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Patrick M. Jenlink
Western Michigan University

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At Risk Students: Portraits, Policies, Programs, and Practices. Edited by Robert Donmoyer and Raylene Kos. State University of New York Press, State University Plaza, Albany NY 12246. ISBN: 0-7914-1393-4. 1993. 429 pp. US\$19.95.

Perhaps no one element of our society is reflected more in our schools than at risk students. In our treatment of this pervasive and endemic issue, we have constructed a lens that would have us believe that at risk students might be understood through common-sense stereotypes in our community schools and by the researchers' ideal types. The authors of this book, in two parts, present a convincing argument that at risk students are highly idiosyncratic, creating a widely diverse portraiture of context and lives of at risk children and the educators that share those lives.

Part I. Constructing a metaphorical lens of the verbal portrait, the editors and authors in the first part of the book support their assumption about idiosyncrasy by a series of case studies. Some of the students portrayed fit the common-sense or researcher ideal types. In a hauntingly important way the authors share their stories of students who are clearly at risk but who would not be labeled as such. The authors bring a voice to issues of literacy, rural poverty, gay or lesbian students, the deferring learner, and gender stereotyping, all

contrasting portraits to the common-sense at risk student. The authors also bring the readers' attention to issues of the intellectually at risk — students who are gifted intellectually but at risk to themselves socially. Part I creates the context for understanding the idiosyncratic nature of at risk students in today's schools. The reader is reminded that the risk to the student isn't always literacy, intellectual, or related to school. An important theme of the idiosyncrasy of at risk students is detailed by the verbal portrait metaphor. There is a holistic intent in providing the array of student portraits. Capturing the unique individualism of each student, the authors enable the reader to step back from the canvas and see a larger picture of at risk students today. Each artist's verbal portrait is both a recognition of the student at risk and the author/artist's own particular style, technique, training, and point of view in each.

Part II. Fully immersed in the idiosyncratic context of at risk students, the reader is now focused on the programs, policies, and practices designed to help at risk students. A major theme woven throughout the chapters represented is the importance of a guiding philosophy and the building of programs based on tenets of this philosophy rather than bureaucratic procedures. Another emerging theme is that of creating a school culture, founded on the philosophy, which embraces the idiosyncrasy of at risk students. Finally, the reader is provided the opportunity to learn vicariously from the diversity and rich base of experience provided by the authors of these chapters.

Chapter twelve introduces the chapters in part two and focuses on the metaphors used to conceptualize policy making and program development, as well as teaching and learning in the classroom. Chapters thirteen-fifteen explore current policy and programs, examining primarily the problems with existing programs. The authors present a defensible

argument that well-intentioned policies and programs designed to reduce risk often result in the opposite effect.

In chapters sixteen through eighteen the reader is introduced to the need to balance direction and discretion with respect to policies, programs, and practices for the at risk student. Presented is an example of a success story, a Reading Recovery program where balancing top-down direction and local discretion is required if teachers are to have a sense of how to proceed while accommodating student idiosyncrasy. Examples are provided by the authors with respect to specific programs such as the Reading Recovery Program, the delicate balance entailed in site-based management, and specific classroom issues.

Chapter nineteen contains the reflections of a former teacher at New York's famous Central Park East High School. This chapter presents a cautionary sign, challenging to some degree a major theme in the second half of this book by indicating that building programs around philosophical tenets rather than bureaucratic procedures is no guarantee that the idiosyncratic needs of at risk students will be addressed.

Chapters twenty through twenty-two focus the reader on using the notion of culture to organize and structure life in three teachers' classrooms. A second theme emerging in these chapters is the use of writing as a lens to focus the building of a classroom culture that is a writing culture. Chapter twenty takes the reader into a teacher's classroom where she consciously uses process writing to engage the students in culture building. This chapter focuses on classroom characteristics contributing to the teacher's success. These included: 1) improvisational teaching and modeling; 2) importance of writing; 3) importance of students' writing; 4) deemphasis on grades and emphasis on critiquing; 5) emphasis on the

positive; and 6) individual differences. This chapter presents strong consideration for findings of the study presented to be used heuristically by teachers, administrators, and policy makers.

Conclusion. The editors of this book have brought together a rich descriptive collection of chapters, helping the reader to construct a context for understanding the idiosyncrasy of at risk students. The use of metaphor to consider the nature of at risk students and the philosophy, policy, program and practice relevant to the at risk student provides a guiding framework for the reader to construct meaning and understanding about the at risk student. The editors, empowered by the excellent 'verbal portraits,' or case studies, have provided argument in support of their idiosyncratic position respective to at risk students versus the more common-sense stereotyping that has existed.

The book presents well written case examples in both part I and II. The authors have brought a voice to a critical issue of our time. Although the voices are not always in harmony, the collective voice of the book resounds with the importance of revisiting our philosophy, policy, program and practice when considering at risk students. More importantly, the collective voice speaks loudly to the necessity to reconsider the common-sense and ideal type lens we use when viewing the at risk student. The student at risk may be more obvious than our trained minds are capable of accepting.