learning style or preference for seeing the world and making decisions will give a teacher the opportunity to teach children the way they need to learn. That is a change we need.

Children who learn about themselves find their special gifts and the benefits of developing these gifts. Appreciation of differences could prevent and reduce the incidence of at-risk students. That is the sort of understanding we can use a lot more of.



---

Zelda B. Tenenbaum is Human Relations Consultant, Savannah, Georgia and Member, Georgia Commission on Children and Youth.

# Reducing the Risk Through the School Discipline Program

by George J. Fero

Students who were not likely to successfully complete school for one reason or another have been labeled as 'at-risk' students. During the decades of the 1940's and 1950's the dropout problem soared with a high near 75% of the students not completing high school (Parker, 1987). During that period the ability to obtain and maintain employment was not as difficult since many jobs did not require the level of skilled labor required by the current job market. The current problem of at-risk students has been considered one of major concern by many organizations and individuals related to education and government. In the annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, the public listed the issue of discipline as the second highest problem with which the schools must deal, with the use of drugs listed as the number one concern (Gallup, 1989). Truancy was ranked thirteenth on the poll, parent lack of interest seventh, and lack of after-school programs twenty-second. The issue of at-risk youth was not listed as a problem by the public, and the poll addressed the issue by asking questions about criteria for leaving school.

In 1987 a two-year study was completed by this researcher (Fero, 1987) which tested the effectiveness of in-school suspension as a disciplinary tool in the schools. The results of this study found that, in general, there was no difference in effectiveness between the use of behavioral contracts and in-school suspension in preventing or reducing repeated offenses. However, if student offenses were divided into two broad categories, planned or unplanned, students who committed unplanned offenses tended not to continue to violate

school rules. In addition, it was also found that there appeared to be a relationship between students who did not complete a public school education, and whether or not a student was a discipline problem. This substantiated findings by Richard Riley (1983) who used behavior problems as a criterion in selecting subjects for his study. Subsequently, 33% of his subjects dropped out of school.

A second study funded by the Northwest Missouri State University Center for Applied Research was conducted by this researcher in 1989. This study was essentially a continuation of the 1987 study. The same Cohort Control Group design and experimental groups were used for comparison. The results of this study found that there was a significant relationship between the class of behavior which results in disciplinary action and whether a student was considered to be at-risk. The findings specifically indicated that a student who committed a planned offense was more likely to be at-risk than a student who violated school rules with an unplanned offense. These findings are substantiated by a number of related reports. For example, Grossnickle (1986) listed early warning signs of at-risk students which included truancy and tardiness. The planned offenses identified in these studies included: truancy, tardiness, failure to attend detention and use of tobacco. Unplanned student offenses were: fighting, the use of foul and abusive language and insubordination.

The literature has indicated that students who are at-risk tend to have low self-esteem. Hamby (1989) stated,

if we can believe what dropouts themselves tell us about why they left school, failure, boredom, and loss of self-esteem stand high on their list.

Generally, the literature has indicated that once a student has dropped

from school, the level of self-esteem rises. The reaction in many schools when a student violates a school rule has been to punish the student, and at times to use the student as an example for other students. This has usually resulted in the student losing valuable classroom time which led to lowered success in academics, and loss of self-esteem. Hamby stated,

to set standards for young people, have them fail these standards, and then blame the failure on them, their families or some other element outside the school is an abdication of our roles as educators.

Another finding of the 1989 study by Hamby was that a relationship existed between achievement and whether a student was considered to be at-risk. Again, this finding has been fully substantiated by the literature. One primary indicator cited in numerous sources was that students at-risk were generally deficient in academics, primarily due to low reading ability. Students who have had a history of truancy, or tardiness have been punished by removal from the classroom either into an inadequate in-school suspension program, or through suspension from school. This has not corrected the behavior, but only has resulted in loss of classroom instructional time which may have helped the student to gain skills necessary to become successful in school. With success the student may have gained self-esteem and not have been as likely to drop from school.

The study completed by this researcher in 1987 was based upon the work of Canter (1976), Glasser (1969), Skinner (1971), and others who have advocated the use of a behavioral contract as an effective disciplinary tool. The theory advocated by those researchers had been that by contracting, the student had a better understanding of why the behavior was not acceptable,

---

*George J. Fero is Assistant Professor of Educational Administration and Coordinator of Teacher Education Student Services at Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri.*

and had some ownership in the punishment for the offense. By having had ownership in the punishment, self-esteem may have been better developed in the student, and the offense was less likely to be repeated. Firestone (1989) stated

high school students expect to receive respect from adults in the school.

The concept presented in Firestone's statement has been repeated a number of different ways by other authors in the literature, and indicated that if students were expected to respect the educational system, then they should also have been given the respect they were entitled to.

---

*The effective attendance policy should include immediate parent notification when students are absent.*

---

Based upon the findings and information found in the literature, it may be concluded that students who commit planned violations of school rules, and who rank below the mean in standard achievement tests are more likely to be considered at-risk students. It may also be concluded, based upon the same studies and taking into considerations the contents of the literature on both discipline and at-risk students, that the disciplinary methods for these students must allow for the development of self-esteem, and that disciplinary actions should not remove the student from the classroom. Exceptions would be offenses which endangered the student, other students, or the professional staff, or totally disrupted the right of others to learn. To accomplish this it is recommended that schools have clearly defined attendance and disciplinary policies and programs.

The literature on at-risk youth generally state that three of the reasons which contribute to students dropping

from school are: having low academic skills (the key word here is skills, not ability); having negative self-perception (low self-esteem); lack of participation in school activities (sometimes the result of not having activities available). Unfortunately many attendance, activity and discipline programs in the schools tend to perpetuate these conditions rather than address and adjust to them. For example, those schools which must follow No-Pass/No-Play mandates may actually contribute to the non-participation of at-risk youth who are not achieving due to a lack of academic skills, and permit lower self-esteem to develop further by not giving those students an opportunity to experience success. As a result the student may choose to not attend school, is suspended, and loses more of the classroom time needed to learn and develop academic skills.

School attendance policies and programs need to encourage regular attendance. The policy should clearly define the attendance expectations of the school, and those must be communicated to both the parent and student. Included in the policy should be definitions of excused and unexcused absences, the maximum number of days the student may miss before some action is taken, and the consequences which will occur when a student has exceeded the maximum number of days. The effective attendance policy should include immediate parent notification when students are absent. Such notification programs could use parents, community volunteers or teachers to call the parents of absent students, or computer assisted attendance/discipline management programs. The initial cost of a computer assisted attendance program may appear to be high, but the time savings and long range savings to society are likely to be unlimited.

