Promising Practices: Perspectives of Junior and Senior High At-Risk Students

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PROMISING PRACTICES: PERSPECTIVES OF JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH AT-RISK STUDENTS

by

Janet Dalman

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PROMISING PRACTICES: PERSPECTIVES OF JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH AT-RISK STUDENTS

Janet Dalman, Ed.D.
Western Michigan University, 1994

This dissertation examined the "fit of school and Me" from at-risk students' perspectives. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into at-risk students' views on what school elements were necessary and helpful in their achieving success, in their seeing hope, and in their choosing to remain in school.

Promising practices of affective/nurturing and cognitive/learning gleaned from the literature review of success producing school components were examined within the context of most favorite and least favorite classrooms during focus group interviews with junior high school and senior high school at-risk and non-at-risk students. Students were asked to compare and contrast those classroom settings to identify promising practices which contributed to their school success. Personal surveys were used for students to identify their most desired classroom elements and their valued evidences of success.

Focus group interviews were video-taped and scripted, then the content was analyzed using categories of nurturing (the teacher liking me, having time for me and using caring practices) and learning (mastery learning, knowing how to do school, teacher expectations, communication of success, progress, cooperative learning, problem solving, conflict management, and experiential learning). Hypotheses of
differences between at-risk and non-at-risk were tested.

Comparison of at-risk and non-at-risk students' perceptions resulted in conclusions about at-risk students' views on necessary and helpful components for school success. At-risk students required relational components of the teacher liking me. They benefitted from teacher-directed learning, strategies for how to do school, processing time, experiential and multisensory learning, and relevance of learning to their immediate worlds. At-risk students valued the same evidences of success as non-at-risk students did, but at-risk students needed more support (advocacy and cheerleading) to be successful. All findings led to the conclusion that all components of school, that is, teaching, processing and interacting, must be infused with nurturing to assist at-risk students in perceiving hope for school success.
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Promising practices: Perspectives of junior and senior high at-risk students

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Janet Dalman
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Keeping students in school and providing them with educationally worthwhile experiences to ready them for coping in a complex world is the mission of the school. One-third to two-fifths of the total school population is estimated to be at risk of completing that mission (Natriello, Pallas, McDill, McPartland, & Royster, 1988). To be at-risk means that students are experiencing a strained, difficult relationship in the school environment. They are at-risk of dropping out, withdrawing from the very institution that society values as the developer and trainer of youth’s human potential.

This estimation is especially alarming because the at-risk population is increasing. According to a national study, conducted by Frymier & Gansneder (1988), 25-35 or higher percentage of students are at risk of dropping out of school. The ramifications of not graduating this population spell serious problems for the student personally, and for the nation economically. Hodgkinson (1991) explained that more than 80% of America’s 1,000,000 prisoners are high school dropouts. Each prisoner cost taxpayers upwards of $20,000 a year. “It is seven times more expensive to maintain someone in a state pen than it is to maintain someone in Penn State” (p. 15).

Wehlage (1983) noted that schools should be concerned about education of marginal students because of: (a) the provision of equity in education; (b) the correlation between lack of education and social problems of crime, welfare, and
unemployment; and (c) the school’s self interests. The school should be concerned about its interaction with students as evidenced by alienation, the descriptor which researchers are using to characterize the response that interviewed drop-outs are giving as the number one reason for leaving school early. Orr (1987) noted that “schools send signals to poorly achieving students and those who are discipline problems, in a sense urging them to leave. This lack of encouragement may compound a student’s personal and family problems, further reducing any desire of ability to remain in school” (p. 7).

The school should be concerned about its interaction with students as evidenced by the encroachment of drugs, crime, and other deviant behaviors which compete with schools for students’ energies. Zielke (1990) posited that when the school does not “attend to” the at-risk child, the child continues his or her affectively flat path. In later years, when drugs and alcohol are added to the mix of variables, the defensive behaviors of rationalization, blame-shifting, victimization, and anger-based affect result. Schools react to the student as a discipline problem, focusing on the behaviors rather than the student’s being and the anger and despair escalate.

Who is the at-risk student? What does he or she look like? The profile of the at-risk student gathered from personal experience, at-risk literature, alternative education teachers, and K-12 teachers encompasses a student who struggles with academic success, who struggles with truancy/tardiness, and who struggles with traditional high school policies/operations. Beyond the school setting the student may struggle with personal barriers such as pregnancy, parenting (own or siblings),
extraordinary financial responsibility, dysfunctional family origins, abuse (psychological, physical, spiritual, verbal or sexual), health (physical or psychological), and chemical dependency or recovery.

Additional dimensions of the at-risk student demonstrate the dichotomous continuation within the population. At-risk students are described as bright, low-achieving, curious, hyper, creative, impulsive, shy, hostile, sensitive, angry, delightful, and disturbing. A common descriptor of an at-risk student is he or she marches to a different drummer.

Teachers' comments reflecting their views of at-risk students range from "I wish he would use his talents working with the system ... He spends so much time trying to beat the system" to "Mark is a good kid, BUT ..." to "The outward appearance and behavior is a turn off, BUT once you get to know him, he's gold inside."

The common theme is continuum. The group called at-risk houses a variety of students with a variety of attributes and characteristics. The common conclusion is they're in trouble and the school is in trouble in meeting their needs as noted by the increasing numbers of students being classified as at-risk.

The Problem

The at-risk student problem has been examined from many perspectives. Researchers have examined drop-out data to determine sociological and academic characteristics. Follow-up studies on drop-outs have been conducted to determine
reasons for dropping. Correlational studies of at-risk characteristics and the likelihood of dropping out have been run. Implied is the assumption that knowing characteristics of drop-outs and at-risk students will cause schools to change their policies and practices.

Special programming has been developed to address the characteristics of the at-risk student. Headstart for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds and Chapter I for elementary students are federal programs to provide extra assistance with school readiness and reading and serve as examples for the younger student and alternative education is an example for the older student. Within that continuum of age, a variety of theories and instructional strategies have been developed, and in some cases, measured. Implied is the assumption that special programming will meet the need.

Despite research and programming, the at-risk population continues to build. No causal relationships between at-risk characteristics and academic programming and instructional strategies have been established. Programming has mixed reviews on success or lacks longitudinal studies to demonstrate lasting effects on students. While some practices seem to have positive effects, no if-then statements can yet be made. While researchers' information has caused some schools to examine their policies and practices, no widespread change has occurred. While schools consider what it is, within the school setting, that fails to connect with at-risk students, at-risk students continue to leave school or to grow more alienated. One of the concerns is that schools may be looking for a model to "fix" the student rather than looking at the student and his or her needs.
The student and his or her needs are becoming a more focused perspective for research. Much of the literature examined revealed a student-centered approach as being necessary to influence at-risk students. National Association of Secondary School Principals (1988) reported that “educational reforms must focus on the affective domain ... on ways to make school a more caring, supportive and nurturing place” (p. 2). McMullen, Leiderman, and Wolf (1988), in a study of factors to reduce dropouts in Philadelphia Schools, noted that schools, that is, teachers and staff, must increase their response to student needs, must respond to multiple needs of students, personal, academic and social; and must address students' perceptions of the "fit of school and Me."

What is that fit? What is that fit between at-risk students and school? What pieces fit together to reduce at-risk students' feelings of alienation? What does that fit look like to the at-risk student? What is the at-risk students' perspective on the "fit of school and Me?"

The literature on at-risk programming does reveal some practices that look promising in K-12 and in alternative education. Cognitive strategies which provide information and process and actively involve the student along with interactive relationships between the student and the teachers are the most frequently cited components. Would those promising practices be perceived as positive by at-risk students? What insight could be gained by asking at-risk students about their perceptions of these practices?
Purpose

The purposes of this study were: (a) to gain insight into the teacher-student interaction from the at-risk student’s perspective; (b) to delineate what practices are present within a classroom setting which are seen as positive by at-risk students; (c) to identify what “pieces” must be present in a classroom for at-risk students to perceive opportunities for success, thus hope; and (d) to select evidences of success. Delineating these components would create a picture of what schools need to be to provide success for all students.

The questions set up for the study were:

1. Will at-risk students’ perceptions of teacher-student interaction, i.e., nurturing, differ from non-at-risk students’ perceptions?

2. Will at-risk students’ perceptions of promising practices differ from non-at-risk students’ perceptions?

3. Will at-risk students’ perceptions of necessary classroom components for success differ from non-at-risk students’ perceptions?

4. Will at-risk students’ evidences of success differ from non-at-risk student factors?

The underlying premise of this study was that students have many of the answers to the dilemma of the at-risk population. The second premise was that junior and senior high school students would be both able and willing to articulate those answers within a positive and interactive focus group setting.

To build a comparison model to determine where differences lie between at-
risk and non-at-risk students, both groups were asked to respond to the same components through focus groups and surveys. By comparing at-risk and non-at-risk student’s perceptions of teacher-student interactions/nurturing, promising practices and success, differences between the two groups would provide insight into at-risk student’s perceptions of what are the factors which contribute to their choosing to remain in school.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I provides the introduction, purpose, premises and definitions of the study.

Chapter II contains a review of the literature which characterizes the at-risk student, the family and school practices.

Chapter III consists of the research design, procedures, population and selection, data collection and methods of data analysis.

Chapter IV reports the results of the analysis of perceptions related to nurturing, cognitive-learning practices and success.

Chapter V provides a review and summary of the study and presents conclusions and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

With the purpose of the study to determine what practices or connections could make a difference for at-risk students to see the “fit of school and Me,” the goal of the review of literature was to develop a rationale for the study. Identifying characteristics and family environment of the at-risk student which make the student different from other students, that is, to identify uniqueness and needs and identifying school components, that is, practices and relations that research evidenced seemed to be making a difference was the goal. Relating uniqueness/need to school components from the at-risk students’ perspective, it was hoped, would give insight into school components to continue, to change, and to initiate.

The review of the literature conducted in the generalized areas of at-risk students and promising practices used with at-risk students resulted in a body of literature that could be divided into four categories: the at-risk student as learner; the family, a component of the problem; teaching practices that researchers are suggesting hold promise; and the teacher connector.

The Student At-Risk

Four national studies have been conducted to determine what characteristics are present in drop-outs, the at-risk student’s final step. According to Wehlage and
Rutter (1986), all four studies confirm that a family background characterized by low socioeconomic status (SES) is strongly associated with dropping out. Poor school performance characterized by low grades and course failure is related. No other variables are consistently strong enough to be termed relational. One of the national studies, the High School and Beyond Study (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), provides the most recent longitudinal data. In 1980 over 58,000 students (30,000 sophomores) attending 1,105 public and private high schools nation wide were surveyed on a variety of variables. In 1982 a follow-up survey was done to discover if those same students dropped out, stayed in school, and/or were college bound. Two sets of variables were used: “known” sociological and educational variables and “suspected” educational variables. In the known category, expected school attainment was the most powerful (.61). Tests, SES, and grades were indicators. The dropout was characterized as one who had low expectations, low achievement/ability, low SES and low grades. Other pertinent findings to the school function were person, product, moment, correlations of truancy (.47), discipline problems (.41), and lateness (.25) (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Guthrie (1992), examining six variables contributing to dropping out of school, found the three factors having highest predictability were absenteeism, low grade point average, and failing two or more courses.

Race has been examined in various studies as a characteristic of dropping out, since a higher proportion of blacks and Hispanics drop out. Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1987), using data from High School and Beyond, found that when other factors were held constant, blacks were less likely to drop-out of school than whites
or Hispanics.

In 1989 a national survey directed by Phi Delta Kappa (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989) with a data base of 22,018 students identified 45 variables that contribute to at-riskness across all grade levels. The top 20 listed factors in priority order were: attempted suicide in the last year, drug use, drug pusher, negative self esteem, pregnant, expelled, consumes alcohol regularly, arrested for illegal drugs, parents’ negative attitude toward school, siblings dropped out, sexually or physically assaulted, failed two courses last year, suspended twice last year, absent more than 20 days, parents drink excessively, retained in grade, one parent attempted suicide, scored less than the 20th percentile on a standardized test, family members use drugs, and attended three plus schools in the past 5 years. Facilitators of the at-risk study concluded that to be at-risk is “a function of what bad things happen to a child, how severe they are, how often they happen, and what else happens in the child’s immediate environment.” (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989, p. 42)

Slavin (1987) has cited that any student 2 years behind in reading by the third grade is in serious trouble. Any student who has repeated a grade by the time he or she is nine faces long term chronic failure and marginal achievement. Castallo and Young (1988), in reviewing 309 dropouts’ data, found four categories of dropout students: (1) the slow learner, that is, low level of readiness, difficulty with basic skills, high recidivism in primary grades, assigned to special classes; (2) the decreasing achievement learner, that is, entered with some success, not retained in primary or special placement, but became at-risk at high school level; (3) the
diminishing achievement learner, that is, the learner with more ability than student number two but had an uneven pattern of achievement and performance; (4) the event or situational leaver, that is, pregnancy, family death, or economic disaster which put the student "over the edge." A lack of identity with the school in terms of involvement in extracurricular participation and poor self-concept were co-existing factors in drop-outs. Castallo and Young also reported that aptitude for learning is a poor indicator for dropping out. In general, students at-risk can be bright, gifted, of average ability, or of low ability. The key is under achievement and disengagement.

As cited by Castallo and Young (1988), Buck, et al., noted 70-75% of leavers had poor achievement in early grades, but they, too, found no correlation to ability. Bachman, Green and Wirthanen (1971), in sampling 2,000 students, found six predictors accounted for 30% of the variance: grade failure, average classroom grades, self-concept of school ability, positive or negative school attitudes, and rebellious behavior in school.

Through interviews, Ekstrom et al. (1987) found dropouts were less satisfied with self and tended to have external locus of control. Thirty-three percent of the students cited not liking school and receiving poor grades as their reasons for leaving. Perceived low value of diploma, competing life responsibilities, undermined self-esteem, struggling with traditional authoritarianism, classroom competition, teacher controlled environment, feeling pushed out by the school, and pregnancy were the reasons for leaving in a study by Fine (1987). Wehlage and Rutter (1986) cited lack of success, alienation, and exclusion as a student’s conclusion that “school is not
In an earlier study in 1983, Wehlage cited comments from students: "They don't care about me as a person;" "if you want to come to school, fine; otherwise, don't hang around;" "teacher threw the book at me and said 'know it'." School is seen as impersonal, hostile and inflexible. Higgins (1988) interviewed 16 focus groups to determine stayers' and leavers' differences. They shared similar feelings about all phases of program participation, but leavers cited initial phases of program participation as negative. They had to reconcile prior expectations to the reality of the program and when no additional incentives were offered to continue, they left. Tolerating program related stress such as dissatisfaction with a teacher, frustration with operations or programs was more than they could handle. Stayers cited teachers trying to "help me straighten out my attitude" as a major incentive to stay. Stayers saw long term incentives for staying; leavers did not.

The coping skills of the dropout student are implied as a factor in being at risk. Having low self-esteem and having to deal with the frustrations of poverty, of family concerns, and of negative school experiences set up a no win situation. At-risk students lack an active and persistent approach to problem solving. Their experiences of repeated failures erode self-confidence (Smey-Richman & Barkley, 1990).

Students evidence their coping skills in a variety of ways. Some students are enraged and strike out at their peers, their teachers, and systems. Overt negative behaviors result in disciplinary action or suspension. Those results validate the student's perception that he or she is not OK. Those negative experiences reinforce
the student's poor self-image and teach him or her that school isn't for him or her (Stern, Catterall, Alhadeff, & Ash, 1985). Some students become passive and withdrawn. Their covert negative behaviors result in being left alone because they're not causing any trouble. They become more marginal as time passes and eventually wander away. Ghory and Sinclair (1987) referred to the marginal student as one who is disconnected from conditions designed for learning. Some students are high verbal and appear to be in the mainstream of activity, yet on closer examination are disengaged from learning and are socializing, commonly, on their dislike of school. Some students are average or above in intelligence, but because they are prone to maladaptive behaviors, such as giving up, choosing easier over harder tasks, or ascribing failure to lack of ability, leave school when confronted with overly challenging tasks (Bempechat & Ginsberg, 1989). At-risk students have been described as alienated (Seaman, 1975) with attributes of powerlessness, a sense of low control, of low mastery over events, self-estrangement, social isolation and a sense of exclusion.

A continuum of behaviors, of characteristics, and of circumstances are present in the at-risk population. According to Zielke (1990), teachers who work with at-risk students describe a continuum of reactions. Some at-risk students are withdrawn and maintain walls around themselves; some interact to some extent, but maintain a distance when feelings become too involved; some interact positively, but inconsistently depending on the day's circumstances; some are loud and abrasive, covering their selves; some are defensive at each interaction, questioning what's the
angle; some are internally enraged, maintaining a veneer of calm, which gives way to explosive vehemences when crossed. The at-risk literature cites despair as the common thread interweaving the continuum. As the stressors of at-riskness increase or as the attitudes and aptitudes for dealing with the stressors diminish, the at-risk student evidences greater truancy, more discipline referrals, and more tardies. Each type of behavior suggests the student's capacity for maintaining school attendance and performance is weakening. As the use of alternative highs, drugs, alcohol and partying, become the pattern, the student slips farther from achieving success. That suicide attempts in the last year are listed as the top at-risk factor in the Phi Delta Kappa (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989) study suggests that more students are losing hope that anything will ever change. Any student has the potential to be at-risk given mitigating circumstances. One constant does seem to hold: dropping out, the final step by the at-risk student, is a process, not an event (McMullen et al., 1988).

The at-risk student is characterized by a low socioeconomic background, poor school performance (low grades, failed courses), low expectations, absenteeism, drug use, diminishing achievement, disaffiliation from school, low self-esteem, not liking school, feeling pushed out by teachers, and inappropriate coping skills. The at-risk student is characterized as feeling helpless and hopeless. Yet a continuum of hopelessness is evidenced; a continuum of not giving up is evidenced; a continuum of brightness and learning ability is evidenced. What school practices can positively affect that continuum? What components of school intervene on that sense of hopelessness to give hope, to encourage at-risk students to remain in school, to try
another day? What are the necessary components for success from the at-risk students’ perspective? What evidences of success are necessary for the student to continue to believe that school and “Me” are compatible? Do these perceptions differ from the non-at-risk student? If differences exist between at-risk and non-at-risk student’s perceptions of necessary components for success and evidences of success, what school practices and interactions will need to be addressed to verify that schools become perceived as success oriented by at-risk students? Effecting a success-possible school view for at-risk students, it is hoped, would encourage at-risk students to continue to invest themselves in school. Spady (1990) cited success breeds success. Reinforcement theory supports the premise that a successful action reinforced leads to additional tries. Schools need to build on at-risk student’ perceptions of necessary components for success and evidences of success to increase at-risk students’ perceptions for success potential. To compete with other “competing life responsibilities” school practices and components must be seen by at the at-risk student as helpful and hopeful, else the energy to attend, to achieve, and to affiliate will continue to compete with the energy to drink, to drug, and to disaffiliate, which mask the problem. What makes the difference for the at-risk student?

The Family, a Component of the Problem

Two major institutions who have the most potential for intervention in the at-risk students’ lives are the family and the school. Historically, the value of learning, the value of the work ethic, and the value of relating positively with others were
modeled and taught by parents. Parents monitored activities of children and verified that environments to which children were exposed represented the same values and morals that the parents held. In many homes that remains the model. In many homes that model is absent. Lower class parents' inferior education and low prestige jobs make parents more dependent on teachers to know what is best for their children, according to a study by Lareau (1982). Ekstrom et al. (1987) in analyzing the High School and Beyond dated, as cited by McMullen, Leiderman and Wolf (1988), noted that at-risk students are more likely to come from families who have a weaker educational support system, that is, fewer study aids, less opportunity for non-school related learning, mothers with lower levels of formal education and lower educational expectations for children, mothers who were working, and parents less likely to monitor children's activities. Pollack and Bempechat (1989), reviewing a series of research studies on home experiences of at-risk youth, summarized findings: single parented (mother) households contributed to less modeling of decision making through negotiation (Dornbusch et al. 1985), to less nurturing and discipline (Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Simon, 1989) and to greater negative impact due to economic stress (Elder, Van Nguyen, & Caspi, 1985). The mother's educational level and attitude toward and involvement in school activities affected student's success (Stevenson, & Baker, 1987). Pallus, Natriello, and McDill's (1989) notation that poor, poorly educated mother-led homes are increasing portends parents who are already overwhelmed by trying to make ends meet while still maintaining a supportive, nurturing home. Zielke (1990), studying at-risk students in the '90s, found that
students were isolated in their homes. The parent was in so much personal need that he or she couldn’t meet the child’s need, that is, couldn’t hear the child’s need. As the child was deprived of positive, nurturing relationships in the home, the development of self was stunted. As the child entered the school years, he or she brought his or her isolated self into this new world.

As parents feel increasingly overwhelmed, the less attention and psychological nourishment the children are likely to receive. Studies tracking mothers trying to cope with life and raising a family noted an increase in APD. Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD) (Magid & McKelvey, 1987). This disorder, a failure to bond or attach humanly, places the child further at risk in coping with his or her world.

Frymier and Gansneder (1989) cited parents’ negative attitudes toward school as an at-risk characteristic. Those parents often are drop-outs, which means they were at-risk students in their day. The cycle of negative school attitudes begets negative school attitudes.

The at-risk student’s family is characterized by economic stressors, feelings of being overwhelmed, absenteeism from school activities, and disenfranchisement from advocating for their child’s educational success. At-risk students’ characteristics and at-risk family’s characteristics can be paralleled. Competing life’s responsibilities, hopelessness, absenteeism, and the lack of believing in self are common threads.

Attending to the child within the student is missing. Nurturing, that is, attending to, caring for, evidencing loving, having time for, is minimal based on the literature. Add to that deprivation the stressors of adolescent tasks and economics and
the vulnerability of the junior high and senior high at-risk student heightens.

Energies for and interventions on behalf of the at-risk students from their homes are limited, thus the at-risk student is more vulnerable in succeeding in school. How can the school and its practices and personnel impact this vulnerability? How can the school address these unserved needs? What is the view of at-risk students? The literature would advise that school practices, both cognitive and affective, must be seen as advocating, fair, personal, and caring for, that is, nurturing, by at-risk students. Would at-risk students see this dimension as making the difference?

School Practices, a Component of Promise

School, the one center to which all children must come, is the other arena where at-riskness, that which is alterable, can most consistently be addressed. As the proportion of at-risk students has increased in schools, a variety of curricular approaches, of teaching strategies, and of regrouping students has evolved. The modifications have ranged from short-term groupings to specialized programming, from individualized learning modules to whole group experiential learning, from flexible scheduling to job shadowing, from adult-student planned interaction to cooperative learning groupings. No model for successful intervention has been developed. No single, best time to intervene has been established. No causal relations have been established to the point of guaranteeing the if-then relationship on educating at-risk students. Much of the literature comes from elementary studies; some comes from middle and secondary schools. Many studies have been conducted using
alternative education, but limited longitudinal literature is available. An on-going problem is the absence of established criterion on what makes a difference and what to measure. Factors that lead to success in elementary may or may not be transferrable to an adolescent population.

What does appear to hold true is that the response of education to the at-risk student must be conditioned by the needs of the student, that is, the approach must be student-centered. Young (1986) explained that schools that accept, respect, encourage and empower their students, emphasizing personal choice and creativity, facilitate the natural actualizing tendency which enables students to meet their needs for self-esteem.

Because the elements of students, teachers, and communities are so varied, no guaranteed strategies are noted in the literature. At-risk literature did produce a variety of theories, programs, strategies, and delivery systems purported to show promise in meeting at-risk student's needs. Most programs used a combination of strategies. Through charting and analysis across programming and literature descriptions, a synthesis of the literature reviewed on school success with at-risk students did identify components and strategies that had consistency of success across all levels of at-risk programming. Those components, referred to as promising practices for this study, have been divided into nine categories for ease of discussion. Additional citations from researchers on these components were gathered to enhance understanding and application to at-risk students. Common threads within the categories were student-enhancing, climate supportive and teacher-student interactive.
Mastery Learning

By definition, mastery learning is a structured attainment of adequate levels of performance on tests that measure specific learning tasks. Mastery learning as an instructional strategy is used by many at-risk programs. The construct of mastery learning was developed from the cognitive theory of Bloom (1976), who predicted that 95% of all children could learn, given the right conditions and atmosphere. The extent to which a learner possesses the prerequisites for the learning tasks accounts for 50% of the variance in relevant achievement on subsequent learning tasks. Another 25% of the variance is attributed to the learner’s affective entry behaviors or the extent to which the student can be motivated to engage in the learning. Good quality instruction and time to practice complete the condition.

Based on the critical attributes of the content, a scope and sequence of objectives are established. Appropriate instruction aligned with the objectives is provided and formative evaluation is used to provide feedback to the individual student on progress in learning. Gaps in mastered material are remediated immediately through additional corrective work. A summative evaluation measure is used to record mastery of specific objectives. Mastery equals 80% of objectives.

Mastery learning, as an instructional strategy, is used by many at-risk programs. Horton (1981) described the elements of mastery learning that impact students as: (a) allowing students adequate time to practice each new skill;
(b) providing frequent, regular and direct reinforcement; (c) cuing students to help them select appropriate responses; (d) encouraging students to participate actively in learning tasks; (e) providing direct instruction; and (f) monitoring carefully. Berliner (1984) praised mastery learning for its emphasis on academic learning time, one of the knowns about learning.

The focus on the individual meeting the objectives assists the at-risk student in pacing learning at an appropriate rate (Natriello et al. 1988). In a synthesis of research of studies from 1973-82, Waxman, Wang, Anderson, and Walberg (1985) found that tailoring instruction to respond to the needs of individual students was more effective in obtaining intended social and academic outcomes.

One of the growing concerns with mastery learning is its part-whole nature, which may limit the student’s grasp of the whole, its larger context and its application (Knapp, Turnbull, & Shield, 1990). The teacher who teaches for meaning and understanding from the beginning assists the student in capturing the gestalt. Hooking the student’s past experiences and learnings to the present task aids the student in transfer (Hunter, 1982).

**Doing School**

Doing school is defined as knowing how to fulfill systems’ requirements and knowing how to process information. Junior and senior high schools sometimes make the assumption that students know how “to do” school and provide little guidance in the transition from elementary school to high school. Assumptions are made that
students know how to take notes, study for tests, and decipher critical attributes of the lesson. The at-risk student is vulnerable in this area for at least two reasons: he or she often does not transfer former learnings on doing school to new settings and he or she avoids asking questions to clarify the issue.

Learning to Learn (LTL), an input, organizing and output skills program, developed by the University of Michigan research clinicians based on observations and analysis of successful learners’ strategies, has been successful in motivating junior and senior high students to learn. Students are taught how to break apart learning tasks, how to seek answers to their own questions, and how to meet self-directed goals for knowledge (Heiman, 1985).

Crawford (1989) and Stein, Leinhardt, and Bickel (1989) cited metacognition skills and self-monitoring skills must be taught. McTighe (1985) noted that all students should be taught thinking skills for they are fundamental to all subjects and teaching thinking promotes deeper understanding of content material. Research on critical thinking recommends processing aloud with students to model thinking and hypothesis development. For the at-risk student whose family likely does not analyze the process of thinking, the modeling by the teacher is most necessary.

Pressley, Levin, and Ghatala (1988) noted that effective thinking is more likely when the person perceives he or she can control his or her own fate. The at-risk student who experiences powerlessness needs the undergirding of being taught how to do school. He or she requires training in all of the strategies of information processing, critical thinking, and decision making (Beyer, 1988). Doyle (1982)
suggested that student problems in learning are more informational than motivational. They lack specific concreteness in the communication of the task to be performed. Competencies for learning how to learn have been described by some as having the most enduring effect on student achievement (Chipman & Segal, 1985).

**High Expectations**

Holding high expectations for student learning is present in all levels of successful at-risk programming (Council of Chief State School Offices 1987; Johnson & Chaky, 1987). High expectations are defined as teacher verbalized beliefs that the student can successfully learn or achieve the outcomes. When teachers perceive the at-risk student as being from an intellectually deficient home environment, lacking self-esteem and being a “slow learner,” the tendency is to be nice and make fewer demands on the student. Peterson (1989) found that students did reach higher levels of achievement when high expectations were held. McMullen et al. (1988) found students were motivated when teachers had high expectations and held students to them. Students perceived the “holding to” as caring that the students succeeded. The Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching (1988) referred to this strategy as “you can.” When the teacher holds the belief that the student can learn and shares the belief with the student, the student is more likely to live up to the expectation.

Consistent findings, according to Bar-Tal (1978), reflect the individual who believes that the successful completion of a task is due to his or her own ability will probably attempt similar endeavors. Vice versa, ability perception is viewed as
mediating or influencing achievement behavior. Situational factors are emphasized in the individual's attributional judgments, that is, difficulty of task, awareness of how others perform, student analysis of his or her own competence at that particular task, all interact and exert influence on subjects' judgment of performance. Nauman (1985) and Anderson and Pellicer (1990) concluded that focusing on student effort as making the difference in reaching the goal assists the student in replicating the effort in other learning arenas. Coleman (1980), working with experiential learning, proposed that students need to do something difficult which allows them to discover untapped resources within themselves.

Teachers who are successful in reaching low-achieving students combine a high sense of their own efficacy (confidence in making a difference) with high, realistic expectations for student achievement (Alderman, 1990). Levin (1987), citing the Stanford Accelerated program, reported that low achieving children must be held to higher expectations (than is currently being done). In reality, Brophy and Good (1974) concluded from observations of classroom teachers that low achieving students were criticized more often for their failures, and that teachers provided lower achieving students with briefer, less accurate and less detailed feedback.

Because at-risk students are characterized as having low self-expectations and low self-esteem, the teacher's high expectations, belief in the student to meet the goal, and communication of those beliefs must be delivered in a manner that is perceived by the student as believable and attainable. Meeting the expectations assists at-risk students in feeling competent and in feeling able like other students.
**Opportunities for Success**

Creating opportunities for success is defined by McPartland and Slavin (1990) as doing “whatever it takes” to make the student successful. Examples cited were one-on-one tutoring, ongoing assessment, providing third grade reading remediation to a 10th grader, peer-coaching, summer school, and maintaining students and teachers together for 2 years when success is happening. Brophy (1988) theorized the amount of time spent in learning interesting, relevant, interactive materials was a key to success.

Offering a variety of opportunities for students to show evidence of their learning to the teacher in a variety of ways was found to be helpful. Wheelock and Dorman (1988) citing a Rayvid study on successful schools, emphasized early and frequent success was necessary to counter the accumulated messages over time ... “I’m no good. I’m dumb. I can’t.” Creating opportunities for success must focus on substituting positive tapes for negative tapes by empowering the student, through effort, to be successful. Bloom (1976) noted that the more public and official the judgments of the quality of the student’s work, the greater the effect they have on student’s adequacy to the task. If the affect is positive, the student says, “I will do; I can do.” If the affect is negative, the student says, “I can’t do; I won’t do; I disengage.” Clifford (1990), citing a Danner and Lonky study, noted success must be achieved on moderate to challenging tasks to provide pride in self-achievement, a motivator for continuing the effort for success. Brandt’s (1988) interview with Glasser noted programs that are successful persuade the students to use pictures of themselves.
liking to read history or liking to do math, thus students choose to see themselves as successful.

Progress

Evaluating progress, defined as formative feedback, that is, identifying gains achieved toward the goal, rather than grading on absolute standards crosses all successful at-risk programs. Brophy (1988) cited findings that made a difference when students were encouraged through small steps of learning presented with briskness and provided with clear and immediate feedback. Slavin and Madden (1989) noted that facilitating the student at his or her own pace through a well defined set of instructional objectives in small groups with similar skills levels is one of the most effective classroom instructional practices. Tested experimentally, continuous progress based on a clearly defined hierarchy of objectives had .95 effect size.

Communicating the progress of the student to the student was a reinforcer for progress. Epstein (1987) and Bloom (1980) reported that providing formative feedback to the student assists the student in learning what he or she needs to know in preparation for the next learning tasks. The student is refocused on the learning rather than on being judged for what he or she has not learned.

At the junior high and high school levels, a motivating factor for progress is the creation of a plan of learning goals. Both short-term and long-term goals are established. Teachers and students review these plans to highlight progress, to reevaluate goals, to adapt to present conditions, and to reset goals. Higgins (1988), in
interviewing at-risk youth, found that both stayers and leavers needed to have a plan and needed to see that, despite their feelings on any given day, progress was being made toward reaching their goal. Wlodkowski (1986) reported that immediate student awareness of progress usually serves as an incentive toward increasing efforts. Competition for grades was not a motivator for the at-risk student. Citing progress towards a self-proclaimed goal and developing cooperative strategies to reach the goal were more supportive, thus more motivating. Alderman (1990) structured motivating low-achieving students for success by establishing proximal goals for students, by giving frequent feedback, and by establishing experiences in which students could be successful. As the student succeeded, linkages between student effort and successful outcomes were drawn, identifying the kind of effort and quality of effort needed to be successful.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is defined as a strategy using small groups to teach both cognitive and social skills. Successful elementary programs used cooperative learning to master teacher presented materials (Levin, 1987; McPartland & Slavin, 1990). Krappman (cited in Galbo, 1989), in a field study with students aged 6-12, found that children’s capacities developed best when the contribution of the child was accepted and reactions between the partners was reciprocal.

D. Johnson and R. Johnson (1990) noted cooperative learning enhanced the internalization of learning because conflict within the group increased student
motivation, increased oral participation and oral rehearsal. Cooperative learning provided the small grouping where ideas could be tested and discussion could occur within a focused setting. Knapp et al. (1990) noted cooperative learning accommodated differences in student proficiency, a key in working with at-risk students. Slavin (1987) found in 33 out of 38 studies that significantly higher achievement was attained through cooperative learning groups, where group goals were in place. Ames and Ames (1984) hypothesized that negative self-esteem can be reduced in cooperative learning settings. The group outcome information is central to the self-evaluation and group members share rewards and punishments depending on group outcomes. Group products cause students to judge their own ability and deservingness as similar to that of other performers. Bempschat and Ginsburg (1989) found girls responded well to cooperative learning, for it reduced the large group competition factor which was inhibitive. Johnson and Johnson (1990) noted cooperative learning built positive interdependence which encouraged trust and empathy and accommodated differences in student proficiency, a key in working with at-risk students. Slavin (1982) noted that the success of one student enhances the success of the other students within the group. Rutter (1985) supported the reciprocity of active participation of the student. Slavin, Madden, and Stevens (1990), in discussing the merits of Team Assisted Instruction (TAI), noted the benefits as empowering the student through student management functions, through appropriate placement cognitively in group, through manageable chunks of learning and through interactive strategies.
Cooperative learning provides a forum where social skills can be practiced and learned. Providing continual feedback on the performance of the skill and rewarding the group when the skill is used motivates students to engage in the activity. Cooperative learning (Combs, 1982) allowed the teacher to be a facilitator who goes from team to team encouraging, helping, inquiring and prodding. Students aren’t forced to follow the same path to learning which values their uniquenesses in learning style. Kagan (1990) cited the necessity for teachers to have a variety of structures of cooperative learning to match the style with either the student’s particular needs with particular content to be taught or the particular function to be achieved, that is, team building, communication building, mastery, and concept development. Cooperative learning strategies are selected when they best facilitate learning for the students.