To better enable students to feel success and build self-esteem it is also recommended that the disciplinary program be based upon preventative measures, and a desire to correct unacceptable behavior rather than to just be punitive in nature. While initial school rule violations would carry lesser penalties or the use of contracts, the disciplinary plan should have well-defined consequences for repeated offenses, and parental involvement should be an early part of the disciplinary plan. The use of

contracting as a disciplinary tool allows for student ownership in the consequences and has been shown to improve student self-esteem. However, contracts must be based upon short term goals. A goal set too far into the future, or too high, is not as likely to be achieved. The schools need to remember that we are dealing with young people who should be allowed to learn from their mistakes; to be allowed to have a fresh start and not to suffer for the rest of their school careers.

---

*For students to experience success outside the classroom, which may then be transferred to the classroom, it is recommended that supervised extra-curricular activities be expanded to allow for maximum student participation.*

---

For students to experience success outside the classroom, which may then be transferred to the classroom, it is recommended that supervised extra-curricular activities be expanded to allow for maximum student participation. While academic success has traditionally been a pre-requisite for participation in extra-curricular activities, the extracurricular activities should actually be encouraging broader participation to better develop the skills necessary to build a foundation for total success both in and out of the classroom. For example, in addition to the regular inter-scholastic sports teams, short term sports programs might be introduced which would allow more students to participate without the long-term commitment required of the regular 'teams.'

Within the classroom it is recommended that teachers be encouraged to use more positive approaches to instruction and discipline. For example, the teachers may use peer tutoring in the classroom to assist students, or operate selected units using cooperative learning models with heterogeneous groups of students. The high expectations of the school and teachers need to be maintained, but kept within a realistic framework considering the needs and profiles of the students to be served. Teachers should consider exploring different ways to manage the classroom that are designed to prevent rather than react to problems. For example, Swick (1987) advocates addressing those fac-

tors in the classroom which may contribute to student/teacher stress. By reducing the stress level in the classroom, students are more likely to learn with fewer problems for the teacher. The educational goals of the school need to be maintained at a high enough standard to be challenging, but not so high that at-risk students are unable to experience success. For some of these students, credit should be awarded for the effort made in trying to achieve rather than punishment for failing. A familiar phrase often used by this writer reads: "You never fail until you stop trying."

In summary, by using disciplinary and academic records, students can be

identified to be at-risk. To prevent these students from actually dropping out of the educational system, every effort needs to be made to eliminate the reasons these students fail to achieve in both behavior, and academics. Strategies should be preventative in nature, they should be well planned and clearly defined. Once these strategies are planned and defined, they must be communicated to administration, teachers, students and parents. The schools should also consider that students are not the only population to be considered, parents and teachers are at-risk, too.

## References

- Canter, L. & Canter, M. (1976). Assertive discipline: A take charge approach for today's educator. Santa Monica, CA: Lee Canter and Associates, Inc.
- Fero, G.J. (1987). The effectiveness of a selective early release program alternative to in-school suspension. Dissertation Abstracts International, 49, 4209A.
- Firestone, W.H. (1989). Beyond order and expectations in high school serving at-risk youth. Educational Leadership, 46(5), 41-45.
- Glasser, W. (1969). Schools without failure. New York: Harper Row.
- Grossnickle, D.R. (1986). High school dropouts: Causes, consequences and cure. (Fastback No. 242). Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.
- Gallup, A. (1989). The 21st annual Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 71(1), 41-54.
- Hamby, J.V. (1989). How to get an 'A' on your dropout prevention report card. Educational Leadership, 46(5), 21-28.
- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (1988). Reducing the risk: Strategies and resources to assist Missouri public schools in meeting the needs of at-risk youth. Jefferson City, MO: Author.
- Parker, F. (1987). School reform: Recent influences. National Forum. Phi Delta Kappa, 32-33.
- Riley, R. (1983). The effect of mastery learning instruction on the academic achievement, self-concept and attendance of potential dropouts and dropouts in an Arizona high school. Doctoral Dissertation. Northern Arizona University.
- Skinner, B.F. (1971). Beyond freedom and dignity. New York: Bantam Books.
- Swick, K.J. (1987). Student stress: A classroom management system. Washington, DC: National Education Association.



# Restructuring the K-2 Grades for the Prevention of Failure

by William P. Deighan

In 1985-86 the West Chester Area School District (West Chester, PA) restructured its K-2 grades into teams of teachers for the purpose of preventing the start of school failure. After four years, in 1989-90, the initial group of 'at-risk' first graders had declined 90% by grade five (Superintendent's Report, 1989).

Perhaps more importantly, nearly 80% of this reduction was reached by grade three, a grade that is a critical predictor of later school failure and dropping out (Slavin, 1989). The purpose of this article, then, is to describe briefly how this was achieved.

## Description of the Program

Beginning as a pilot program in three of the district's nine elementary schools in 1985-86, the initial group of first graders was assessed using the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, with those who tested below the 49th percentile being identified as at-risk of academic failure. The three pilot schools restructured their respective K-2 grades and teachers into two teams. In addition to the regular classroom teachers, each team was assigned the services of a full-time instructional aide, a half-time reading specialist, and a half-time tutor. In some cases Chapter I personnel were able to fulfill some of these duties without violating federal or state guidelines. Also, declining enrollment at the middle school allowed for a creative redeployment of people in order to achieve these staffing goals. Each school in turn randomly assigned all K-2 students to each of the two teams. (It should be noted that today, states are providing a variety of different funding sources, e.g.,

Pennsylvania's TLS program, and these represent opportunities for creative ways to serve students better.)

## Goals for the Program

While there were both primary and secondary goals for the program, its main purpose was to intervene into the potential failure cycle of academically at-risk students by preventing failure from starting. This article, then, will report only on the implementation and results of this primary goal.

## Implementing the Program

While many factors were involved in implementing the program, three were critical:

- Piloting the program
- Using an out-come-based curriculum
- Providing a summer program

## Piloting the Program

The opportunity to work first on a small, controlled basis is essential to the success of virtually any product or project. In the summer of 1985, therefore, the pilot phase began in three of the nine elementary schools of the district. Prior to that, planning had been conducted with the three principals and their respective staffs.

Since restructuring the K-2 grades into teams created the possibility that some teachers who were working in those grades in the pilot schools would no longer do so, it was necessary to obtain the support of the teachers' association. Special efforts, therefore, had to be taken with them at appropriate times, culminating in a meeting of the association's officers and all of the elementary teachers who were interested in the program. Over 100 people attended, with the result being that they supported the pilot program.

## Outcome-based Curriculum

An outcome-based curriculum, designed by the teachers, gave them a strong stake in its being successful. They worked cooperatively as a team to identify the major goals and objectives that students should acquire at various stages within the new K-2 block.

Also, teachers were assisted in designing the criterion-referenced assessment measures that would reflect mastery. A 90/90 standard (90% of the students achieve 90% of the designated learning outcomes) was adopted for both individual and program success.

## Summer Program

The most important element of the program was the four-week, three-hour per day summer program. It was available only to those K-2 students who remained at-risk at the end of the normal school year. Since time had been shown to be a critical variable in learning (Bloom, 1981), its purpose was to provide additional time for the at-risk students. It resulted in the equivalent of an additional one-half year of school, and possibly more because of its concentration on reading.

## Results

The longitudinal results for the period between grade one and grade five, which is the current grade of the original at-risk group of students, are shown in Figures 1 through 3.

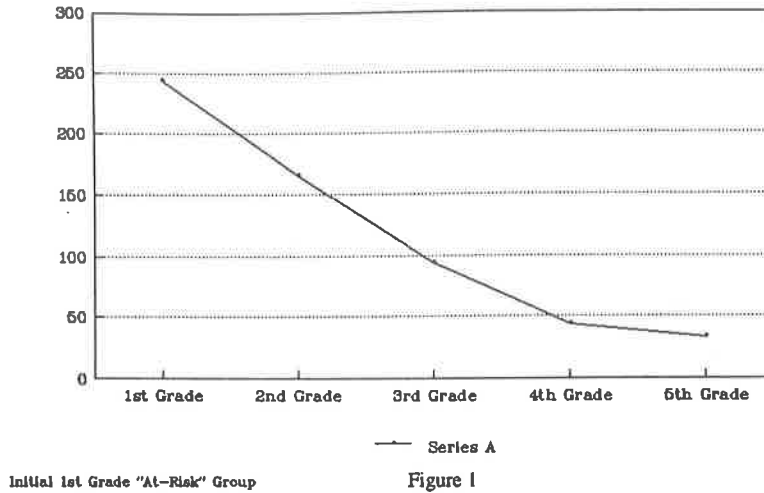
As can be seen from Figure 1, the number of students who tested below the 49th percentile dropped steadily and dramatically from grade one through grade four. The small decline from 6% to 5% in grade five perhaps represents students who will not be successful in school unless they receive on-to-one, clinical assistance. This may be cost-effective to implement at this point in their

---

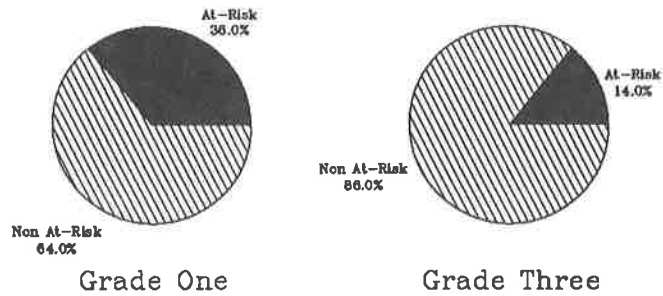
William P. Deighan is Coordinator of the Graduate Program in Administration and Supervision at John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio.



## AT-RISK STUDENTS' PROGRESS (Longitudinal Study)



## AT-RISK PERCENTAGES (Grade 1 to Grade 3)



Longitudinal = 61% Improvement

Figure 2

education, however, because there are only 33 of them in a fifth grade of nearly 700 students.

Figure 2 shows the at-risk student population dropping from 36% in the first grade to 14% in the third grade. Although working with a somewhat different student population than that of an exclusively Chapter I population, this 61% improvement gain is significant

Figure 3 indicates an additional reduction of 9% between grades three and five, leveling off at 5% in the fifth grade. These nine percentage points are an additional 64% improvement gain between grades three and five.

## Discussion

The program brought together some important pieces of the growing knowledge base about teaching and learning. For example, it was partially anchored by a 'lasting effects' school improvement model because the development of basic skills in the early,

formative years of school is critical to success in later years.

A second anchor was a core of findings relating to both 'teaching-learning' and 'organizational development.' The program was conceptualized, designed, and implemented using these findings, with the key ones being academic learning time, mastery learning, team building, and teacher empowerment.

Since its start, an important feature has been added. It is a preschool program that focuses upon children who are three and four years old. The curriculum used is Phyllis Levenstein's Mother-Child Verbal Interaction Program in which trained school social workers utilize specialized toys for teaching mothers to become verbally interactive with their children.

## Summary

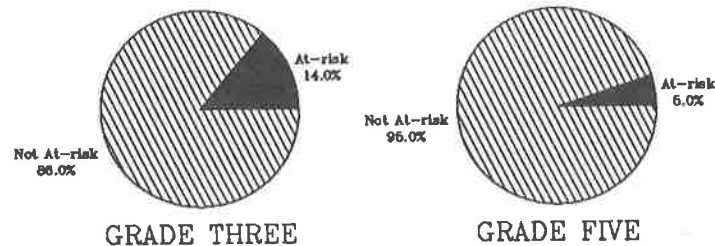
Based upon the longitudinal data accumulated during the past four years,

it can be stated that the project was successful and continues to be the district's organizational structure for K-2. Although not all children are entering grade three without being at-risk, the large percentage of them are, and by grade five, 90% are no longer so identified.

Also, the program was highlighted as one of 16 programs for at-risk students in a Pennsylvania State Department of Education manual compiled for them by Research for Better Schools. Of the 16, it was the only one that involved primary grades.

Lastly, an important feature of this program is that it is replicable because its effectiveness comes from its conceptual base and structure, not from the charismatic nature of the staff who work within it.

## AT-RISK PERCENTAGES (Grade 3 to Grade 5)



Longitudinal Comparison

Figure 3

## References

Bloom, B.S. (1981). *All our children learning*. New York: McGraw-Hill, pp. 2-3.

Slavin, R.E., Karweit, N.L., & Madden, N.A. (1989). *Effective programs for at risk students*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, p. 5.