Problem Solving

Problem solving is the reflective thinking sequence, identified by Dewey (1964), which allows the student to test his or her ideas, to test action plans and to take risks in a safe environment. The model, with variations, is composed of identifying the problem, brainstorming options to solve the problem, selecting two or three options, testing consequences of those options, selecting the best option, creating an action plan and implementing.

Oregon Model Youth Programs (Oregon State Department of Education, 1989) described problem solving as an effective skill builder. The student gains skills in conflict management, decision making, self-esteem building, and communication
skills. Benedict, Snell, and Miller (1987), in an alternative education setting, threaded problem solving through all of the activities from planning for class, to purchasing supplies for activities, to resolving conflict. Students learned to work together and learned that they could accomplish more through thinking about plans of action. Chenowith and Synowiec (1990) used problem solving to deal with academic problems, attendance problems, and interpersonal problems in a group setting.

An element of problem solving, creating the action plan, lends itself to students taking charge, making choices, and looking at consequences. Glasser, as cited by Brandt (1988), supported the choice process, for it provides the student with a sense of control. Having control of one’s choices provides hope. Leadbeater and Dionne (1981) tested experimentally the problem-solving skills of a continuum of achieving students and found that students were better helped with problem-solving skills overtly taught. Students needed open, nondirective atmospheres where value-laden issues could be examined. Pfeiffer, Feinberg, and Gelben (1981) cited real problems as issues for problem-solving activities aided students in seeing and learning the process. J. Larson (1990), testing problem-solving experimentally, found that at-risk students lowered anger acts and avoided significant increases in misconduct referrals.

**Experiential Learning**

One aspect of alternative education programs, which provided success for at-risk students, was experiential learning. At-risk students’ foundation of broad based
experiences is often less developed than that of non-at-risk students. Providing multisensory learning experiences with discussion on why or how the process works assists at-risk students in building a foundation of meaning. The increased use of manipulatives, of scenario enactment and of games that taught meaning was advocated by Coleman (1980).

Only as the student's experience base was present could learning come alive. Conrad and Hedin (1982), in an experimental design, found that experiential learning impacted self-esteem, social and peer responsibility, attitudes toward adults and others, empathy and complexity of thoughts. Coleman (1980) added that the experiential dimension provided knowledge about self and “makes us less fearful of our faults, more able to address them in a straight-forward way, without fear of failure” (p. 18).

Conflict Management

Conflict management is defined as modeling and processing how to cope positively with conflict. Inherent in modeling is positive regard for one another. Miller (1989) identified trust in action and respect given unconditionally as elements of teaching conflict management. Offending students are consulted, asked to analyze their behavior, and make suggestions for improvement. Intentional attending to conflict with consistent positions against which to make decisions assists students in monitoring and resolving conflict. Flexing when necessary undergirds the process.

Given their familial background and peer background, at-risk students need opportunities with teachers and students to develop and test communication skills.
Knowing about and practicing "I" messages, active listening, and affirmation statements reduces edginess and values people. Glasser, as cited by Brandt (1988), theorized that perhaps 95% of perceived discipline problems related to students acting out because their need to be listened to or to be valued was thwarted. "People who aren't able to say, 'I'm at least a little bit important' in some situation will not work hard to preserve or maintain the situation." (p. 40) Opportunity for interaction in the classroom provides an arena for testing ideas, for testing interactive skills, and for learning about self. Interactive classrooms can develop conflict as ideas collide, but teachers, having planned for the possibility, use the conflict to teach conflict resolution skills.

Teachers, who are responsive to students, who model valuing others through active listening and appropriate conflict resolution, and who purposefully interact with students within conflict settings, are providing a demonstration on how to communicate. A study of disruptive student behaviors in 276 classrooms found one third of all disruptions as attributable to the teachers' interpersonal skills in handling conflict (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977).

In a field study of four successful dropout programs, Nauman (1985) found teachers applied rules and discipline in a more flexible way, that is, according to the situation and the student's need. The teacher who modeled conflict management, employing positive interpersonal skills, enabled the students to process coping with conflict.

These school practices, in part or in combination, portend to create
opportunities for success for at-risk students. These promising practices combine learning tools, structuring tools, measuring tools, social tools, and coping tools to enhance the possibility for success. These promising practices are purported to address the gaps in training and socialization that the at-risk student requires. Would these practices be viewed as positive by non-at-risk students as well, so that conclusions could be drawn that these practices should be incorporated for all students to be more successful or do these practices especially serve at-risk students? Are there substitutes among or between the practices that make the difference for at-risk students as compared to non-at-risk students? By comparing the differences between at-risk and non-at-risk student perceptions of these practices, what knowledge and understanding could be gained about the role of these practices for the at-risk student? Identifying promising practices as promising from the at-risk students’ perspective will assist schools in knowing what practices to incorporate. Identifying how they differ for at-risk students will assist schools in understanding how to incorporate the practices.

The Teacher, the Connector

The promising practices of cognitive/learning and interaction are united in the teacher, whose positive interaction with students, that is, nurturing, is a key to success for students (Foley & Warren, 1985; O’Connor, 1985). Stated more emphatically, Peck, Law and Mills (1987) concluded the quality of the people carrying out the (at-risk) programs was the single most important factor in success or failure. “It seems to matter less what is done than who does it and how” (p. 17). Rogers, as cited by
Brendiro, Brokening and VanBockern (1990) noted that research shows that "the quality of human relationships in schools...may be more influential than the specific techniques or interventions employed" (p. 58). Murphy (1991), found in case studies of 20 at-risk students who stayed in school that respect from teachers was a major contributor to their success.

The most consistent factor in all the successful at-risk programs reviewed, either K-12 or alternative education, was the teacher. In a study by Williams (1981), using the Spady-Mitchel model of societal expectations, school structures, and student experience, the teacher was the constant key to student satisfaction and feelings of status. Wiltrout (1992) found that teachers who were successful in retaining and engaging at-risk students demonstrated an empathy for attendant commitment to at-risk students. Brophy (1988), linking teacher behaviors with student outcomes, cited teachers who are businesslike and task oriented, who pace the learning tasks of students appropriately, and who actively engage interactively with students in the learning process increase the quality of outcomes. Sills' (1989) national survey of 2,822 seventh graders concluded that teachers viewed as most productive were those who had time for students, who took responsibility for student achievement, and who cared about students' lives. Glasser as cited by Brandt (1988) reasoned that the basic need for belonging is better met by teachers who plan and provide interactive teacher-student or student-student time in class. Providing interactive time meets power needs as well, for to be listened to is empowering. Rogers (1983) described the effective teacher as a learning facilitator who encompasses a genuine respect and unconditional
positive regard for students, who provides acceptance and empathy, fostering feelings of belonging within a noncoercive style of management. A supportive climate where teachers liked and understood adolescents was crucial to moving adolescents to become productive students.

At-risk students cited teachers as being the positive difference for them (Author interviews, 1990; Fine, 1987). McCormick (1989), reviewing a 1982 study of California drop-outs, found the most important factor was the students' psychological need for someone to care about them individually. A sense of caring, warmth, and liking students were descriptors of effective teachers used by researchers (Bempechat & Ginsburg, 1989; Castallo & Young, 1988; Lacey, 1982; National Council of LaRoza, 1988). Bonding, attachment, and belief in students were stronger descriptors used by Hirschi (1969). “Attending to”, that is, focusing attention, providing empathy and positive regard was the key in the Zielke (1990) study. Teachers, however, generally pay less attention to low-expectation students, interact with them less frequently and demand less work and effort from them (Rist, 1970).

The major differentiating attribute of teachers in at-risk programs was their extended role (Nauman, 1985). Wehlage (1983), in reviewing effective programs, found the teacher created a family atmosphere as teacher, parent, counselor, and student advocate. Teachers personally called absent students or followed up on mitigating circumstances. McMullen et al. (1988), describing programming in Philadelphia, cited teachers addressing multiple needs of students, social, personal, and academic. Sustained adult contact arranged by the teacher provided cross-age tutoring,
connecting students with other adults in the school, referring to counselors, and
pairing of students with adults in and out of school for personal growth (Lewis, 1989;
Natriello et al., 1988; Sapone, 1989; Wheelock & Dorman, 1988). Teachers invited
parents to become involved in their students' learning by maintaining the
communication flow with the parent, by encouraging volunteering of the parent in the
classroom, by making schools user friendly, and by encouraging parents to participate
in adult basic education and English as a Second Language to serve as role models
for students (Bempechat & Ginsburg, 1989). The teacher's extended role is seen as
nurturing, giving to the student the sense of attentive time and expectations that
connote caring. The teacher's extended role is seen as nurturing, the frequently
missing component in at-risk homes.

Given the characteristics of the at-risk student, low grade point averages,
absenteeism, low self-esteem, limited coping skills, and feeling of alienation within
the school setting and given the characteristics of the at-risk student's family,
dysfunctionality, feeling of overwhelmedness, absence of intervention, and/or
advocacy on behalf of their student, the school becomes the agent which must address
the unique needs of the at-risk student.

The literature review cited the absence of nurturing, that is, being liked, having
time for and caring practices, for the at-risk student in both the home and the school.
The at-risk student is portrayed as disconnected and alienated. If nurturing is the
component that is missing for the at-risk student, is that the factor that must be
addressed by the schools? Are there differences between at-risk and non-at-risk
students' perceptions of being nurtured within the school? Would at-risk and non-at-risk students view the three components of nurturing differently? If there is a difference, what light would be shed on the practices and interactions within the school for the at-risk student? Analysis of being needs would suggest that being valued within the setting would make a difference in choosing to remain in the setting.

The promising practices, which focus on reaching individuals; on encouraging students to reach high expectations, through doing school and progress reporting; on facilitating learning of social skills, problem solving, and conflict management; guide, facilitate, and teach. The teacher, in the roles of advocate, listener, and attender, provide the nurturing support. Will these components be seen as helpful and positive by at-risk students? Will they view these components as making a difference for them in reducing feelings of alienation and increasing their desire and readiness to stay in school? Will these components reflect what makes the difference?

Summary

National studies to identify dropout characteristics have been conducted to impact on keeping at-risk students in school. Phi Delta Kappa (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989) directed a national survey to identify variables that contribute to at-riskness across all grade levels. A variety of researchers have measured variables to seek answers to the at-risk phenomenon. The consistent thread is that any student can be at-risk, given mitigating circumstances and perceived disengagement from school.
Families are increasingly under stress. As divorce rates increase, as economics require both parents to work or a single parent to work two jobs, as time for nurturing is squeezed out of daily living, the family’s influence on the at-risk student becomes less positive. When factors of poverty, of poorly educated parents, and dysfunctionality are added to the descriptors of family, then psychological isolation of the student within the home increases.

The school, the one center to which all children must come, becomes the arena where learning and attending to can occur. Studies show schools have tried to reach at-risk students through special programs, but newer research (Caprione, 1992) suggests that schools are more successful when students are intermeshed and attending to strategies are used on all students. A review of strategies and learning components within at-risk literature produced nine elements cited as successful. These elements had components of cognitive and interactive skills and were judged student centered rather than curriculum or system centered.

The teacher, as the provider of the strategies, is seen as the connector for the at-risk student. The teacher connects the learning with the student and vice versa. Liking students, having time for students, and caring for students were identified as necessary attending to components.

The review of literature set up givens, that is, neither family nor school is successfully meeting at-risk students’ needs, yet the literature points out that at-risk students need success, need to see hope, and need to experience connectedness. The literature review analysis establishes practices that have been successful across at-risk
programs. If the needs are evident and the practices identified, what are the missing pieces that elude schools in successfully teaching the at-risk student? To begin to peel the layers of this question, at-risk students hold the key. What is their perspective on nurturing and cognitive practices? What do they say about necessary classroom components for success? Are their evidences of success the same as what schools have established? Do their views differ from non-at-risk students? Will differences between groups be evident to shed light on the missing pieces that elude schools from successfully reaching at-risk students?

To seek answers to these questions, the following conceptual hypotheses were tested. (For clarity of understanding, nurturing was divided into three hypothesis based on literature review.)

1. A difference exists between at-risk and non-at-risk students’ perceptions of being liked.

2. A difference exists between at-risk and non-at-risk students’ perceptions of teachers having time for them.

3. A difference exists between at-risk and non-at-risk students’ perceptions of being cared for through positive practices.

4. Differences between at-risk and non-at-risk perceptions of promising practices can be delineated.

5. Differences between at-risk and non-at-risk students’ perceptions of necessary classroom components for success can be delineated.
6. Perceptions of evidences of success between at-risk and non-at-risk students can be identified.

If differences can be discerned, those differences from the at-risk perspective will assist in identifying adaptations that must occur in the 7-12 program as well as in alternative education. Knowing what is perceived as positive from the at-risk students' perspective can be identified as practices and connections to be built into programming, processes and staff development.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

At-risk literature was reviewed for successful school practices. Strategies and practices that were consistent across the at-risk literature were identified. From the synthesis of promising practices found in the literature, cognitive learning and teacher interactive strategies served as the criterion base for developing understanding about students' perceptions of success-oriented or nurturing environments. Focus groups were chosen as the medium to gather students' perceptions because focus groups draw on principles of group dynamics to elicit discussion that might not emerge in one on one interviews or on self-administered questionnaires (Higgins, 1988).

Focus groups of at-risk students and non-at-risk students examined the criterion base through structured questions and open-ended questions. The format for the group interview examined the role of the promising practices and interactive strategies within favorite classroom and least favorite classroom settings. Using a compare and contrast process, students then identified factors which were most important for them to be successful. Surveys were completed by the focus group participants at the end of the group interview to elicit specific, personal perspectives.
Population and Selection Process

Two school districts, an urban setting and a rural setting, provided junior high and senior high at-risk and non-at-risk students for the study. At-risk students from Phoenix Alternative School and GOALS Parenting Program representing the two districts were also included in the study group. These schools were selected as representative of a variety of Michigan mid-sized junior and senior high schools. Because of the increasing numbers of truant and troubled teens, these schools represent that growing phenomena in Michigan.

Holland, the urban setting, was selected for its variety of socioeconomic factors, its racial distribution (28% Hispanic, 8% Asian, 2% Black), its parental/marital status, and its changing demographics. While growing in population, the major changes over the last 10 years have been increasing numbers of minorities, gang activities, at-risk students, and varying values. Holland’s reported drop-out rate for 1991-92 was 6.2% compared with the state’s drop-out rate of 7.4%.

Hamilton, the rural setting, represents the small, farm community whose values and family orientation have been stalwart over time. In the last 8 to 10 years, as new families with less traditional values have moved into the district, the drop-out rate has increased. The 1991-92 school year represented the largest drop-out rate historically.

To maintain confidentiality, students were identified with the assistance of junior high and high school principals using a matrix of characteristics as noted in the literature for the status of at-risk and non-at-risk. At-risk students were identified by the following factors: (a) GPA equal to or less than 2.0, (b) low socioeconomic (based
on free lunch data), (c) one grade behind peers and (d) absences equal to or greater than 11 per semester (15 absences is the limit per semester for continued credit and/or inclusion). Non-at-risk students' were identified by the following factors: (a) GPA equal to or greater than 2.3, (b) non designated free lunch, (c) on schedule to graduate and (d) absences equal to or less than 10 per semester.

The original design called for free lunch as the designation of the socioeconomic factor. New in 1992 was a law prohibiting access to free lunch data unless the district had requested parents to sign a form giving permission to share information. Neither Holland nor Hamilton had used this procedure, thus the socioeconomic factor was withdrawn as a criterion.

In conducting this study, care was taken to control for possible sources of error. Random sampling of students was the technique used and is assumed to be representative of student subgroups within each school. During the fall of 1992, a multistage random sampling (Erickson, 1986) was conducted in both Holland and Hamilton school districts. With the assistance of junior high and high school principals, a total of 480 files were randomly selected. Eighty files were drawn from each junior high and 160 files were drawn from each senior high.

Using the 80 files in Hamilton Junior High, student files were classified as at-risk and non-at-risk when compared to the category definition. A pool of at-risk and non-at-risk students was created. From each category, names were randomly selected and placed in focus groups of students per group (two at-risk and two non-at-risk). The procedure was replicated at Holland Junior High.
At each of the high schools, random sampling occurred in the same manner. Each high school sample was grouped, by category, into three focus groups of 10 students. Appendix A provides additional information.

Packets were mailed to parents of the selected students which included a letter from the principal approving the process of interviewing students; a letter from the researcher explaining the purpose, process, and confidentiality of participating students; a parent release form; and a stamped, self-addressed envelope (see Appendix B). Parents were provided an expected return date and were encouraged to phone the principal or the researcher if they had questions. Approximately 2% of the parents phoned with questions. Both principals and the researcher received calls questioning the anonymity of the interviews and the certainty that students taken out of class could make up the work. After the interviews, the researcher received three calls from parents requesting summaries of the findings.