Superintendent's Report. (1989). *K-2 report: 1988-89*. West Chester, PA: West Chester Area School District, pp. 23-24.



# Rhyme, Rhythm, and Reading for At-Risk Students

by Wynton H. Hadley and Richard T. Hadley

A significant number of programs have been designed in recent years for students at-risk. However, high attrition rates from these programs by at-risk students suggest that planners are not assessing successful interventions that have been implemented in the classroom setting. The purpose of this article is to describe a model program for at-risk students which is adaptable for elementary, secondary, and post-secondary students. Modifications of the program emphasize the use of selected poetry, music, and reading comprehension passages.

A review of the literature on at-risk students indicated that a variety of programs and resources have been developed. The programs and resources are designed to interest students in learning through poetry, music, and reading passages.

Many programs make use of computer software to motivate at-risk students. Bialo and Sivin (1989) reviewed computer software that has been adapted by educators for use with students at-risk. Software disks for teaching basic skills, creativity and thinking skills are available for teaching at-risk students. Bialo and Sivin (1989) also discussed methods for using computers to reduce the dropout rate. Restructuring the school and early intervention programs are key factors for success in academic achievement. Many restructured programs have included modifications in curricular offerings to enhance self esteem in students.

Johnson (1987) described the organization of instruction for at-risk students in California which focused mainly on basic skills and was entirely super-

vised by teacher aides. While basic skills are essential, modification of basal textbooks can improve reading and thinking skills. Additionally, a curriculum that integrates literature and reading comprehension is beneficial to the at-risk learner. Modification of classroom instruction which includes small group and individualized instruction is essential.

Newman's study (1988) concluded that student-centered programs with a committed staff can assist at-risk students. He recommended that there be individualized attention for leaving and newly entering students in remediation programs and that handbooks, school practices and procedures be designed to assist students in making adjustments.

The literature also revealed that some at-risk youth leave basic skills programs after a series of frustrations and failures because of their inability to cope with program structure (Higgins, 1988). Programs for at-risk students should be designed for variations in teaching strategies and flexibility in classroom organization. Peer tutoring and cooperative learning are two strategies that may be implemented.

Chapin and Veto (1989) proposed that the level of structure and participation that children and adolescents experience with teachers and classmates have a strong influence on their sense of competence and relatedness within the school context. The interaction of at-risk students with their teachers and peers is significant for success in school.

The comprehensive concept is a restructuring of the school to better serve at-risk students. The basic approach to serving these students is adjusted by developing support services, mobile teachers, flexible scheduling, and emphasis on prevention.

A North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction Report (1988) described several components of a successful comprehensive program for at-

risk students. The components are access to services outside school, basic remediation courses, and counseling. Basic education remediation courses include reading and math skills, and career counseling is available. The program also includes individualized and small group interactions, flexible scheduling and attendance monitoring.

Higgins (1988) concluded that at-risk students who remained in remedial programs, identified a supportive relationship with a teacher and a sense of team spirit within a class as reasons for remaining in the programs. Higgins (1988) also revealed several findings about remediation program 'leavers.' First, few youth leave a remediation program impulsively; most leave only after a succession of frustrations and failures.

Secondly, a substantial number of in-school departures result from situations that are extrinsic to a program, such as health problems and family relocations. Because many of these problems are associated with the socioeconomic profile of at-risk students, efforts should be made by the classroom teacher to provide a positive learning environment. Teachers must be sensitive to the emotional needs of students and when possible, adapt program operations to enhance the students' learning experiences and their self esteem.

In an effort to improve the academic performance of at-risk students and to provide a positive learning environment, Zeluff (1988) reported that four alternative strategies for improving self concept and learning skills are creative writing, peer tutoring, creative teaching and behavior modification.

While a significant number of programs exist for at-risk students, only a few of them delineate specific activities that can be utilized in the classroom to enhance self esteem and im-

---

Wynton H. Hadley is Associate Professor of Education at Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Richard T. Hadley is Professor of Music at Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, North Carolina.

prove reading skills. A review of recent literature indicates that at-risk students do not perform well in traditional classroom settings (Zeluff, 1988). While ability to read and think critically is the basis of education, an increasing number of at-risk students lack these skills. Modifications of textbook selections have been beneficial to students with reading and learning problems. Poetry and music can be used to improve reading comprehension. The poetical and musical activities can motivate at-risk students in all grade levels including the university classroom with disabled learners.

A post-secondary program was developed for at-risk students in a predominately Black university in the south. The participants were education majors with grade point averages below 2.5.

### **Project MAP—A Retention Program for At-Risk Students**

Project MAP is a model program for identifying, monitoring, counseling and tutoring at-risk post-secondary students. The objectives of Project MAP—Monitoring Academic Progress of Students—are to provide opportunities for improving the overall grade point average of students; to monitor classroom performance of students; to provide mandatory counseling sessions; to provide tutoring in reading, mathematics and other disciplines; and to provide study skills workshops for the students. After students are identified, profiles are developed. Each profile includes the following: GPA's; standardized test scores, sex, race classification and essay test scores. Each student is given a class progress reporting form which is signed by each instructor, every three weeks. Students are required to attend a pre-scheduled one-hour weekly counseling session with a

school counselor. Remedial and developmental activities are designed to meet individual needs of students. Tri-monthly study skills workshops on locational and organizational skills are conducted. Contractual agreements are made with each participant to verify program participation and commitment.

A modification of Project MAP was piloted with 30 students in a middle grades classroom. The workshops included the use of music, poetry, and reading selections to enhance self concept and reading achievement. The integration of poetry, self concept activities and music enhances the students' interest in reading.

### **Music for At-Risk Students**

Music is an integral part of the lives and experiences of at-risk students. It serves as a means for group participation and self-expression. The musical selections provided opportunities for social, physical, emotional and cultural development.

Musical selections to enhance positive self concepts and positive relationships included *The Greatest Love, Join the Game, We'll All Get Together Again, Michael Row the Boat Ashore* and *Lean On Me*. Students may be given the opportunity to work collaboratively in writing songs.

The music and reading comprehension passages were selected to encourage students to think positively about themselves and others. Self esteem activities, reading and interpreting quotations that reflect the students' personalities and creating a personal coat of arms which depicts salient aspects and contributions of their families can be integrated to motivate students.

### **Poetry for At-Risk Students**

Creating concrete poetry, poetry designed in the shape of an object, is a positive activity for at-risk students.