Returned, parent signed, coded NAR (non-at-risk) or AR (at-risk) permission slips were randomly assigned by category to at-risk and non-at-risk focus groups within Hamilton Junior High, Holland Junior High, Hamilton High School and Holland High School. While groups of 8 to 10 were the goal, groups ranged in size from 6 to 10 with average group size of 8.

Principals provided class schedules of the students, which aided in grouping students with the least intrusive interferences in their school day. In Hamilton Junior and Senior High and Holland Junior High, students were excused from one class period. In Holland High, students used a portion of their lunch hour and a portion of
their next hour for the interview.

A second mailing was made to parents thanking them for their permission to interview their students and advising them of the day, time, and location of the interview. Students were called the night before the interview to remind them of the interview.

Data Collection

School principals established times for interviews which were perceived to be the least intrusive in the students' school schedules. Counseling secretaries and/or principal's secretaries aided in providing class passes or intercom connections to enhance student participation.

Attendance rates at the focus-group interviews averaged 84% with the total number of students participating being 151. At-risk groups had 77% attendance or 70 of 90 students while non-at-risk groups had 90% attendance or 81 of 90 students.

A semi-structured interview process as cited by Borg and Gall (1983) was used with standard openings, instructions and closings to minimize interviewer error. The researcher conducted all the interviews to reduce multiple-interviewer errors. An interpersonal style of interview was used based on research of Fowler and Mangione (1990) and the researcher's personal experiences with at-risk students. When incomplete answers were offered, probes for clarification and elaboration in a nondirective manner were used to avoid influencing the direction of answers. Probes used included "help me understand," repeat of words with quizzical look and "I heard
The interview was videotaped to capture both verbal and nonverbal cues from students.

As students entered the interview room, they were greeted and invited to sit in the pre-set chairs. As two or three would gather, a brief statement of appreciation for coming and information about starting when all had arrived was made. The video camera created interest and questions. When all students were present, the interviewer and the camera man were introduced and the connection to the project was explained. The interviewer was the researcher who was working on a degree at Western Michigan University to become a school administrator. Because of school regulations, the interviewer had to maintain student confidentiality and to maintain confidentiality of what students shared. The process used with parent letters was explained and students were asked to sign and date their student release form.

The camera man served the purpose of set up and focus to assure a quality video, but he did not remain during the taping. The purpose of the interview was described as seeking students’ input on a variety of practices that researchers said helped student learn. The goal of the project was to gain insight into how students felt about these practices and what helped them be successful in school. They were the experts on the subject. The interviewer needed their ideas and expertise. The students were positioned informally with the camera operator advising on view.

Humor and interactive communication were used throughout the beginning moments to reduce student anxiety. Fowler and Mangione (1990) cited Boston University and University of Michigan studies concluding that humor and warmth are
the best interview strategies for those who haven’t finished high school. Students were advised that only the interviewer would be viewing the video and that the video would be destroyed after the research study was completed. When the camera was set, the operator left the room. The interviewer recapped the purpose and advised the students that they were the experts on what they needed from the classroom to be successful. Students were introduced to the question format and encouraged to add ideas to others’ statements without formalized hand raising or interviewer intervention. (See Appendix C for interview questions.)

Flip charts were used to record ideas and student comments as a visual for both students and the interviewer. The interview questions focused student attention on favorite and least favorite classrooms and cognitive and interactive strategies. At the conclusion of discussing both settings, students were asked to identify what factors for their personal success were necessary within the classroom.

Personal surveys were completed by each group member at the end of the group session. (See Appendix D) Students were advised to depart when they were finished.

Instrumentation

Student measurements were created by the researcher. Two pilots were conducted to assure the questions captured the intent of the study. The first pilot study, using a small group of at-risk students, used open-ended questions to test student-appropriate verbiage. A second pilot on a different small at-risk sample was
used to test the analysis components on the open-ended questions and to use the closed answer structure of the survey to verify quality of questions and value of responses. (Borg and Gall, 1983).

The focus group sessions featured questions on promising practices and interpersonal dynamics within a most favorite classroom and a least favorite classroom. Students were asked to identify basic differences between the two examples after attributes of both had been delineated. Students were asked to identify factors needed in the classroom for them to be successful. The survey completed by each focus group’s students at the end of the group session requested age, grade, sex, and school. Survey questions were structured and open-ended. Personal interactions with teachers and necessary evidences for personal success were surveyed.

Data Analysis

Video tapes of at-risk students and non-at-risk students were viewed and scripted by the researcher to assure confidentiality of responses of the persons interviewed. Those scripts served as the base for the content analysis and measurements used. The categories used in the content analysis were drawn from the subsets of teacher-student interaction/nurturing that is, being liked, having time for and using positive practices that connote caring, and the promising practices, that is, mastery learning, doing school, high expectations, success, progress, cooperative learning, problem-solving, conflict management, and experiential learning. Definitions and critical attributes of terms were developed by the researcher based on the
literature review.

Two sets of two-to-a-team Hope College students were trained in identifying categories used in the study. One set of students had teacher training background while the second set had none. The category definitions (see Appendix G) were reviewed and discussed until the reviewers concluded they were comfortable with their meanings. A list of 45 phrases (examples from actual scripts) were given each reviewer to independently analyze and assign to a category. An interrater reliability of 84% was achieved. A discussion of differences of opinion followed with more clarity and mutual exclusiveness of categories being the result.

A pilot study script was used for the second training session. Reviewers analyzed them independently and returned them to the researcher. The inter-rater reliability was 76%. Again reviewers and the researcher discussed clarification and differences in interpretation. Application of definition within the script setting enhanced questioning refinement of understanding.

To establish reliability of separate categories as cited by Laswell and Leiters (1965), both teams coded scripts Number 1 and 2. Comparisons of each individual's scoring by category to the interviewer's scoring by category resulted in relationships ranging from 85% in the affective (nurturing) to 100% in the cognitive domain (promising practices).

Team 2, the non-education trained team, completed the content analysis on the set of 20 scripts. Reviewers charted by frequency of phrase per script page into categories on the graphs provided. (see Appendix F) The average interrater reliability
for all 20 scripts was 75.4%. The mean reliability was 77.5%.

The purpose of the study was to gain insight from the at-risk student's perspective on what practices and components were seen as making a positive difference for them. The operational hypotheses being tested were:

1. That the frequency of references to being liked/not being liked by the teacher will be greater among at-risk students than non-at-risk students.

2. That the frequency of references to teachers taking/not taking time for the student cognitively or interactively will be greater among at-risk students than non-at-risk students.

3. That the frequency of references to teachers having positive/negative expectations of students will be greater among at-risk students than non-at-risk students.

4. Differences between views on promising practices can be measured through attribution of practices seen by both groups as beneficial, beneficial to at-risk, beneficial to non-at-risk, seen by both groups as nonbeneficial, nonbeneficial for at-risk, and nonbeneficial to non-at-risk.

5. Differences in factors of desired classroom components for success can be delineated by category and percentage.

6. Evidences of success between at-risk and non-at-risk students will reflect different proportions.
Definitions for Operational Hypothesis

At-risk is defined as having all of the following attributes: (a) being at least one grade behind in credits earned, (b) having equal or greater than 11 absences per semester, and (c) having an equal to or lower than 2.0 average on a 4.0 scale.

Non-at-risk is defined, (a) a being on schedule to graduate, (b) having equal to or less than 10 absences per semester, and (c) having an equal or greater GPA than 2.3.

Nurturing is defined as the teacher perceived as liking the student, taking time interpersonally with the student, and providing positive practices for the student which connote valuing the student.

Being liked is exemplified by verbal statements by the teacher of liking the student, compliments on person, personal sharing, nonverbals of smiles, touch, and warmth. Not being liked is exemplified as embarrassment, verbal statements of not being liked, absence of caring nonverbals, and verbal put downs.

Taking time is exemplified as giving time in classroom, providing time before or after school, providing one-to-one assistance, and providing equity of time. Not taking time is exemplified as no time in classroom or outside or rushed time before the student was completed in questioning or understanding.

Positive practices of caring are exemplified by vocabulary leveled appropriately, explaining so the student can understand, helping the student with personal concerns, and believing in the student. Negative practices of caring are exemplified by vocabulary being too difficult, lack of ownership for the student,
telling the student it was "your problem."

Cognitive/learning is defined as strategies that provide structure and interaction within content. Examples are mastery learning, doing school, high expectations, success, progress, cooperative learning, problem-solving, conflict management, and experiential learning.

Mastery learning is defined as attainment of adequate levels of performance on tests that measure specific learning tasks. Components are use of previous knowledge, instruction, time, checking for understanding, past assessment, and task analysis leading to step by step instruction.

Doing school is defined as knowing how to fulfill system requirements and process information.

Expectations is defined as believing that all students are able to achieve; holding realistic to high expectations.

Success is defined as doing whatever it takes to help the student be successful.

Progress is defined as formative feedback.

Cooperative learning is defined as teamed efforts in small groups building cognitive and social skills.

Problem-solving is defined as structure involving identification of the problem, options, consequence checking, choice, and action plan.

Conflict management is defined as modeling and processing how to cope with conflict.

Experiential learning is defined as hands on learning.
Desired classroom components are those identified by at-risk students as important for their success.

Evidence of success are defined as good grades, understanding the material, being liked by other students, having a good attitude, liking the subject, liking the teacher, being liked by the teacher, and pleasing parents.

Hypotheses 1 through 3 reflect the teacher-student interaction/nurturing needs as established by the literature review. Within the context of both most favorite and least favorite classrooms, both at-risk and non-at-risk students articulated feelings and ideas about the recording units of teachers liking them, having time for them, and caring for them through positive practices. Students expressed both the presence and the absence of nurturing components. The focus group interviews provided direct opportunities for students to respond to specific questions which referenced the three areas. Students made references to the three areas in other segments of the interview and in the necessary components segment.

Content analysis, as outlined by Krippendorff (1980), of the scripts resulted in the number of responses that could be classified within each category or recording unit, that is, being liked by the teacher, the teacher having time for the student, and the teacher caring for the student through positive practices. The number of responses or frequencies of responses became the unit of measure. The underlying assumption was that frequency of reference served as an indicator of perception emphasis.

The unit of measurement to test the hypotheses was the focus group script. The totaled frequencies of the non-at-risk scripts for each recording unit and the totaled...
frequencies of the at-risk scripts for each recording unit were compared. Measurements used for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were t tests for independent means. Only differences that were significant at the alpha level of <.05 were considered. The decision to use a level of .05 allowing for the chance of increased Type I error was made to maximize all promising leads.

Hypothesis 4, differences between views on promising practices, can be measured through attribution of practices seen by both groups as beneficial, beneficial to at-risk, beneficial to non-at-risk, seen by both groups as nonbeneficial, nonbeneficial to at-risk, and nonbeneficial to non-at-risk, reflects the cognitive practices gleaned from the literature review. Students were asked direct questions about the practices and students also made reference to these practices in both the comparison of favorite/least favorite classrooms and in the necessary components segment. Coders sorted students' responses by status into the recording units of mastery learning, doing school, high expectations, success, progress, cooperative learning, problem-solving, conflict management, and experiential learning for the purpose of validating assignment of response to category. (see Appendix F)

Within context, attribution, as noted by Janis (1965), provides for partitioning data into pre-set categories. Since the purpose of the study was to define what promising practices were perceived as helpful to at-risk students, the partitions used were beneficial to both, at-risk, to non-at-risk, and nonbeneficial to both, to at-risk, and to non-at-risk. College students had identified components in their content analysis as positive or negative. The components of each script were categorized by
the researcher into beneficial and nonbeneficial components. Those beneficial and
nonbeneficial components within each script were organized by practice. Scripts were
grouped by non-at-risk status and at-risk status. Scripts were analyzed against the pre­
sent categories of beneficial to both, to at-risk only, to non-at-risk only, and
nonbeneficial to both, to at-risk only, and to non-at-risk only. Comparisons of
differences between groups on both beneficial and nonbeneficial attributes were
drawn. Comparisons of beneficial for both statuses set up positively perceived
practices for at-risk students and beneficial to at-risk practices were added to identify
practices perceived as positive by at-risk students.

Hypothesis 5, differences in factors of desired classroom components for
success can be delineated by category and percentage, reflects the opportunity given
to at-risk and non-at-risk students to articulate the necessary components within a
classroom to make it their favorite. Based on the literature review noting cognitive
and affective practices, responses were categorized by learning/cognitive practices,
teacher relations/affective, and other. Within each status, at-risk and non-at-risk, the
number of responses per category was compared to the total number of responses
within the group resulting in percentage of response by category. A comparison of
percentage by category between groups was noted as an indicator of successful
component priority.

Hypothesis 6, evidences of success between at-risk and non-at-risk students
will reflect different proportions, reflects the review of literature's evidences of
success, namely, good grades, understanding the material, being liked by other
students, having a good attitude, liking the subject, liking the teacher, being liked by
the teacher, and pleasing parents. Students selected the two most important pieces of
evidence which were totaled by status, at-risk and non-at-risk. Are the evidences of
success independent of status was the question to be answered.

Summary

The purpose of the research design was to discover at-risk students' perceptions on nurturing and promising practices that at-risk literature notes make a difference in keeping at-risk students involved in school. The design was constructed using focus groups from two junior high and two senior high schools.

Multi-stage and simple random sampling were techniques used to select the students for the study. School staff assisted in gathering students, in assisting with parent communication, and in arranging for interviews/schedules.

Focus group interviews were video taped for both verbal and non-verbal reactions. The researcher conducted all the interviews to reduce multiple interviewer errors. Nurturing and positive practices questions posed in the interview were set in students' self-selected most favorite class and least favorite classroom. Students were asked to compare and contrast those settings to identify promising practices which contributed to their success. Students completed a survey which requested personal information regarding their perceptions of necessary classroom components for success and evidences of success.

Content analysis of focus group scripts was completed by college students. To
test the hypotheses, content analysis, $t$ tests for independent means and comparison of percentages were used.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The design of this study centered on testing hypotheses that addressed the “fit of school and Me” from the at-risk student’s perspective. The purposes of the study were to gain insight into the teacher-student interaction/nurturing, to delineate what practices are present within a classroom setting which are seen as positive, to identify what pieces or necessary components must be present in a classroom for at-risk students to perceive opportunities for success, and to identify evidences of success. The reporting of data was grouped under the headings teacher-student interaction/nurturing, promising practices, desired classroom elements, and evidences of success. Alpha of .05 was used for the purpose of testing null hypotheses when inferential statistics were used in decision making.

Teacher-Student Interactions/Nurturing

Three facets of teacher-student interactions/nurturing were measured by testing three hypotheses: (1) A difference exists between at-risk and non-at-risk students’ perceptions of the teacher liking the student, (2) a difference exists between at-risk and non-at-risk student perceptions of teachers having time for them, and (3) a difference exists between at-risk and non-at-risk students’ perception of being cared for through positive practices.
Examples of phrases reflecting teachers liking students were: "The teacher smiles at me," "the teacher told me he liked me," and "the teacher notices personal things about me." Negative examples of the teacher liking me were: "The teacher never smiles at me," "...doesn't like me and never recognizes me outside of class."

Examples of phrases reflecting teachers having time for students were: "He gave me all the time I needed," "I never felt rushed with his explanation time," and "he always was available to help as he walked around the classroom." Negative examples of the teacher having time for me were: "The teacher never came over to me to explain," "the teacher would rush away before I had all my questions answered," and "the teacher never gave me a second chance."

Examples of phrases reflecting teachers caring for me were: "He explained it in my words," "she made learning fun, so I could understand," "she cared that I understood 'cause she would check with me everyday." Negative examples of the teacher caring for me were: "The teacher didn’t care if I understood the material," "the teacher told me it was my problem, not his," and "the teacher used too big of words."

To test the hypothesis of nurturing, the frequencies of references to each variable, teacher liking me, teacher having time for me, and teacher caring for me, from the 10 interview scripts of at-risk students and the 10 interview scripts of non-at-risk students were totaled. The means of each of the group totals per variable were compared for differences.

Table 1 reflects the differences in means between the two status groups, at-risk
and non-at-risk, for the testing of the hypothesis that at-risk students’ perceptions of being liked will differ from non-at-risk students’ perceptions of being liked by the teacher. The mean difference is 8.3 resulting in a $t$ value of 2.12 which exceeds the critical value of 1.734.

Table 1

Comparison of At-Risk and Non-At-Risk Perceptions of Being Liked by the Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>$t$ value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>9.457</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-at-risk</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>8.206</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N =$ number of focus groups

Using a $t$ test for independent means, the null hypothesis that no differences between at-risk and non-at-risk students’ perceptions of being liked by the teacher was rejected using alpha of .05 with 18 degrees of freedom.

Table 2 reflects the measurement of differences between the two status groups relative to the hypothesis that a difference will exist between the at-risk and non-at-risk students’ perceptions of the teacher having time for me. The means are of near equal value resulting in a $t$ value of 0.4 compared to the critical value of 1.734. The hypothesis was not supported.
Table 2
Comparison of At-Risk and Non-At-Risk Perceptions of the Teacher Having Time for Me

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>7.487</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-at-risk</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>8.069</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = number of focus groups

Table 3 reflects the differences between the two status groups testing the hypothesis that a difference will exist between the at-risk and non-at-risk students' perceptions of the teacher. Again, the means are of near equal value resulting in a t value of 0.16 compared to the critical value of 1.734. The hypothesis was not supported.

Table 3
Comparison of At-Risk and Non-At-Risk Perceptions of the Teacher Caring for Me

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>10.082</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-at-risk</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>9.082</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = number of focus groups

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Promising Practices

The second component, promising practices, was measured by testing the hypothesis that a difference between at-risk and non-at-risk perceptions of promising practices can be delineated. A synthesis of promising practices, across all programming, was developed from a review of literature on strategies and constructs that were found to be beneficial in helping at-risk students be successful in school. Those promising practices were set up in mastery learning, doing school, expectations, success, progress, cooperative learning, problem-solving, conflict management, and experiential learning. Using attribution theory as noted by Janis (1965), student interview responses to each promising practice were coded against the following attribution groups: (a) beneficial to both, (b) beneficial to at-risk, (c) beneficial to non-at-risk, (d) nonbeneficial to both, (e) nonbeneficial to at-risk, and (f) nonbeneficial to non-at-risk. No promising practices could be placed in only one category. Only problem-solving had no responses in nonbeneficial to both or nonbeneficial to at-risk. Experiential learning had no nonbeneficial responses from either group. All other promising practices had units of response in each cell.

Mastery learning findings are noted in Table 4. Beneficial characteristics for both at-risk and non-at-risk students, for at-risk only and for non-at-risk only are outlined in the top of the table. Nonbeneficial components for both, for at-risk only, and for non-at-risk only are featured in the bottom of the table. More components are shared by both in beneficial and nonbeneficial areas than are held separately. In general, differences between the two status groups center on pacing of learning.
degree of dependence on teacher interaction, and assistance in content analysis.

Table 4
Content Analysis Summation by Category
Mastery Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Both</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking for understanding</td>
<td>Taught how to think</td>
<td>Time to think about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-by-step analysis of content</td>
<td>Identifies what's most important to know</td>
<td>Logic pattern taught-time to work on my own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to practice</td>
<td>Doing learning tasks in teachers presence, so I can be told where I'm having trouble</td>
<td>Appropriate speed for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic of how to think is taught</td>
<td></td>
<td>Retesting without penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback on accuracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole/part learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on &quot;How I'm doing&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonbeneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No task analysis of content</td>
<td>Too fast through material</td>
<td>Too step-by-step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No checking for understanding</td>
<td>Test items not covered in class</td>
<td>Too slow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No feedback on accuracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheet driven learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient practice time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Doing school findings are noted in Table 5. Beneficial characteristics for both,
for at-risk only, and for non-at-risk only are outlined in the top with nonbeneficial characteristics noted in the bottom. Differences between groups focus on learning style. At-risk students prefer step by step patterning with concrete examples at each step while non-at-risk students prefer logic overviews and process thinking examples.

Table 5
Content Analysis Summation by Category
Doing School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Multisensory</td>
<td>Logic patterns overview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration models</td>
<td>Manipulatives</td>
<td>Criterion for work; freedom to do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Step-by-step patterns</td>
<td>Emphasis on processing thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visuals</td>
<td>Examples at each step</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Emphasis on concretes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning map - outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written guides and time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonbeneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of how to do</td>
<td>No helps</td>
<td>Busywork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of examples</td>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td>No cueing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples that fail to</td>
<td>Tells me, rather than shows me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discriminate differences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No map for learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Expectations findings are noted in Table 6. Differences between groups focus on the message transmitted. At-risk students view expectations through the filter of "Me" and the willingness of the teacher to believe in me and be there for me, whereas the non-at-risk student uses the filter of effort. Both the teachers' abilities and knowledge affect the success of the students' efforts.

Table 6
Content Analysis Summation by Category
Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific guidelines up front; behavior, classwork, homework</td>
<td>Pressure is just right</td>
<td>Focus on teacher/student effort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides support for learning</td>
<td>Allows me to try again</td>
<td>Emphasis on quality not quantity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbalizes “I believe you can”</td>
<td>Helps me see evidence of reaching expectations</td>
<td>Ability of teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair and equitable treatment</td>
<td>Supportive climate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonbeneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear or unstated expectations or both</td>
<td>Authoritarianism: power, not human</td>
<td>Teacher ability; knowledge content questionable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfection expected</td>
<td>Teacher attitude: My way or highway, tone of voice = questions if I can achieve</td>
<td>Disorganized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judging attitude by teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Success findings in Table 7 show differences between the two groups cited being needs versus learning needs. Both beneficial and nonbeneficial categories reflect the differences. At-risk students revealed interactive, person-to-person benefits, while non-at-risk students related effort and teacher-to-learner benefits. In the nonbeneficial section, the at-risk student notes the absence of personal undergirdings or judgments, while the non-at-risk student focuses on learning related factors even noting teachers' personal sharing as inappropriate.

Table 7

Content Analysis Summation by Category Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Both</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varied teaching strategies</td>
<td>Teacher was real</td>
<td>Allowed students to demonstrate creativity &amp; leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher style, pace matched students</td>
<td>Teacher provided listening time</td>
<td>Teacher prepared to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive learning</td>
<td>Teacher talked with kids outside of school</td>
<td>Teacher trusted me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate level vocabulary</td>
<td>Teacher helped when I was wrong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged to ask questions</td>
<td>Allowed me to learn at my pace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cared that students learned</td>
<td></td>
<td>Empathetic to my life stressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance to real world</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7—continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonbeneficial</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Big&quot; words</td>
<td>Had to keep up with class pace</td>
<td>Busywork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks &quot;at me&quot; all the time</td>
<td>&quot;You should know&quot; attitude</td>
<td>Pace of learning inappropriate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonvaried teaching strategies</td>
<td>No support for question asking</td>
<td>Less frequent praise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No interaction</td>
<td>No nonverbal supports</td>
<td>Sharing teacher's personal life - inappropriate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One style of presentation (lecture) with films</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn't seem to care that students learn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on getting lesson done</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Progress findings are identified in Table 8. More subtle differences were noted within progress, for both groups benefitted from both public and private praise with continuous feedback delivered in writing and orally. The difference between groups was based on effort. Non-at-risk students preferred recognition for effort and while at-risk students liked to receive praise on effort, they also were sensitive to the teachers' delivery of praise. Was it real? Were the teacher's words believable?
Table 8
Content Analysis Summation by Category
Progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Both</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliments</td>
<td>Private praise</td>
<td>Recognizes student effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• hears specific positives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• not embarrassing to others if they don’t</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>receive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Good job” orally, written</td>
<td>Note to parent</td>
<td>Praise delivery compatible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>with student style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Nonverbals</td>
<td>Conferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic; positive &amp;</td>
<td>Enthusiasm of teacher</td>
<td>Frequency of realistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative with follow-up</td>
<td>raises self confidence</td>
<td>praise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and private praise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonbeneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of feedback or</td>
<td>Correct papers in class -</td>
<td>Group praise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarcastic praise</td>
<td>read scores aloud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summative feedback</td>
<td>No way given to improve</td>
<td>Only advised on lack of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without time for recourse</td>
<td></td>
<td>progress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cooperative learning comparisons are reflected in Table 9. Differences between groups demonstrate both the social and cognitive benefits of cooperative learning. At-risk students noted the socialization benefit more frequently than non-at-risk students. At-risk students saw small groups providing question asking and checking for understanding opportunities, while non-at-risk students saw benefits to task-centered...
group reasoning. Perceived risks differed between groups. At-risk students risked being placed in personally vulnerable situations while non-at-risk students risked wasting time and effort on tasks between completed independently.

Table 9

Content Analysis Summation by Category
Cooperative Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Both</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group discussion gave new perspectives and cues on how to think</td>
<td>Opportunity to make new friends</td>
<td>Task centered learning helps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students can explain to each other - common language</td>
<td>Socialize with people I normally wouldn’t</td>
<td>Group reasoning assists learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretches thinking</td>
<td>Provides chance to ask more questions</td>
<td>Provides practice time on learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to check facts</td>
<td>Helps me focus</td>
<td>Work at own pace as a group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives teacher opportunity to check with all groups</td>
<td>Helps me check knowledge for tests</td>
<td>Pairing shares tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonbeneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of group activities</td>
<td>Placed with kids I don’t like</td>
<td>Helpfulness of group depends on task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kids see how dumb I am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group shares ignorance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Problem solving findings are noted in Table 10. The only nonbeneficial attribute listed by either group was its redundancy for some non-at-risk students.
Differences between groups related to the setting, the pattern, and the process. At-risk students consistently praised the patterning, the thinking aloud step-by-step processing, and the model’s transferability to life. Non-at-risk students appreciated the model in handling conflict. One major difference appeared to be the influence of the home. Non-at-risk students cited parents modeling problem solving at home, so it became part of them whereas at-risk students learned the model at school and benefitted from practicing and relating it to life.

Table 10
Content Analysis Summation by Category
Problem-Solving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful when handling disputes</td>
<td>Talking problems through helps with perspectives and what if’s</td>
<td>Helps in understanding model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing problems with problem-solving model helps in thinking aloud</td>
<td>Helps with solving conflicts in real world</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talking aloud through steps helps with learning and internalizing the process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helps when real problems are used to learn process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonbeneficial</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Problem-solving taught at home—redundant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conflict management noted in Table 11 features more likenesses than differences. Both groups preferred calm, logical, respectful resolution of conflict. Neither group benefitted from top-down authoritarianism, once safety factors had been addressed. The subtle difference noted between groups is the at-risk students' notation re: "you're dumb" or teacher apology versus the non-at-risk students' focus on insufficient process for resolution. The at-risk students' being appeared to be more vulnerable.

Table 11
Content Analysis Summation by Category
Conflict Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Both</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher reacts calmly, listens to what happened, resets situation, uses problem-solving</td>
<td>Humor helps</td>
<td>Know consequences of behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treated with respect, diplomacy, kindness</td>
<td>Teacher or student apologizes if wrong</td>
<td>Negotiation style of discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of logic, issue oriented</td>
<td>Others' opinions are respected</td>
<td>Adversarial opinions are written with rationale; discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation is talked through</td>
<td>Climate is affirming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonbeneficial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student sent to office</td>
<td>Teacher maintains anger beyond reasonable limit</td>
<td>&quot;Sit down; shut up&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opportunity for interchange</td>
<td>Detention without talking</td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed publicly</td>
<td>Yells &quot;You're dumb&quot;</td>
<td>Empty threats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experiential learning as reported in Table 12 shows both groups benefitted from experiential learning. No nonbeneficial attributes were cited. The only difference noted was at-risk students tend to prefer more concrete activities with specific learnings than do non-at-risk students.

Table 12
Content Analysis Summation by Category
Experiential

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beneficial</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance to real world</td>
<td>Manipulatives</td>
<td>Deductive and inductive activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role plays: court, store</td>
<td>Role playing: creative options</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games: life, jeopardy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field trips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations: hands-on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulations: real life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonbeneficial</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Desired Classroom Elements

The third component, desired classroom elements, was measured by testing the hypothesis a difference between at-risk and non-at-risk student's perceptions of necessary classroom components for success can be delineated. Both groups of
students responded to the survey question, "What do you wish were present in your current classes, so they would be more like your favorite classroom?" Responses were unstructured and uncued.

Analysis of phrases led to categorization into three groups: (1) learning/cognitive practices, (2) teacher relations and (3) other. Learning/cognitive practices are defined as student comments relating to promising practices of doing school, mastery learning, cooperative learning, expectations, experiential learning, and teaching of content. Teacher relations are defined as the nurturing qualities including qualities of liking me, having time for me, caring for me, attending to me, and understanding me. Other is defined as other than the two categories.

Examination of Table 13 for within group comparison denotes that among all comments regarding desired classroom elements made by at-risk students and non-at-risk students, at-risk students responded with learning/cognitive comments 37.4% of the time as compared to 43% response by non-at-risk students. At-risk students responded with teacher-relations comments 52% of the time as compared to the non-at-risk students' response of 47.3%. The other category showed differences of 10.6% for at-risk and 9.6% for the non-at-risk student. While differences were slight between categories, at-risk students appeared to require more teacher-relation components while non-at-risk students gave more attention to learning/cognitive components.

For more delineation, responses are found in Appendix H. Responses within categories are shown in rank order with number one being the most frequently cited to the last one cited at least once. Responses are coded by percentage masses.
Table 13

Comparison of At-Risk and Non-At-Risk Perceptions of Desired Classroom Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desired Classroom Elements</th>
<th>At-risk students</th>
<th>Non-at-risk students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning/cognitive practices</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher relations</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Evidence of Success

The fourth component, evidence of success, was measured by the testing of the hypothesis that differences between at-risk and non-at-risk students’ perceptions of necessary classroom components for success can be delineated. Both groups responded to the survey question, “What are the two most important pieces of evidence of your success at the end of the class?” Eight answers were given from which the respondents selected two.

Examination of Table 14 showed no dramatic differences between groups. Good grades were the number one indicator for both at-risk students (24.8%) and non-at-risk students (31.9%). The second most frequently cited success indicator was
understanding the material. At-risk students' comments accounted for 20.4% of the response while non-at-risk students' selection accounted for 30.4% of their response.

Table 14
Comparison of At-Risk and Non-At-Risk Perceptions of Evidence of Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of response</th>
<th>At-risk students</th>
<th>Non-at-risk students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good grades</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand material</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked by others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good attitude</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like subject</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like teacher</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked by teacher</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasing parents</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Summary

The results were grouped into four categories: (1) teacher-student interactions/nurturing, (2) promising practices, (3) desired classroom elements, and (4)
evidences of success. Alpha of .05 was used for the purpose of rejecting the null hypothesis.

The focus group interview scripts were content analyzed to make comparisons on teacher-student interaction/nurturing and on cognitive/learning practices. The comparisons made on teacher-student interaction/nurturing were made through the use of t tests for independent means. Cognitive/learning practices, desired classroom elements and evidences of success were each examined for differences. The comparisons were as follows:

Hypothesis 1: A difference between at-risk and non-at-risk students' perception of the teacher liking the student was found. At-risk students perceived that the teacher liking the student was important to a greater extent than non-at-risk students perceived.

Hypothesis 2: No difference between at-risk and non-at-risk students' perceptions of teachers having time for them was found.

Hypothesis 3: No difference between at-risk and non-at-risk students' perceptions of being cared for through positive practices was found.

Hypothesis 4: A difference between at-risk and non-at-risk students' perceptions on promising practices was found. In the practices of mastery learning, doing school, expectations, success, progress, cooperative learning, problem solving, and conflict management differences could be noted. Only experiential learning did not provide evidence for differences. In general, at-risk students' perceptions centered on interactive, being components and non-at-risk students' perceptions centered on effort.
and learning components.

Hypothesis 5: A difference between at-risk and non-at-risk students' perceptions of necessary classroom components for success was supported. Comparing percentages of cognitive/learning, teacher relations and other, at-risk students cited teacher relations more frequently than did non-at-risk students and conversely, non-at-risk students cited cognitive/learning practices more frequently than did at-risk students.

Hypothesis 6: Differences were not found between at-risk and non-at-risk students' perceptions of evidences of success. Both at-risk and non-at-risk students identified good grades and understanding material as their two most important evidences. Both shared the least valued evidence of success, a good attitude.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V contains a discussion of the study and its findings. The chapter is organized into purpose of the study, questions and findings, conclusions, implications for schools, and recommendations for future research.

Review of the Study

The number of at-risk students is increasing yearly. Not graduating this population spells serious problems for the student personally and for the nation economically. Research studies have identified characteristics of at-risk students. Special programming has been developed to address the characteristics of the at-risk student, yet the numbers of at-risk students continue to increase. Schools continue to examine what fails to connect the school and the at-risk student. Increasingly research and school reform are pointing to student-centered programming and interaction as potential keys to connections.

The fit of school and the at-risk student was the focus of this study. Drawing from literature on characteristics of the at-risk students, their family environment, promising teaching practices across programming, and teacher/student relations were synthesized. At-risk students, through focus group interviews, provided their perspectives on these practices, and teacher-student relations as they identified
necessary ingredients for their successful continuance in school. The purposes of the
study were: (a) to gain insight into teacher-student interactions/nurturing from at-risk
students' perspectives, (b) to delineate what practices were present within a classroom
setting which were seen as positive by at-risk students, (c) to identify what pieces
must be present in a classroom for at-risk students to perceive opportunities for
success, thus hope, and (d) to select evidences of success.

Those purposes were restated in four questions:

1. Will at-risk students' perceptions of teacher-student interactions differ from
   non-at-risk students' perceptions?

2. Will at-risk students' perceptions of promising practices differ from non-at-
   risk student's perceptions?

3. Will at-risk students' perceptions of necessary classroom components for
   success differ from non-at-risk students' perceptions?

4. Will at-risk students' evidences of success differ from that of non-at-risk
   students?

Summary of Findings

Question 1: Perceptions of Teacher-Student Interactions

Will at-risk students' perceptions of teacher-student interactions differ from
non-at-risk students' perceptions?

Combining the alienation cited by researchers as the descriptor used by drop-
outs as the reason for leaving, the consistency of family factors in identifying at-risk
students and Zielke's (1990) citation of the student's need for "attending to" the dimension of nurturing through teacher-student relations was examined. The literature reflected three facets, that is, liking, having time for and positive practices connoting caring, which were measured by the first three hypothesis. Those three facets were delineated in the content analysis as: (1) liking me is meeting the student's being needs, (2) having time for me is citing the reference to time, and (3) having positive practices is providing appropriate support for the student doing the work. A series of questions in the focus group interview asked students to reflect on how teachers communicated liking to them, on how teachers gave time to them, and on how teachers helped students feel successful. Only the hypothesis testing the teacher liking me was supported.