The shapes may include ice cream cones, fruits, sport balls or animals. Other poetical forms for motivating students are poster poetry shaped couplets, triplets, quatrains, and parodies of Mother Goose Rhymes. Students are encouraged to write original poetry.

### **Reading and Listening Activities for At-Risk Students**

The reading passages should vary in readability and format to improve comprehension. Among the reading activities are Steps to Comprehension, The Main Idea Wheel, Modified Cloze Passages and Mapping. The comprehension passages are selected to develop each level of reading comprehension, literal, interpretive and critical. The reading selections may be used for writing paragraphs. Group writing activities are recommended. Two group writing activities which encourage self-expression are Peer Writing and Writing Roulette (Searfoss and Readance, 1989). In Writing Roulette, one participant identified the problem in writing, another writer suggested ways for solving the problem, and a third writer concluded by solving the problem. This cooperative approach encourages persons who may be reluctant to express their ideas in writing.

Listening comprehension activities were demonstrated to encourage the use of listening skills to improve understanding. Participants listened to paragraphs that were read orally and they identified the topic sentences and main ideas based on general and specific details.

Project MAP, with its modifications, is an effective program for at-risk students. Components of the project may be used in grades one through twelve. The use of poetry and music with at-risk students and modification of reading passages can motivate the learner who is at-risk.

## References

- Bialo, E., & Sivin, J. (1989). Computers and at-risk youth: Software and hardware that can help classroom computer learning, 2, 4580.
- Chapin, S., & Vito, R. (1988). Patterns of family interaction style, self-systems processes and engagement with school work: An investigation of adolescents rated as at-risk or not at-risk for academic failure. (Report No. CG02 1117). New Orleans, LA: American Educational Research Association (ERIC Document Report Serial No. ED 299 472).
- Higgins, C. (1988). Youth motivation: At-risk youth talk to program planners. (Report No. UDO 26469). Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 300 486).
- Johnson, D. (1987). The organization of instruction immigrant education: Assistance for children and youth at-risk. TESOL Quarterly, 21, 437-59.
- Newman, J. (1988). What should we do about the highly mobile student? A Research Brief (Report No. CG 021555). Mt. Vernon, WA: Educational Service District 189. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 305 545).
- North Carolina State Development of Public Instruction. (1988). Planning the comprehensive concept. Report No. CG 021492). Raleigh, NC: Raleigh Division of Support Programs. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 304 618).
- Searfoss, L., & Readance, J. (1989). Helping children learn to read. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Zeluff, K. (1988). Improving student performance. Academic Therapy, 24, 95-98.



# Vitae Scholasticae

began when a number of scholars in North America and Europe indicated their support for establishing a focal point for biographical research that concentrates on educational figures and issues.

We find exploring the lives of these figures—whether famous or lost in the pages of history—a worthwhile research that reignites old ideas, encourages new thoughts, and evokes discussions.

Why not join us.

Please enter my subscription as indicated below:

One year:  Individuals \$12  Institutions \$22  
Two years:  Individuals \$24  Institutions \$44

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Pan American add \$2 per year. All others outside North America add \$4 per year.

*Vitae Scholasticae* is published twice yearly in the spring and fall by the International Society for Educational Biography, the Department of Leadership and Educational Policy Studies, Northern Illinois University, the Department of Foundations and the Graduate School, Loyola University of Chicago. Direct inquiries to: *Vitae Scholasticae*, 325 Graham Hall, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115-2866.

# Study Skills: One High School's Alternative to Special Education: An Intervention Program That Works

by Donald E. Kersemeir

**D**uring the past decade, schools have been challenged to confront the exponential increase in the number of students broadly defined as at-risk. Expanding programs such as English as a Second Language (ESL), special education, and Chapter 1 are among a kaleidoscope of educational responses to meeting the needs of this student population. As a typical middle class suburban Chicago high school with an enrollment of nearly 1800 students, Glenbard East has had to deal with the reality that student entry requirements for currently existing programs keep most students out in the cold. In 1984, our administration and staff erroneously perceived that the great majority of our students were being served by the basics, regular, and honors courses offered in the respective 'academic' departments. We assumed that the few students who were experiencing difficulty in any of these three levels of the curriculum would be identified and placed in programs by our Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Team. This team consists of the assistant principal for student services, the social worker, psychologist, special education consultant, guidance department chairman, special education department chairman, and the school nurse. Staff members refer students to PPS who are deemed academically or behaviorally at-risk for their review, discussion and intervention.

However, in January of 1985, an analysis of the first semester grades revealed that the system was not working nearly as effectively as we had believed. Ninety-five (95) students of the 1984-85 freshman class had received two or more failing grades at the semester grading period. Few of

these students had been referred to the PPS team which meant that the majority of these students would not get any formal attention until the second semester when they would already be caught in a downward spiral of school failure. Seventeen (17) of these ninety-five (95) students were in fact later screened by PPS and found eligible for special education services. We still had the problem of how to meet the desperate academic needs of the remaining seventy-eight (78) freshmen who did not qualify for any additional school services.

In addressing the needs of these seventy-eight (78) students, the following mandate was set by the Glenbard East administration:

Develop a program which would provide academic and emotional support for entering at-risk freshmen beginning the first day of school.

To achieve this goal, a Study Skills Program was developed by a committee composed of the assistant principal for instruction, the assistant principal for student services, the special education consultant, the school social worker and the school psychologist. The committee determined that a Study Skills program with two major components was needed in order to provide a better opportunity for the identified at-risk freshmen. The elements of instruction and counseling were thought to be essential for program success. The following is a description of the committee's design for the Study Skills Program.

## Instructional Component

**Pre-identification of students** at the junior high school level. Each December, prior to enrollment, members of the study skills team meet with the junior high counselors to determine

at-risk students based on the following criteria:

a. 40th percentile or below on Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

b. Junior high teacher recommendation based on previous performance.

**Voluntary student enrollment** in a daily class for half credit. Each student is interviewed and parents are apprised of the study skills program. Parental consent is a prerequisite for enrollment.

**Formal classroom instruction** in areas of:

- a. Goal setting
- b. Time management
- c. Listening
- d. Note taking
- e. Test taking
- f. Concentration
- g. Motivation
- h. Memorization
- i. Reading a text

**Content tutoring** provided by the classroom instructor in collaboration with a computer aided instruction program.

**Monitoring of student performance** by the study skills instructor in collaboration with other faculty. The study skills instructor makes weekly contact with the teachers in the mainstream classes.