The differences between at-risk students' and non-at-risk students' percepts centered on the teacher liking me. At-risk students identified they needed to be liked by the teacher in order to exert effort. This perception affected learning in two ways. The teacher's liking the student was intertwined with learning the subject. When the student perceived he or she was liked by the teacher, he or she enjoyed the subject more, spent more time engaged in learning the subject and perceived he or she could more successfully comprehend the subject. When the student perceived he or she was liked by the teacher, he or she felt more positive about others in the class and was more eager to interact, to question and to exchange ideas with fellow students.

At-risk students identified they needed to be liked by teachers in order to feel valued as persons. They needed to be acknowledged as individuals, greeted with a
smile, recognized outside of class, and queried sensitively about their personal lives. They enjoyed teachers exchanging personal information, chatting about common interests, caring about their personal problems, and humorously interacting with them.

At-risk students differed from non-at-risk students in their response to their perception of not being liked. At-risk students explained that if the teacher didn’t like them, then they felt discouraged because they couldn’t do anything to change the teacher’s opinions. They gave up; they tuned out; they skipped class. As one student softly replied, “If the teacher doesn’t like me, I might as well stay home.” The frequency of such comments from at-risk students implied that students carried rejection baggage and weren’t surprised when they found another teacher from whom they could claim more.

Non-at-risk students, while acknowledging their desire for teachers to like them, were more fluent on issues like teachers’ respect for student’s learning abilities, teachers’ abilities to connect the student and the subject and teachers’ commitment or preparation and teaching. The non-at-risk students noted they had it in them to succeed whether the teacher liked them or not; they had parents who expected them to be successful; and they were goal oriented, which reduced their perception of their success tied to the teacher liking them. While non-at-risk students appeared cognizant of one-on-one attention, outside of class recognition and nonverbals, the value placed on those pieces was much less than that from at-risk students. With some frequency, criticism was leveled against teachers who became too personal, too chatty, and too questioning about personal problems.
Given the differences between at-risk and non-at-risk students' perceptions, the question that follows this question is: What does it mean to be liked from the at-risk students' perspective? What does that look and feel like? Quotes from favorite classrooms and least favorite classrooms provide clues:

**Favorite Classroom Comments**

"Even though I screwed up, she still stuck by me."

"When the teacher is nice to me, I feel like I want to go to school."

"The teacher comes to me and talks with me about my family or my work."

"Teachers who like kids try to keep everybody going—when students aren't paying attention, he comes over and says, 'I want you to be successful' and then works at helping us."

"When I cried 'cause I was so frustrated, the teacher kept telling me I could do it—she stuck by me."

"Teachers talk with kids they like in 'down' time."

"When teachers treat me like I'm somebody, then I do better in school."

"When the teacher trusted me and we became friends, I wanted to please the teacher and have her like me more."

"The teacher treats me like a human being, like somebody, not like a robot."

"The teacher makes me feel valued—I put myself down and the teacher said, 'You can do it: you're still OK as a person.'"

"After I finished his class, he still remembered my name and said 'Hi.'"
“The teacher was like family.”

“The teacher let me do special tasks like running errands and demonstrating an activity.”

“The teacher wasn’t out to make me look stupid.”

“The teacher smiles at me, wants to know my ideas, doesn’t blow off my questions, doesn’t make racial slurs.”

“The teacher talks slower and softer to me which makes me feel like she likes me.”

Being liked from the at-risk student’s perspective reflects smiling at, attending to, talking with, not giving up on, and being interactively engaged. No major earth-shaking qualities here, when one thinks about necessary classroom climate for successful learning, yet Matthews (1991) noted in a study of 20 classrooms that at-risk students received one-third of the praise from teachers, were 7 times more likely to receive criticism and were ignored 7 times to 1 when compared to non-at-risk students. At-risk students were approached by the teacher half as often as non-at-risk students.

Those statistics are reflected in at-risk students’ comments in describing their least favorite classroom.

**Least Favorite Classroom Comments**

“The teacher never says ‘Hi’ to me. I walk into class, sit in the back of the room, stare out the window and nobody notices.”
"When the teacher doesn't like the group, then you feel like you're nothing."

"The teacher yells at me and accuses me of not paying attention."

"The teacher says, 'You'll be a druglord when you grow up.'"

"The teacher is always suspicious—like I can't do the work or I'm going to do something wrong."

"Why go to class where I'm gonna feel worthless; I don’t want to be insulted! I want to be happy."

"The teacher looks at me like I don't exist—right through me."

"The teacher tells me my grade in front of the class so everybody knows how dumb I am."

"The teacher was meaner to some kids than to me—but I was afraid to ask questions."

"The teacher never said anything to me."

Those negative comments reflect the continuum of students' reactions within the at-risk group interviewed. Some students became agitated when they shared how the teachers didn't like them. Some students expressed longing for teachers to like them. Some students reflected their hurt-filled rage when citing an embarrassing classroom incident. Some students sat passively, reflecting no feeling.

One at-risk focus group concluded that if the teacher likes me, will help me, and is OK as a human being, I can learn. The teachers' attitude, that is, readiness to help, is the key. "Respect and value me; I'll respect and value you." Another group concluded that the reason they didn't like school or thought about dropping out was
that nobody cared. "You don’t come up with wanting to leave on your own—you’re given the impression that you’re not valued." As one at-risk student said, "If I know the teacher likes me, then everything else falls into place."

The consistent focus of each at-risk group was on the teacher-student interaction/nurturing. The teacher needed to like the student, needed to demonstrate that liking through personal nonverbal or verbal comments and needed to be there for them consistently. Believing in the student, attending to the student, and being sensitive to the student were affirmed as necessary by the at-risk students. Examining these views in light of the family component as cited by Pollack and Bempechat (1989) and at-risk characteristics, as cited by Ekstrom et al. (1987) and Seeman (1975), the need for nurturing is identifiable from the at-risk students’ perspective and requires teachers and school personnel’s valid attention and action.

Question 2: Perceptions of Promising Practices

Will at-risk students’ perceptions of promising practices differ from non-at-risk students’ perceptions? Promising practices were extracted from research and experts’ reviews as effective in teaching at-risk students. Those practices were discussed in focus group interviews, then students’ responses were analyzed and summarized. Differences and commonalities between at-risk and non-at-risk students resulted. Conclusions about each practice and its value to at-risk students follow.
Mastery Learning

Few students in either group could respond to the term mastery learning, but all could identify components of step-by-step learning, determining gaps in learning with teaching to gaps, checking for understanding, teacher explanation time and practice time.

Differences between groups centered on assistance in content analysis, pacing, and degree of dependence on teacher-student interaction. At-risk students benefitted from the step-by-step process within mastery learning. Explaining, questioning, modeling, guided practice, and reexplanation were beneficial in learning the material accurately with understanding. Teacher explanation of how to think about information was valued. The greater the concreteness of example and the more visual the process, the better for at-risk students which is supported by Doyle (1982) and Chipman and Segal (1985).

At-risk students preferred the pace of mastery learning to other teaching strategies for the teacher helped them learn and understand one step well before going on to another. At-risk students appreciated teachers who allowed them questioning time. Non-at-risk students criticized mastery learning when the teacher presented information too slowly, too step-by-step. They enjoyed faster paced learning unless the material was totally new and/or had a higher level of difficulty.

At-risk students identified more teacher assistance was necessary for them to adequately learn. They benefitted from the teacher determining what parts were important to know among all the stuff. They benefitted from the teacher's step-by-step
how-to-think about the information and appreciated teachers who worked one-to-one to verify they understood each step. Teacher attentiveness in watching them work, then identifying the area or piece of inaccuracy for reteaching was desired. Comparing new information to old information was helpful to students in seeing differences. At-risk students identified both teacher explanation and teacher time as vital to their success. Non-at-risk students identified more individual time alone as necessary for them to adequately learn. Think time or reflective time was identified throughout the interviews. Students benefitted from teachers showing logic patterns of content, then allowing students to play with content to test the pattern, to determine if they could understand the pattern, and to develop their own questions for further discussion. In Hunter’s (1982) terms, at-risk students preferred continued guided practice while non-at-risk students preferred independent practice.

At-risk students identified the absence of mastery learning components as being detrimental to their learning. The absence of content analysis and task analysis by the teacher created nondiscernible learning. Much note taking resulted in students trying to capture all the stuff, but learning was stymied because patterns of logic, important facts versus unimportant facts, and making meaning out of verbiage were not present. Unfortunately when class discussion was at a minimum or nonexistent, the second way of discernment, auditory analysis, was eliminated. When checking for understanding and teacher feedback were nonexistent, the third way of capturing the learning was absent, leaving at-risk students frustrated and discouraged.

At-risk students described a system which was like mastery learning, but
featured a preassessment which resulted in a series of worksheets being established as the student’s work. No feedback, no reteaching, and no teacher assistance were involved, thus students shut down in their learning. Teacher interaction, refocusing, and supportive feedback are essential.

**Doing School**

A constant, within both at-risk and non-at-risk students, was favorite teachers provide “how to do” helps and non-favorite teachers do not. Teachers make assumptions that students have acquired skills in how to do school was a generalized feeling among all students. All students appreciated teachers who were responsive to students’ need for assistance in how to do school because teachers’ styles differed, goals of classes differed, and content differed.

Differences between at-risk students and non-at-risk students reflected learning style differences. Both groups consistently identified examples as beneficial in seeing the meaning, in connecting with past experiences, in delineating differences between concepts. At-risk students praised teachers who refined examples time after time, so clarity of understanding evolved step-by-step. One student explained, “He says it’s like this, and like this and like this; that helps me!”

Written guides with teacher explanations and opportunities for clarifying questions were the most cited beneficial system. The guides served as models for future reference and the students added notes to make them clearer and more usable. Other systems noted were diagrams, graphs, visual representations and mnemonics.
The major difference between at-risk and non-at-risk students was the need for concretes versus patterns. At-risk students cited a process in which the teacher: (a) provides a written model, (b) demonstrates the model or gives multiple examples, (c) then the student does one or more activities using the model or the examples, (d) the teacher advises on appropriate/inappropriate thinking or processing, (e) then the student redoes, as being most beneficial. Students benefitted from the affirmation that they could do the system. Students could easily refer back to the process due to its experiential nature, that is, it set up a personal experience. As noted by Presley, Levin, and Ghatala (1988), learning how to do school assists students in perceiving they control their own fate which addresses their sense of powerlessness.

Additional helps on doing school included training in outlining, establishing vocabulary to know, repeating back orally, using multisensory explanations and modeling. Time for questions and clarifications was identified as necessary in all situations. At-risk students preferred manipulatives, concrete examples and step-by-step patterns.

Non-at-risk students benefitted from organizers, class outlines and logic patterns overview. Non-at-risk students preferred overviews and criterion for work with freedom to do and experiment.

**Expectations**

Differences between at-risk students and non-at-risk students focused on the message transmitted. At-risk students focused on ableness and willingness to achieve
to meet expectations if the teacher allowed the student to try again, pressured “just right” (based on personal judgment), and provided evidence that the student was meeting the goals. Support and affirmation were foundations for meeting expectations, agreeing with Bar-Tal’s (1978) findings. The elusive explanation dealt with “pressured just right.” For some at-risk students, “just right” meant balancing “you can” orally with backing off when the student was managing on his or her own. For others, the “just right” pressure was tied to task with more sensitive support needed when the task was complex or historically failure based. Teachers needed to be sensitive to the exasperation/frustration level within the student.

At-risk students used or implied the word authoritarian with frequency. When asked to describe the evidence, at-risk students struggled to articulate their feelings. Power control, “my way or the highway,” a tone of voice, a “feeling” were deterrents to striving to meet expectations. When teachers were perceived as putting them down or undermining their beings, then at-risk students gave up. In attempting to clarify the feeling, the common response was, “You just feel it! You can tell sometimes as early as the first day of class.”

Non-at-risk students cited teacher competency in content as a key to meeting expectations. When teachers knew content well, students could learn from teachers as they encouraged students to excel. Non-at-risk students preferred emphasis on content quality rather than quantity. This group also cited influential others’ expectations and/or internal motivation as impetuses for excelling. Parents were frequently mentioned as motivators.
Both groups of students were very clear on what they needed: (a) clearly delineated guidelines given up front with criteria; (b) procedures for earning points for homework, daily work, behavior; and (c) a supportive climate where the teacher says and shows “I believe in you.” Teacher excitement evidenced through teaching and teacher energy evidenced by continued nonflagging support were necessary ingredients for success for both groups. High expectations with perceived teacher caring and support were acceptable and necessary for student learning.

Unclear, ill-defined, or nonexistent expectations frustrated both groups. Structure and standards were perceived as helpful in guiding learning, in setting parameters, and in knowing when one had met the goal. Realistic was the standard needed as both groups complained of perfection and 100% accuracy as defeating. A judging attitude on the part of the teacher was negative for both groups for different reasons. At-risk students described teacher judging as devaluing, questioning if I'm valuable as a person. Non-at-risk students described judging as questioning my ability to achieve. Neither group preferred rigid, inflexible teachers.

Success

Differences between at-risk students and non-at-risk students cited being needs versus learning needs. At-risk students noted listening time inside and outside the classroom as helpful to their success. Teacher empathy to their lives, their stressors, and their schedules helped them feel they were supported in their efforts. The teacher's sensitivity to their appropriate learning pace, their struggles with learning
and lack of success empowered students to risk and try again.

At-risk students needed teachers to encourage both their learning and their persons. When students were discouraged with learning or continuing to attend school, they wanted teachers to encourage them verbally, to empathize with their situations, and to support them in their trying again.

At-risk students described put downs, embarrassing comments, "you should know" attitudes, and low tolerances for question asking as barriers which they couldn't overcome. More attuned to nonverbal cues, at-risk students described feelings of devaluing by inattentive teachers and by intolerant and insensitive teachers. A few students reported they never talked to teachers nor teachers to them. Those students described a lack of success and no hope.

Non-at-risk students appreciated opportunities for creativity, leadership, and safety in learning, that is, no trick questions and trust building. Preparedness of teacher and expressed concern undergirded their success opportunities.

Using varied strategies to communicate the learning was the most frequently cited benefit to both groups. Games, puzzles, debates, completing graphs, acting out math problems, using novel approaches to old learning, and being enthusiastic about learning were examples that helped students be successful. Healthy competition, incentives, and interactive learning environments energized students. Giving choices on learning options, learning in groups or learning alone, were empowering and valuing to students. Appropriately leveled vocabulary was cited in every interview as a key to success. Demonstrating evidence that the learning would be helpful in the
real world helped students see purpose in the learning and intensified their efforts. Reteaching at any time and in any manner to help the student succeed was appreciated. The main thrust to success was question asking opportunities. Teachers who encouraged question asking, who took time to process questions and who used questioning as a teaching tool were described as providing the greatest opportunity for success. When teachers evidenced they cared about the students' success through giving time, pacing the learning appropriately, matching presentation to learning style and frequent praise, then success seemed reachable.

**Progress—Formative Feedback**

Differences between at-risk students and non-at-risk students were less easily defined. The at-risk student required more frequency of praise or progress, more sensitive delivery, and more genuineness. Cognizant of their own personal feelings when not receiving praise or progress cues, at-risk students noted the appropriateness of private praise when public praise could not be given to each student or to all students. Realistic progress and praise were essential to the teachers' believability.

At-risk students cited nonverbal cues like smiles or winks as encouraging and helping them feel they were doing well. Notes to parents were helpful. Non-at-risk students appreciated feedback that noted their effort, that was frequent and was delivered in the style that matched the students' need.

Compliments and "good job" spoken or written on papers were beneficial to knowing progress. Agreeing with Epstein (1987) and Bloom (1980), both at-risk and
non-at-risk students benefitted from realistic feedback featuring positives and areas for improvement which were followed up with strategies on how to improve. Continuous progress and assessibility to grades aided in tracking success.

Both public and private praise were beneficial to both groups. Reasons varied with at-risk students citing public praise’s value as embarrassing but pride producing and good feeling producing. Non-at-risk students noted that public praise built morale and self esteem. Private praise was the preferred mode, due to less embarrassing to others not receiving praise, less likely to produce goody-goody or nerd feelings, and most importantly, provided interactive opportunity for specificity in both correct and incorrect components.

The absence of feedback, the absence of positive feedback and the presence of sarcastic praise topped the nonbeneficial elements for both groups. Not knowing progress or being uncertain about the teacher’s meaning reduced students’ eagerness and effort. No provision for making up assignments or improving grades was defeating to both groups.

Cooperative Learning

At-risk students cited the social benefits of cooperative learning more frequently than did non-at-risk students, which supports Johnson & Johnson’s (1990) observation. Cooperative learning encouraged new friendships and forced students to socialize with others with whom they usually didn’t converse. Non-at-risk groups benefitted from the task centered groups, the jig-sawing of tasks, and the group
reasoning. Both groups saw benefits in practicing and reviewing information.

At-risk students benefitted from the discussions generated in cooperative learning teams, the opportunity to ask questions and check understanding and the advantages of learning from peers who use common language and reason similarly. At-risk students could check their reasoning against others to verify its quality. Being grouped provided the teacher with time to circulate and check with each group, which aided progress and opportunity to question. Students consistently cited use of learning from peers and the interactive mode as producing greater understanding and functionality of learning.

Continuous whole group learning was not beneficial to either group, thus cooperative learning groups provided a variance that allowed for interactive learning. The interactive nature was viewed as risky and uncomfortable by some at-risk students. Exposure in a small group risked “seeing how dumb I am, then telling others or starting rumors.” Interaction meant having to risk working with students not known or not liked. Interaction meant working with students who “know more or less than me” which was uncomfortable.

The knowledge base was raised as a potential detriment by both groups. One student having greater knowledge could be slowed by the group; one student not “getting it” while all the others did could be discouraged; no students “getting it” could lead to wasted time, time off task, and frustration.

Cooperative learning was viewed as beneficial for most tasks, but matching the process to the task, as noted by Kagan (1990), was considered necessary by some.
non-at-risk students. As an example, brainstorming was best generated in larger groups, while defining consequences of choices was best generated in small groups.

**Problem Solving**

Fifty percent of the groups could not respond to this concept due to the lack of knowledge or absence of use. Among the students who did respond, problem solving was viewed as a positive tool for present and future use. Differences between the two status groups centered on the setting, the pattern, and the process. At-risk students benefitted from practicing problem solving in the school setting. Alternative education students interviewed were trained in the model, used it on a weekly, formalized basis and reported the intentional use of the model helped them solve their real problems. Opportunities for sharing personal problems in problem-solving groups gave them support and increased the likelihood that action plans would be implemented. That perception, defined by Glasser (1988), provided the student with the sense of self-control.

At-risk students valued talking aloud the process, for processing aloud aided their learning of the steps of the model, aided their understanding of others’ perspectives, and aided them in “hearing” their own views. Some at-risk students noted that sharing of persons through the problem solving process increased feelings of bonding and appreciation for others’ hurts.

All students agreed that the problem-solving model was beneficial in dealing with conflicts of behavior or ideas in classrooms. Working through the conflict with
the problem-solving structure gave everyone a procedure to follow which reduced tensions. Both groups benefited from the talking aloud process. They could gain ideas, perspectives, and strategies on how to solve problems by listening to others’ thinking. They perceived less continual friction resulted when conflict was handled using this process.

One focus group of non-at-risk students saw the value in teaching analysis skills more than problem-solving skills. Analyzing the problem or ideas in general was a more necessary skill for them, since they “caught” problem-solving skills in the home.

**Conflict Management**

Two conflict producing scenarios were used in the interviews to gain feedback: (1) two students shoving/punching in the hallways and bringing their behaviors into the classroom, (2) idea discussion in classroom which “heats up”; tension building and name calling result.

In each scenario, both groups benefited from a calm teacher listening to what was happening and advising on personal control. Respect, diplomatic efforts, and kindness were ingredients that helped reduce tension. When teachers used the situation as a teachable moment, students benefited. Using the problem-solving model, the teacher reset the situation, involved the class in analyzing the problem, and proceeded through the model. All students needed logic oriented discussions, not personality or fault-finding oriented discussions. All students noted student affirming climates, which
were maintained throughout the year, limited the number of classroom conflicts and managed the tension when conflicts did arise.

Few differences were noted between groups in discussing conflict management. At-risk students consistently mentioned affirming climate as a key to dealing with conflict. Being provided the opportunity to talk through conflict helped them calm down and reach closure. Humor to reduce tension helped; respecting others’ opinions helped; and others (including teachers) apologizing, if wrong, helped. More emphasis on feeling positive during and after the conflict was the delineation.

Non-at-risk students benefitted from knowing consequences of behavior beforehand. They cited structure in resolution helped with examples of minitrials, negotiation teams, and debate formats. In the adversarial scenario, having to find more information on one’s opinion, writing out rationale, writing pros and cons on the board, and discussing the issues were helpful. Again, logic was the key.

Handling conflict negatively provided much discussion within groups. All students agreed that sending to the office or allowing no discussion of issues were frustrating and nonresolving. They expressed anger with being judged without discussion and with being embarrassed publicly through drawing greater attention publicly to the issue, fault finding, put downs, and ridicule. Showing no respect for persons or ideas was self-defeating.

At-risk students cited carrying grudges, being called “dumb” and detention without talking as the most detrimental actions. Non-at-risk students noted being told to sit down and shut up, empty threats discipline, and ignoring conflict as detrimental.
for them.

**Experiential**

Minimal differences between groups were noted. At-risk students tended to prefer more concrete activities with specific learnings than did non-at-risk students. All students agreed that experiential learning was beneficial. When the learning paralleled the real world or clarified the constructs, greater learning occurred. Projects using experiments, working with first-hand research or environmental studies were examples given. Working in the real world through community service or outdoor education helped provide new perspectives. Classroom activities cited included simulations, role playing, math manipulatives, banking, and holding court.

In general, non-at-risk students cited activities that allowed both deductive and inductive reasoning helped their learning and interest. At-risk students expressed pleasure in the fun that experiential learning provided, for the learning was relevant to their lives, active (you moved around), and results in learning were seeable and doable.

Summarizing the promising practices, at-risk students preferred interactive learning where opportunities for questions, sharing of ideas, and social skills could be used. Cooperative learning was seen as beneficial for it met the need for interaction and learning from peers. Problem-solving was viewed positively for it provided opportunity for sharing aloud, reducing conflict, and working in groups. Doing school was most helpful when students worked together on models, patterns, and
multisensory projects. Experiential learning was the preferred learning style for it was multisensory, active, interactive, and relevant.

Relevance of learning was necessary for success as students could connect the new learning with the now or real life. Problem solving was viewed as practical and immediately useable. Teachers who used real life problems in teaching problem solving helped at-risk students see the model for transfer to their problems.

Student supportive climate was the undergirding requisite for successful learning practices. Working examples until the student understood, repeating directions, and showing patterns were teacher actions viewed as supportive. Expectations were most helpful when the teacher was affirming rather than judging. Mastery learning was beneficial when the teacher continued to monitor the student, to check for understanding, to miniteach when understanding was not present.

Non-at-risk students found promising practices to be beneficial but for different reasons. Doing school was helpful to set guidelines and patterns, but students appreciated being provided with time to think, to try on their own. Mastery learning was helpful for whole/part learning and establishing logic patterns. Expectations were beneficial when teacher competency was present, when content quality versus quantity was the goal and when teachers were positive and not questioning the students' ability to achieve. Success contributed to leadership, to trust building and creativity. Conflict management was helpful learning when logic and consequences of behavior were known in advance.

Comparing the benefits of promising practices between the at-risk and non-at-
risk groups underscores the at-risk students' perception of student supportive learning versus self-initiated learning. At-risk students preferred interactive, teacher-directed learning. At-risk students preferred learning that was undergirded with teacher attending to.

**Question 3: Perceptions of Necessary Classroom Components**

Will at-risk student's perceptions of necessary classroom components for success differ from non-at-risk students perceptions?

The responses to this question were unstructured and uncued. Students responded to the survey question requesting additives that they wanted in the classroom. In comparison, both at-risk and non-at-risk students noted learning practices and teacher-student interaction. The percentage of responses on teacher-student relations was greater in the at-risk group than the non-at-risk group. Responses were organized by learning practices, teacher-student interaction, and other.

At-risk students differed from non-at-risk students on six main areas: (1) knowing before moving on to new content, (2) activity based learning, (3) opportunities for success, (4) incentives, (5) teacher enthusiasm for learning, and (6) encouragement/empathy.

A consistently named component for success was knowing the material before moving on to new material. At-risk students needed teachers to check for understanding, to verify that the learning was complete before introducing new material. Supporting this component were requests for one-on-one teaching, patience,
and step-by-step teaching.

"My favorite teacher doesn’t move on until I understand" was a common statement of at-risk students. Pace of learning was implied, but also implied was the teacher’s sensitivity to the student’s need to understand. One at-risk group commended a teacher for she always looked at each student before moving on to new material. Every student had an opportunity to ask more questions if needed. Having the opportunity presented itself as a component of hope, a crucial dimension for the at-risk student.

Another facet of this piece related to the teacher’s hooking the pieces together so the student could internalize the learning. When teachers didn’t spend time hooking the pieces, students understood for the moment but later, when reviewing or readying for a test, the connections were gone. Students became frustrated.

Activity based learning was more frequently cited by at-risk students than non-at-risk students. Games, role playing, simulations, experiments, and interactive learning were agreed upon components for success.

Games were cited by at-risk students as hands-on, fun, interactive, and entertaining. Games “didn’t feel like school,” yet many at-risk students referenced specific games that had taught them lasting concepts.

Opportunities for success included demonstrations with immediate practice, cooperative learning groups where all students could share responsibility and reward, and activities that rewarded recall, physical activity, and manipulatives. At-risk students needed these components built into daily or weekly modules to assure their...
equal opportunity to do well, to assure their equal opportunity for hopefulness.

Incentives were noted by several at-risk groups as a helpful additive for success. Money was the first response, but free time or time with friends or extra credit points were the consistently named incentives.

Teacher enthusiasm for learning influencing student interest and energy was cited by 6 out of 10 groups of at-risk students. Teachers who were enthused about their subject matter, taught it with humor and activity, and demonstrated its value to students' worlds, were more likely to be perceived as successful imparters of knowledge and contagious conveyers of involvement.

At-risk students needed teachers to encourage both their learning and their persons. When students were discouraged with learning or continuing to attend school, they wanted teachers to encourage them verbally, to empathize with their situations, and to support them in their trying again.

Common components for success for both at-risk and non-at-risk students included relevancy of learning to life, cooperative learning, variety of teaching strategies, checking for understanding, progress reporting, and positive teacher-student interactions.

Non-at-risk students identified their necessary components for success as variety in content and approaches, teacher expectations clearly presented, respect, and teacher effort in communicating ideas and verifying students' engagements.

Non-at-risk students consistently described variety in teaching strategies as a key. Teachers' attentiveness to students' learning styles, to their matching content with
presentation style, and to the logic of their presentation were factors that made a difference.

Teacher expectations clearly stated up front and then used as guidelines for success were appreciated. Non-at-risk students believed they could be successful if consistency, clarity, and commitment were established. Respect for students' abilities to learn, respect for students' need to know and question, and respect for students' rights to form their own opinions were basic to all non-at-risk interviews.

Teachers' efforts were often mentioned. Favorite teachers knew their content, believed the content had value to each student, and worked to connect the student and the knowledge. Teachers took pride in themselves, their knowledge, and their students. Teachers presented concepts in multiple ways to engage their students personally in the learnings. Non-at-risk students enjoyed ideating, discussing differing views, and being creative in critical thinking.

Within the teacher-student interaction domain, both groups identified the teacher liking them as a necessary ingredient. Non-at-risk students required encouragement and respect for their abilities and efforts. At-risk students needed teachers to share time with them, to help students feel secure, to care about what students thought, and to respect them. The major difference between at-risk and non-at-risk students in this domain was the quality of relationship. At-risk students identified more being needs, that is, security, time, and caring than did non-at-risk students.

In analyzing the groupings within the responses, at-risk students noted qualities
of relationship like personal sharing, feels like a family, nice, understanding, human, patient, understanding, and having eye contact. These characteristics reflected the personal involvement of teacher and student. Several at-risk students cited favorite teachers who asked about the students' families, who shared in family crisis, and who evidenced empathy when the student cried or sought help.

At-risk students in alternative education described the absence of these qualities in their description of authoritarian teachers. Students indicated they could size up a teacher quickly by the teacher's judging tone. Students looked for cues that teachers liked them and accepted them for who they were. Smiles, eye contact, humor, not walking away or getting busy when they approached, and listening to their questions or concerns were cues cited.

In the category of other, both groups desired fun and learning styles compatibility. At-risk students desired the opportunity to be themselves, to experience the teacher's pleasant tones, to have incentives, and to have fun. Non-at-risk students focused on classroom management, organization, novelty and challenging content, and teaching. At-risk students raised the relational or being facets more frequently while the non-at-risk raised cognitive or structure facets more frequently.

**Question 4: Evidences of Success**

Will at-risk students' evidences of success differ from that of non-at-risk students?

Students responded to a survey question which requested students to select two
of eight evidences of success. No differences between groups were supported. Both at-risk and non-at-risk students selected getting good grades and understanding the material as the most important evidences of success. When percentages of response were grouped by cognitive (good grades, understanding material, and like subject) and by relational (liked by others, like teacher, liked by teacher, and pleasing parents), at-risk students summed percentages in the relational domain were 64.7% as compared to non-at-risk students' summed percentages of 35.5%. At-risk students' summed percentages in the cognitive domain were 42.9% compared to non-at-risk summed percentages of 57.1%. Based on the summed data, at-risk students identified relational evidences more frequently than did at-risk students.

Conclusions

The overriding question of this study was what is the “fit of school and Me.” Uniting all the questions’ findings resulted in conclusions that can be drawn about at-risk students and their perspectives on practices and needs for school success.

1. At-risk students in this study perceived successful school experience through relational or affective focuses more frequently than did non-at-risk students.

From the hypothesis of teachers liking me to the necessary classroom components, at-risk students identified caring, attending to and personal involvement with the teacher as necessary for their school success. As predicted by Williams (1981), Wiltrout (1992), and Brandt (1988), issues of valuing, equity, helping, and personal involvement were described across all at-risk focus groups. Favorite
classrooms were those where teachers treated the students like family, where teachers asked about their learning and personal concerns, where teachers smiled at them, where teachers remembered them after their classes were finished, or where teachers spoke to them outside of class. Favorite classrooms were those where teachers stuck by students, supported students even when they failed, and took the extra time to affirm student's understanding. Favorite classrooms were those where teachers didn't embarrass, ridicule, or put down students. As one at-risk student said, "If I know the teacher likes me, then everything else falls into place."

In the practices reviewed, the affective focus was related to expectations, success, and cooperative learning. Realistic expectations undergirded by the teacher with "I believe you can do" led to greater success. Success was filled with the teacher's personal attention to progress or to praise specifically created for the at-risk student. Cooperative learning provided the learning arena for personal and social relationships with other students in the class.

Non-at-risk focus groups described their favorite classrooms as those where teachers respected their abilities, their efforts, and their ideas. Non-at-risk focus groups drew conclusions about teacher preparedness and effort interacting with their success. Student efforts and positive attitudes led to success. Teachers who knew their content well, were willing to connect kids and learning, and demonstrated effort assisted students in being successful. One non-at-risk group concluded that even when discouraged, there was "something inside of me that says I can do, I will do." Goal orientation, self-initiation, raised to do my best, and supportive parents were
supporting factors. Non-at-risk students appeared to need fewer affective supports than did at-risk students because they had gained confidence through attending to in the home and in earlier years.

Implied in this comparison of at-risk and non-at-risk students is the framework of self-esteem development as noted by Ekstrom et al. (1987) and Smey-Richman (1991). Non-at-risk students evidenced more confidence in their beings, thus their emphasis was on their effort. At-risk students evidenced less confidence in their beings, thus their emphasis was on relational components. As Higgins (1988) noted, at-risk students need additional incentives to stay in school. A major incentive is personal recognition and attending to by school personnel.

2. At-risk students benefitted from teacher-directed learning.

The frequency of teacher explaining directions, teacher prioritizing learning, teacher comparing and contrasting old and new information, and teacher moving step-by-step through the logic of the construct were interspersed throughout the at-risk interviews. At-risk students' favorite classrooms provided consistent teacher led learning at a teacher-sensitive-to-my-needs pace. Teacher contact time for question answering and for checking for understanding were essential ingredients. One benefit of cooperative learning was that teacher availability was greater because he or she could move among 4 or 5 groups rather than 20 to 25 individual students.

A consistent finding across all at-risk interviews was the need for verification that the student knew the material before new material was introduced. Checking for understanding, analyzing gaps in learning and reteaching, using interesting and
inventive ways to demonstrate learning were strategies that proved beneficial. Pace of learning was part of the picture, for when the material and learning activities went too fast, the internalization didn’t occur. But, as important, was the using of the information in varied ways, so that both the teacher knew the student knew and the student knew he or she “had it.”

While both groups preferred varied activities and teaching strategies in the classroom, non-at-risk students viewed classrooms in light of task. If the materials were better presented by lecture, they appreciated lecture. If the material was better presented through group process, they appreciated that method. However, if the learning could better be learned individually versus group activity, then they resented group interaction. Their need was to have the material presented so they could learn it and produce or provide evidence of their learning.

Implied in this comparison is that both groups wanted to receive the materials in the manner most helpful to them. Non-at-risk students preferred content/teaching strategy coherence, that is, does the teaching strategy appropriately present the content so I can learn? At-risk students preferred content/engagement coherence, that is, does the teacher and/or teaching strategy involve, engage and support me in learning the content?

3. At-risk students need processing time and strategies for processing.

At-risk students benefitted from models that taught them how to think about the issues. Step-by-step models helped them accurately do the work, but also established a pattern that they could reuse in working with comparable content.
Comparisons being drawn between models helped them see likenesses and differences. Thinking aloud about how to think through the model or watching a demonstration, then having the process talked through again, helped. Practice time at doing the model helped cement the learning. Talking aloud the process while practicing the process provided windows for rethinking the process or modifying their performance if necessary.

Problem solving was a model that they could use in dealing with their lives' problems. The more they used the pattern, the greater was their use of and appreciation for the model.

At-risk students benefitted from interaction with students in cooperative learning groups because they interacted with students with whom they might never exchange ideas within other settings. Listening to how other people think helped them understand others' perspectives and helped them figure out their own reasoning. Listening to how other people think helped them see how to take apart ideas for analysis. Cooperative learning or group discussions provided opportunities to check one's validity on ideas and feelings.

Non-at-risk students benefitted from overviews and holistic models. They appreciated seeing the big picture, identifying patterns, then being allowed to work through it on their own. Opportunities for creative expression were desired. Critical thinking strategies were preferred to problem solving.