**Consultation with the mainstream teachers** to modify curriculum and instruction when appropriate.

## Counseling Component

### Group Counseling

Group counseling is conducted by a trained social worker who works only with Chapter I Study Skills students. The purpose of the groups is to help students gain insight into and control over their personal lives so that they can better concentrate on their studies. A workbook designed by the social worker is used to help the students with

---

Donale S. Kersemeir is Assistant Principal of Instruction at Glenbard East High School, Lombard, Illinois.

communication skills, building self-esteem, appropriate sharing of feelings and positive ways of coping with stress. In addition to the workbooks, the following are some of the methods used to actively engage the Study Skills students: group discussion, student produced video tapes, guest speakers and role-playing. Students who have experienced significant personal losses, such as death or a divorce, are given the opportunity of participating in the YES group (Youth Experiencing Separation) for six weeks with the social worker.

### *Individual Counseling*

Each student participates in a counseling session with the social worker at the beginning of the semester to discuss personal goals and academic objectives. These goals are kept on a 3 x 5 card for on-going reference. The students are also given the opportunity to obtain individual counseling for family and/or peer group difficulties. Throughout the semester, counseling for crisis situations is available. As needed, the social worker visits families, maintains phone communication with their homes, and makes referrals to appropriate local agencies.

### *Follow-up*

Follow-up of former study skills students by means of individual and small group counseling is provided subsequent to completion of the program by the social worker. Students are seen individually on a regular basis for long-term or short-term counseling. Again, families are involved as needed.

### *Mighty Conquerors*

This year the social worker organized the Mighty Conquerors, a group of 30 former study skills students who received two or more failures at mid-semester. The purpose of this follow-up contact is to help these students work out the issues of self-discipline, self-confidence, and dedication to pursue realistic career goals. To aid in motivation, the social worker has divided those students into three sub-groups and has students lead the groups themselves during which they take turns asking each other if they have

- a. studied for tests?
- b. done all homework?
- c. had good attendance?

Group and self support are encouraged. Weekly attendance sheets are given to each student. In addition to group building activities, field trips are taken to medical facilities where the teens do volunteer projects, and to the local junior college and trade schools for information about possible school and career options. Members have Mighty Conquerors t-shirts which they wear to group functions. A recognition assembly including their own talent show is given at the end of each semester to acknowledge their achievements.

### *Personnel and Costs*

Implementation of the program is achieved by using Chapter 1 funds, district funds, and existing personnel. In the spring of 1985 an English teacher with a strong reading background was hired to be the Study Skills instructor. That summer, this instructor and the special education consultant began implementing the program, involving other professionals as needed. This effort included meeting with all 8th grade counselors at both feeder schools, working with the high school guidance staff on scheduling, developing a written program description, and assembling a student profile of a study skills candidate. Necessary materials and supplies were also secured with Chapter 1 funds. In 1987, when the school social worker who had been leading the small groups could no longer continue in that responsibility, a request for a part-time social worker was included in the grant proposal.

### *Evaluation of Results*

In assessing the program, we are encouraged by the following:

- a. Seventy-six percent (76%) of the initial group of Study Skills students graduated on time. Another 9% are in their fifth year and are expected to graduate.
- b. Study Skills students passed 82% of their classes during the time they participated in the program.
- c. Study Skills students earned an average of 4.5 credits per year, higher than the all-school average.
- d. In the six years of the program's existence, nearly 600 students have participated.

The program has achieved the original mandate. Academic and emotional support have been provided for students, enabling them to pass their courses and graduate from high school. The grades, credits earned, and graduation rate of a control group consisting of similarly identified students who elected not to enroll in the Study Skills course were significantly lower. The data support the conclusion that our Study Skills program is a proven and, we believe, replicable program option for at-risk students. We have also reduced the need for special education services by enabling at-risk students to succeed in the regular education program.

### *Future Considerations*

After six years of implementing and evaluating the Study Skills Program, we are presently developing a three-level study skills model to include:

*Level 1.* One semester in study skills class. Students who do not succeed academically will continue for a second semester.

*Level 2.* Successful study skills graduates will be assigned to a follow-up Study Skills Resource Period monitored by a staff member. Students would be assigned for one semester to a resource study. If they pass all their classes, they would move to Level 3. Students could remain at Level 2 potentially throughout their high school career.

*Level 3.* Students who succeed at Level 2 will be assigned to meet weekly with a study skills staff member to monitor school performance and give students academic encouragement.

The need for a model which provides sustained assistance has been demonstrated by the fact that some study skill students quickly revert to past patterns of failure if monitoring and support are not maintained.

### *Summary*

After six years experience, we believe the success of our Study Skills program warrants consideration as a cost effective, workable intervention for secondary schools seeking an integrated approach for at-risk students.

# A Selected Annotated Bibliography of Current At-risk Readings

*Compiled and annotated by Nancy Norton and Christopher Scott Chalker*

Brodinsky, B., & Keough, K. (1989). Students at-risk: Problems and solutions. American Association of School Administrators Critical Issues Report. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators

This report analyzes the problems associated with the nation's at-risk population and discusses some of the actions being taken to address the situation. In the first section, the forces at work that place students at-risk are examined, specifically those involving the school. Section B includes a discussion of those forces outside the educational setting that can be of help. Finally, Section C provides an in-depth look at practices and programs that have been proven to be successful for the at-risk children.

Capuzzi, D. & Gross, D.R. (1989). Youth at risk: A resource for counselors, teachers and parents. Port Chester, NY: National Professional Resources, Inc.

This 'eye catching' resource is based on the old saying, "Poor soil yields damaged fruit." Capuzzi and Gross define youth at risk and discuss many of today's tough issues and problems facing our youth. They conclude with a chapter on Understanding and Preventing School Dropout. This book offers a little something for everyone!

Davis, W.E. & McCaul, E.J. (1990). At-risk children and youth: A crisis in our schools and society. Port Chester, NY: National Professional Resources, Inc.

This 106-page monograph was prepared by the Institute for the Study of At-risk Students, University of Maine. In addition to its at-risk definitions and historical perspective, it also addresses several factors impacting the at-riskness of students. The interface between at-risk students and other school and community groups, as well as programs for prevention and intervention are valuable resources for all those concerned with the at-risk problem.

Doyle, D. (1989). Endangered species, children of promise. New York: MacGraw-Hill, Inc.

The author describes the problem of restructuring education to meet the needs of today's students, outlines several programs that have potential for meeting those needs, and finally challenges the various segments of society to meet those needs through unique and creative methods that work.

Frymier, J. (1989). A study of students at risk: Collaborating to do research. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa.

Which students are at risk? What are they like? What are the schools doing to help at-risk students? And how effective are these efforts? These were the four explicit questions that guided this cooperation project, which involved 22,018 students in 276 schools. Particularly interesting are the resulting educational issues addressed as an outcome of the findings of the study.

Lehr, J.B., & Harris, H.W. (1988). At-risk, low achieving students in the classroom (1st ed.). Washington, DC: National Education Association.

A National Education Association publication containing a brief overview of the at-risk problem and the charac-

teristics associated with at-riskness. The remainder of the publication details innovative programs and strategies such as Invitation Education for helping turn students on to school. This book offers very easy reading for educators and parents alike.

Ogden, E.H. & Germinario, V. (1988). The at-risk student: Answers for educators. Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc.

Drs. Ogden and Germinario have approached the at-risk problem from the perspective that while the schools must deal with the problem, they must remain firmly committed to their educational mission as a first priority. This book is designed to serve as a guide to promoting student well-being and learning. Further, the organization of the book provides a practical framework by which specific high-risk student behaviors can be addressed. Finally, this book can serve as a reference to the planning of a total student assistance program or to respond to the variety of crisis situations confronting today's schools.

Presseisen, B. (Ed.). (1988). at-risk students and thinking: Perspectives from research. Washington, DC: Research for Better Schools.

With recent literature pointing to the need for teaching higher order thinking skills to all school-aged children because of the changes in society, there is an increasing challenge to meeting the needs of at-risk children. Despite the research, common teaching strategies for these children indicate that there is a tremendous gap between this recognized need and reality. The focus begins on the larger issue of teaching thinking and moves on to identify what is known about cognitive development, especially in the at-risk child. Finally, implications for instructional and curricular

---

*Nancy Norton is a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia.*

*Christopher S. Chalker is Assistant Principal at Bradwell Institute, Hinesville, Georgia.*



considerations are explored and solutions are suggested.

Richardson, V., Casanova, U., Placier, P., & Guilfoyle, P. (1989). School children at-risk. New York: The Falmer Press.

This book is a description of twelve case histories of students classified as at-risk by their teachers. It provides an exhaustive study of the school setting and home circumstances which led to the at-risk label received by each child. The authors describe how students are assigned to categories, such as at-risk, based on subjective data gathered regarding teacher perceptions and expectations, classroom climate, and school/community constraints. Finally, the question is presented as to whether these twelve students would, under different circumstances, even be classified in the category of at-risk.

Richman-Smey, B. (1988). Involvement in learning for low-achieving students. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Better Schools

This resource document represents a synthesis of research in the field of involving low-achieving learners in the learning process. It includes a discussion of the steps for improving metacognition among students as well as other effective techniques. Finally, five successful programs for meeting the needs of at-risk students are described in detail. They include Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC), Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), Learning to Learn (LTL), Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI), and Prevention of Academic Failure.

Slavin, R.E., Karweit, N.L., & Madden, N.A. (1989). Effective programs for students at risk. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

This book was written to provide the best available information on what is known now about effective programs for students at risk of school failure, particularly those who are currently served in compensatory and special education programs. The message of this book is that we know much more than we are currently using in programs for students at risk, and that while much more remains to be learned, we know how to

proceed to discover how best to prevent and remediate learning deficits.

Wehlage, G.G., Rutter, R.A., Smith, G.A., Lesko, N. & Fernandez, R.R. (1989). Reducing the risk: Schools as communities of support. New York: The Falmer Press.

Despite the fact that America's dropout rate seems to be decreasing, there is mounting concern regarding this issue. The focus appears to be on the impact that these dropouts will have on the economic and social future of the nation. This book begins with a description of programs implemented by fourteen secondary schools in an attempt to stem the tide of dropouts in their systems. In addition to descriptive data, the authors provide their theory of dropout prevention in order to promote a better understanding of the at-risk student and his school's needs. Finally, by providing the descriptive data and theoretical framework, this book can be a guide for policy makers in making responsible decisions about how to respond to the needs of the at-risk student.

### Recent Articles

Barone, T. (1989, October). Ways of being at risk: The case of Billy Charles Barnett. Phi Delta Kappan, 71, 147-151.

Barone presents a case study of a student at risk of school dropout in order to shed light on the dynamics behind the problem and the ways in which it is addressed. A unique approach to better understanding of an old problem with new meaning.

Bearden, L.J., Spencer, W.A., & Moracco, J.C. (1989, November). A study of high school dropouts. The School Counselor, 37 111-119.

Bearden, Spencer, and Moracco acknowledge that there are no simple answers to the dropout questions. This article has focused on the interaction between school personnel and students rather than on student correction. It encourages school personnel, especially counselors, to learn more about students at-risk and to assume responsibility for improving the school climate.

Bialo, E.R. & Sivin, J.P. (1989, January). Computers and at-risk youth: A partial solution to a complex problem. Classroom Computer Learning, 35-39.

Read how technology can play a significant role in many aspects of educational change. This article explains how computer technology can help students at risk. It goes on to describe federal and state funding programs for technology related to at-risk students. Several different models for using computers with at-risk students are listed in this informative article.

Boyer, E.L. (1987, March). Early schooling and the nation's future. Educational Leadership, 4-6.

If the United States intends to educate all children, Boyer contends that the social area of education reform must confront problems of health, families, and poverty. Programs that address these problems should include language rich environments, smaller class sizes, a sensitivity to the changing pattern of families and work, and more research on how children learn.

Catterall, J.S. (1989, November). Standards and school dropouts: A national study of tests required for high school graduation. American Journal of Education, 1-5.

This article reports a study of minimum competency testing in American secondary schools. The analysis focuses on tests that students must pass before they receive the high school diploma. Read this article to explore the effects of these tests on low-achieving high school students.

Clements, B.S. (1990, March). What is a dropout? Pilot program collects meaningful data for improving schools. The School Administrator, 18-22.

Learn about the successful use of the model dropout data collection system and how the concerted efforts of many people facilitated its success. While using this system won't solve the dropout problem, its results will help schools monitor the nation's progress toward a 100% graduation rate.

Cough, G. (1990, January). Student assistance programs screening: Matching needs with resources. Adolescent Counselor, 38-39, 53.

Student assistance programs (SAPs), both preventive and interventive, are found in many schools across the nation. This informative article features a two-fold SAP screening process designed to collect information about students' problems and matching needs with community and/or school resources that will assist them. A promising program for at-risk intervention.

Cuban, L. (1989, June). The at-risk label and the problem of urban school reform. Phi Delta Kappan, 780-784.

Cuban contends that we must re-examine the institution of the graded school and determine the degree to which it is the source of high rates of academic failure among at-risk students. Otherwise, we will continue to opt for quick solutions that do not address the problem. This article takes an informative look back at the effects of educational policy on the dropout problem.

Cuban, L. (1989, February). At-risk students: What teachers and principals can do. Educational Leadership, 29-32.

This article discusses how recent state reforms have largely bypassed millions of students in urban schools across the nation. Read how dynamic teachers and principals have gone past the slogans of reform to achieve outstanding results with at-risk students, and their pioneering work points to promising directions for others. This is an excellent resource for teachers and administrators alike.

Frymier, J., & Gansneder, B. (1989, October). The Phi Delta Kappa study of students at risk. Phi Delta Kappan, 142-146.

Three questions were implicit in this research project: Can a professional organization use its members and resources to conduct research? Is it possible to develop tools and techniques that will be useful, valid, and reliable for those who work with at-risk students in the schools? And is it possible to repli-

cate the same study simultaneously in up to 100 communities in standardized ways? The answer to all three questions is yes. And the Kappan will provide the evidence in detail.

Greene, B. & Uroff, S. (1989, February). Apollo High School: Achievement through self-esteem. Educational Leadership, 80-81.

Read about an effort providing an alternative program for 400 at-risk students—students who have not succeeded in a traditional high school environment. At Apollo High School, educators are trying to ensure that students find school—and learning—experiences that satisfy their needs.

Gersten, R. & Dimino, J. (1989, February). Teaching literature to at-risk students. Educational Leadership, 53-57.

Through the technique of story grammar instruction, at-risk students can discover that literature can be interesting and apply to real-life situations.

Gross, B. (1989, February). Can computer-assisted instruction solve the dropout problem? Educational Leadership, 49-51.

Find out why low-achieving students choose to spend their lunch hours in the computer room rather than playing outdoors. Take a closer look at computer-assisted instruction as a means of keeping them from becoming dropout statistics.

Jureeko, S. (1990). Student assistance program helps reduce dropouts and drug use. Access Newsletter, 1-2.

Programs like Turning Point provide schools with the information, means and resources to combat problems on campus and to give students a readily available, non-critical outlet for giving and seeking help for their problems. An excellent example of school-based intervention in an agency support for the at-risk problem.

Love, N.R. (1990, February). Student assistance programs. Adolescent Counselor, 44-45.

Love describes student assistance programs as "the rising tide that lifts all lifeboats," making successful strides to

make a difference. Find out how having good, solid assessment components can empower SAPs to accomplish what they promise: successful redirection by providing positive alternatives for students.

Murphy, J. (1989, February). Is there equity in educational reform? Educational Leadership, 32-33.

The author asserts that the educational reform movement of the 80's, contrary to the fears of many educators, has not overlooked the needs of at-risk students. In fact, the benefits have disproportionately flowed to these students.

Newmann, F.M. (189, February). Student engagement and high school reform. Educational Leadership, 34-36.

What can educators do to get students to concentrate, to put more effort into schoolwork, and to take it seriously? Newmann contends that educators can motivate students to achieve if they fulfill students' needs for competence, extrinsic rewards, intrinsic interest, social support, and sense of ownership.

Ramirez, A. (1990, April). These are the hallmarks of effective dropout programs. The Executive Educator, 23-25.

Ramirez gives careful attention to nine factors to developing effective programs designed to prepare dropouts for a productive place in the adult world. An interesting article emphasizing flexibility and open-mindedness about what it takes to lure young people back to school and keep them motivated.

Roser, N. & Farest, C. (April, 1990). Language, literature and at-risk children. The Reading Teacher, 554-559.

The results of the study described in this article indicate that at-risk students can benefit as much as any other student in a successfully implemented literature-based literacy program.

Schlichter, C.L., Hobbs, D., & Crump, D.W. (1988, April). Extending talents unlimited to secondary schools. Educational Leadership, 36-40.

Talents Unlimited, a research-based model for teaching thinking that has proven effective at the elementary level for 14 years is now being used with success in secondary schools. The backbone of the model is instruction in 19 thinking skills in the five 'talent' areas of productive thinking, decision making, planning, forecasting, and communication.

Slavin, R.E., & Madden, N.A. (1989, February). What works for students at risk: A research synthesis. Educational Leadership, 4-13.

One of the most frequently used strategies to deal with at-risk students is also the least effective: flunking them. If neither pullout nor in-class models are effective in helping at-risk students, what does help students at risk of school failure? To answer this question, Slavin and Madden reviewed research on every imaginable approach designed to increase student achievement. The results should be particularly interesting to teachers and administrators alike.

Staff, (1990). How can we help children at risk? Scholastic Special Report, 2, 2-3.

This article identifies six different cases where students have at-risk related problems. Learn the six characteristics of successful at-risk programs designed to help these students. Who is at risk? What can be done to help at-risk students? Read Scholastic Special Report to find out the answers to these questions and more.

Staff, (1990). What characterizes successful at-risk programs? Scholastic Special Report, 2, 10-11.

How early is 'early'? What do we mean by 'parent involvement'? How should we redesign schools? Programs that get results, and those you'll read about in this Scholastic Special Report have six common elements: early intervention, parent involvement, school restructuring, mentoring, community collaboration, and a 'can-do' core curriculum.

Staff, (1990). Projects that work. Scholastic Special Report, 17, 23-33.

Project Promise features an interdisciplinary focus on reading, writing, and math. Students keep a writing folder in every class. And through integrated lessons, every teacher in every content area teaches those there basics. An innovative approach that will interest anyone concerned with at-risk students.

Staff, (1990). The impact of attitude. Scholastic Special Report, 48, 48-50.

Many teachers recognized for their success in helping at-risk kids credit their success to rethinking common assumptions and forging new beliefs and attitudes. Read this article and take a closer look at three programs responsible for changing assumptions and attitudes about students at-risk.



# THRESHOLDS



**Thresholds In Education Foundation**  
**Box 771**  
**DeKalb, Illinois 60115**