Comparing these groups points out the differences in learning strategies already internalized. Non-at-risk students have built a structure for learning developed
in the home and school, while at-risk students need the continued development of this structure. Non-at-risk students described receiving validation in their homes. At-risk students looked to schools to provide learning and thinking validation.

4. At-risk students benefit from experiential and multisensory learning.

All at-risk students cited games, role-playing and simulations as helpful in internalizing learning. They learned by doing. They learned by creating meaning. Students could identify learnings from specific grades as they energetically described projects reflecting real-life experiences and hands-on learning. Games such as jeopardy, vocabulary bingo, and concentration were identified as helpful and fun.

Role plays, dramatizations, and simulations provided multisensory approaches to learning. Students learned about others’ feelings and perspectives while increasing awareness of their own feelings and perspectives.

An unanticipated ingredient for successful learning across all at-risk groups was the use of colored chalk. Students explained that the use of color helped them remember categories and differentiations between ideas. They could visualize the colored chalk images on the blackboard later as they reviewed.

While multisensory activities were helpful, overuse of movies and videos were not beneficial. Low interest movies, old movies, and lecturing videos reduced interest and attentiveness. Teacher cueing on what to look for in a video or setting up a puzzle to solve through watching for cues in the video increased interest and engagement.

Non-at-risk students benefitted from experiential learning. They preferred labs, demonstrations which they could recreate, and creative activities where they could put
their ideas to use.

5. At-risk students benefit from promising practices that are relevant to their world.

Students cited irrelevancy of learning materials and assignments as a turn-off to staying on task. Unless the teacher could help them understand how the learning would benefit them now or in the future, they struggled to do homework or to stay attentive in class. When they could see relevancy, the learning was easier and came more naturally.

Problem-solving was viewed as beneficial especially when real-life problems were used. Students could learn how to take apart problems, so they could focus on the root of the problem. Thinking aloud about consequences and what-ifs helped them consider new angles. Problem-solving connected teacher and student in the real world. Students noted they thought teachers understood kids’ problems better through problem-solving. Teachers’ understanding of the students’ world increased students’ ability to risk sharing their real problems.

Conflict management benefitted students as they watched teachers handle conflict and talk it through. What teachers said to calm kids or to refocus the issue from anger to reasoning was beneficial.

Non-at-risk students were more likely to learn material that might not have immediate use. General knowledge for college, broadness of knowledge for use in unknown careers, the joy of learning or the challenge of learning were acceptable reasons. Non-at-risk students cited family members or acquaintances’ validation of the
value of learning, so they “knew” it would be helpful later.

6. At-risk students want to succeed, but they need support to do it.

Students need to be affirmed; they need to know teachers care; and they need verbal and nonverbal cues that teachers like them. That’s one piece. Students need one-on-one assistance; they need help with knowing how to do school; they need to be reassured that they can do it. That’s one piece. Students need private praise, specific praise and continuous praise when they try, when they succeed, when they fail. That’s one piece. All of these pieces unite to assist the at-risk student in believing he or she can succeed.

In one at-risk focus group, approximately 75% of the students were passive. Involving the passive students led to a description of the student’s day. Most arrived late, setting up first hour tardiness. The teacher’s reactions ranged from a negative comment to no response. Students sat in classes; no interaction with teacher or student occurred. Each class led to the next class with no change in interaction. Day followed day. The students reported they were waiting ’til age 16 when they could get on with something meaningful, a job. One student in the group ventured that one class was different. That comment opened the group to discussing what made that class special. All agreed the teacher’s smiles, seeing each student, saying “Hi” to each student, talking to each student in cooperative learning groups, and asking questions about each student’s thoughts were the differences. The teacher used human and real life experiences to engage students, “He made history seem real and relevant!”

The interviewer observed the body language of the students change as they
shared their opinions, looked at positives, and supported each other in agreed upon views. Downcast eyes gave way to looking directly at each other; leaned-back slumps gave way to leaning forward; nonchalance gave way to listening and nodding. Having a teacher like that in each class would make school more enjoyable, more fun and worthwhile was their conclusion. At-risk students want to succeed; they need teachers in their corners to support them.

At-risk students discussed teacher enthusiasm for teaching as both a stimulus to their learning and an encouragement to their staying in school. At-risk students’ perceived tone of teacher enthusiasm reflected a cheerleader on their side; one who smiled when achievement was gained, one who urged the student on, one who never gave up on the student.

Non-at-risk students discussed teacher’s preparedness and content knowledge, not teacher’s enthusiasm. The contrast between perceptions implies that at-risk students need school staff to play a more active role as supporter, cheerleader, advocate, and sharer of dreams.

7. At-risk students look to the same evidences of success as non-at-risk students.

At-risk students’ buy in to society’s standard, that good grades and understanding the content indicate success. Given this buy-in, at-risk students increase their vulnerability for success when the classroom climate, teaching practices and/or support systems are not as supportive as needed. If any combination of those ingredients per student need is missing, then the opportunity for success has been
diminished. At-risk students’ frequency of comment about needing the teacher to verify that the student understands the material before moving on gains greater meaning when examined against their indicators of success. A supportive teacher, opportunities to ask questions, confirmation of understanding, practice and processing opportunities affirm the student’s perception that he or she has a chance at success. When these components are missing, the student must rely on his/her own strategies to gain success. If the student has few strategies or weakly linked strategies, the opportunities to gain success falter.

8. No promising practice in and of itself had value unless it met student needs.

At-risk students described promising practices as beneficial when they supported students, when they increased connection between learning and the student, or when they created a model that students could reuse.

Cooperative learning provided an excellent example, for, in general, it was viewed as beneficial. However, when the need of preknowledge to do the task or clarity of the task was ill-designed or incomplete, the practice lost its benefit to at-risk students. Teachers needed to be sensitive to student groupings if conflict among students was inherent; teachers needed to verify that some of the group members had the requisite knowledge; and teachers needed to step-by-step the task so all students could follow.

Teachers needed to have analyzed the needs of the students and matched the practices to those needs to ensure the success of all students. At-risk students noted
"just right" pressure in expectations as an example of this view. They cited favorite classroom teachers as having that skill. Implied is that their favorite classroom teachers spent time and energy getting to know them, their learning preferences and their learning gaps, so that the expectations felt realistic, appropriate and doable to the student.

9. All findings on the "fit between school and Me" lead to the nurturing conclusion.

The first conclusion drawn noted the affective or relational focus of at-risk students. Conclusions 2 through 7 referenced the relationship between learning/cognitive and affective practices. Conclusion 8 noted the relationship of both to the specific need of each student. The focus on the student in the beginning comes full circle to the focus of the student in the end. The common connection is addressing each student's unique need for nurturing delivery.

Affective focus, interactive classrooms, teacher-directed learning, experiential learning, relevance, supportive success, success evidences of grades and content, positive relations, and promising practices that match student need all carry the nurturing component. All are student-centered. All are student sensitive. All require attending to components.

The at-risk student has related throughout the focus group interviews that school must address his or her being needs as well as his or her learning needs. His or her favorite classrooms are those where learning is verified in its connections to the learner, where learning is relevant and meaningful, and where learning is delivered
in a caring, interactive, validating way.

Zielke's (1990) model of “attending to” matches at-risk students’ verbalized perceptions. Students require school staff to be trustworthy, consistent in being there for them, warm and caring. Students need teachers to “attend to” them, to believe in them as persons, and to not give up on them. Students need teachers to be ready to continue their caring despite the student’s failures, the student’s inappropriate choices, or the student’s falling back to previous behaviors. At-risk students verbalized their need to be taught content and processing, but undergirding the whole experience was the desire and need to be nurtured.

Implications for Schools

Based on the pieces of the “fit of school and Me”, several implications for schools can be drawn within the arenas of systems, teacher training, teaching, measurements, and bottom lines.

1. Schools (staffs of all levels) need to become attuned to at-risk students’ worlds. Increased knowledge of their environments, their fears, and their survival skills may increase sensitivity that can lead to greater understanding and commitment to the needs of at-risk students. Schools need to provide awareness training led by experts and/or by school counselors.

2. School leadership needs to lead the way in making all learning student centered. In junior and senior high classrooms, content driven information giving and inflexible scheduling needs to refocus on connecting students with learning. School
leadership needs to model the caring relationship in undergirding staff in problem-solving, in affective delivery of learning and support in working with at-risk students.

3. Staff development needs to focus on meeting affective needs. How can education be humanized? What does caring look like? Feel like? How can teachers teach to the whole person? What does each teacher need affectively? What are teachers' struggles when students reject their reaching out? What are teachers' concerns about working with at-risk students?

4. Research on promising practices needs to be presented to staffs in a sensitive, caring, interactive way. Many teachers have had training in each of the practices, but modeling the delivery of the practices in a holistic way needs to demonstrate the overall effect on students, the value of intermeshing practices to meet student needs, and the benefit to the teachers' classrooms when practices facilitate learning for at-risk students.

5. All school staffs need to share successes in working with at-risk students. In a planned way, staffs need to positively reinforce each other and learn from each other's practices. Staffs need to share insights into why strategies worked and why and how the student was reached this time. Staffs need to task analyze strategies and peer coach to assist each other in comfort and success. Staffs need to celebrate!

6. Teachers need to adjust preteaching, teaching, and post teaching strategies to address at-risk students. Eliminate assumption making about students' previous knowledge by using preassessment techniques to determine gaps in learning; present information in a variety of ways including step-by-step, experiential, and group
interaction; parallel teaching how to do and how to think along with teaching content; provide continuous checking for understanding, reteaching, and checking again as integral parts of teaching.

7. Educators need to examine how to increase relevancy of learning for students through hands-on, experiential activities. Are there work-place connections that can elucidate the correlation of what students learn today with what students will be doing in the future? Can simulations be created within the classroom in team work, problem solving, and communication parameters to engage all students in understanding, analysis and synthesis?

8. A range of evidences of learning success need to be developed within content. Paper/pencil assessments need to be augmented by role playing, simulations in context, and demonstrations, that is, applications of learning in a relevant world setting. Frequent, specific praise to demonstrate progress toward learning goals will assist at-risk students in seeing hope.

9. All of the above could be implemented and still miss the at-risk student. In the final analysis, systems can change, delivery and strategies can be modified, but the teacher and the student must connect. Teachers must value students as persons, must like students, must be able to see beyond the outward appearance and behaviors to the potential within, and must demonstrate self-efficacy to influence students. The goal is a positive orientation to at-risk students. The bottom line is nurturing, attending to, and hard work with each student.
Recommendations for Further Research

1. This study needs to be replicated using different geographic areas and broader bases of at-risk students. Would the findings be the same? Would the inclusion of inner-city youth vary the results?

2. Multisensory learning with at-risk students needs further study. The frequency of citation among students in this study portends an area that may prove promising.

3. Experimentally testing the promising practices as identified by perceptions of at-risk students in these settings would provide a greater base of knowledge on both learning and student-teacher relations.

4. Further study on nurturing and the junior high/senior high student needs to be done. Is the need for nurturing based on the absence of nurturing in the home or on other factors?

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the at-risk student's perceptions of the successful “fit of school and Me.” The underlying assumption of this study was that students have many of the answers to the dilemma of the at-risk population. Focus groups shared their views, their needs, and their favorite classrooms. Study results provided insight into the foundation of nurturing that undergirds all facets of school and the at-risk student. When teachers demonstrate liking the student, when teachers use promising practices that connect the individual student and the learning, and when the student can successfully evidence the learning.
through understanding and good grades, then the at-risk student sees the "fit of school and Me."
Appendix A

Random Sample Pool
RANDOM SAMPLE POOL

Goal: Groups will consist of 8-10 students per group

Assumption: Will need to randomly select twice as many students as will be needed to verify numbers of participants

Hamilton Junior High
- 2 groups of at-risk students: 16-20 students x 2 = 40 students
- 2 groups of non-at-risk students: 16-20 students x 2 = 40 students

Hamilton Senior High
- 4 groups of at-risk students: 32-40 students x 2 = 80 students
- 4 groups of non-at-risk students: 32-40 students x 2 = 80 students

Holland Junior High
- 2 groups of at-risk students: 16-20 students x 2 = 40 students
- 2 groups of non-at-risk students: 16-20 students x 2 = 40 students

Holland Senior High
- 4 groups of at-risk students: 32-40 students x 2 = 80 students
- 4 groups of non-at-risk students: 32-40 students x 2 = 80 students

Total Pool 480
Appendix B

Parent Communication
Dear Parent:

Thank you for the opportunity to request your permission to interview your student in a group setting at school. As a graduate student in education and as an educational leader, I have read many theories on what helps students achieve success in school. Now, I want to learn from students their ideas and opinions on what works for them. When students feel like they can be successful in school, they attend more regularly and experience more success. My goal is to learn from students what helps them to be successful and what changes they would suggest to make school more successful for them.

I believe group interviews of 6-10 students will help us discuss a variety of ideas; therefore, I am requesting your permission to interview your student in a group setting at school. Because this is a research project, I will be videotaping the group interview, so that I can review each group to learn the most from students. The videotape will be viewed only by me and a typist who will transcribe the tape. The videotape will be destroyed when the transcription is completed. No student names will be used in the transcription.

Enclosed is a consent form which I need you to sign and return to me in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope by if you agree to have your student participate in the interview. When I receive your signed consent form, I will organize students into groups. I will mail your student the time and place for the interview.

Again, thank you for your response. I look forward to learning from your student. If you have questions, please call me at 393-7600 between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Sincerely,

Jan Salman
October 22, 1992

Dear Parent,

Jan Dalman, one of our local educators, is studying students' views on school success. As part of her study, she has requested to interview some of our students in small groups at the school during the school day. Because the students will be selected at random and because students' confidentiality will be maintained, my approval has been given for her to interview students on campus if parents grant permission.

Enclosed is her letter of explanation and a consent form to request your permission. The decision on granting permission lies with you and your student.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gary Feenstra
Principal
November 23, 1992

The permission slip below asks for your approval to let your student, , participate in a group interview led by Jan Dalman at school.

The students will be asked to discuss their ideas on what helps students to be successful in school. The group interview will last about an hour. The interview will be videotaped, so that Jan can review the tapes to learn the most from hearing and viewing the students. The videotape will be transcribed by a typist. The videotape will be destroyed immediately upon transcription.

The transcription will not use student names or school name. There are no risks to the student. Only ideas on what helps students to be successful in school will be used in a research project.

At the beginning of the interview, your student will be asked to sign a permission slip. The student can elect to participate or not participate. If you have questions, please call Jan Dalman at 396-4681.

I have read this statement and I give my permission to Jan Dalman to interview my student, , in a group setting at school. I understand that my student’s name and specific ideas will be held in confidence.

Date:____________________________

Signature_________________________

name of parent or guardian

Please return by December 2. Thank you!
Dear Parent:

We're ready to begin! Please encourage your student to attend the group interview discussing students' ideas about what helps them to be successful in school and suggested changes to increase their being successful in school.

Please share with your student the following information.

Date: 
Time:  
Site:  

Thank you for your consent and assistance.

Sincerely,

Jan Dalman
STUDENT RELEASE FORM

I agree to participate in the group interview on school success. I understand that my name will not appear in any report explaining the results of the school success project.

Date: ____________________

Signature: ______________________________
Appendix C

Interview Questions
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Think about your most favorite class or classroom......
1. What did the teacher do to help you learn?
   a) content: teaching the subject
      1. how did the teacher present the information?
      2. what helps were given for you to learn the information?
      3. how did the teacher reteach the parts you didn't know?
      4. how did the teacher let you know your progress?
      5. what did the teacher do when you didn't understand?
      6. how did the teacher let you know what was expected of you?
      7. how did the teacher help you know how to do the learning?
      8. how did the teacher let you know you were doing a "good job"?
   b) dynamic: working with you and others
      1. how did the teacher organize the class? small groups? one-one? whole group?
      2. how did the teacher help you and other students feel successful?
      3. how did the teacher help you work with other students?
      4. how did the teacher communicate s/he liked students?
      5. how did the teacher use problem-solving in conflict within the classroom? as content?
      6. did the teacher help any and all students? volunteered? had to ask?

Think about your least favorite class or classroom......
recycle questions

Now having thought about both favorite and least favorite classrooms......
1. What was different about that favorite class experience from your least favorite classroom?
   a) the opportunities given for you to learn the content?
   b) the opportunities for cooperation and caring for other students?
   c) the opportunities for interaction with the teacher?
Appendix D

Personal Survey
PERSONAL SURVEY

Name________________ Age_____ Sex_____. Grade_____ School____________

1. We've just talked about differences between favorite classrooms and least favorite classrooms. Please circle the responses that influenced your seeing the classroom differently.

   - Was it the easiness of the subject matter? Yes No
   - Was it the difficulty of the subject matter? Yes No
   - Was it the students in the class? Yes No
   - Was it the time of day the class met? Yes No
   - Was it the teacher's skill of teaching? Yes No
   - Was it the teacher's knowledge of the subject? Yes No
   - Was it the teacher liking you? Yes No
   - Was it you liking the teacher? Yes No

2. Do you talk with teachers during breaks between classes? Yes No

3. Have you ever shared your personal problems with a teacher? Yes No
   If yes, what about that teacher helped you know you could trust the teacher to listen?

4. What one or two "pieces" must be present for you to know you've been successful at the end of a class? Please circle the two most important from the list below or add others.

   - Getting good grades
   - Understanding the material
   - Being liked by other students
   - Having good attendance
   - Liking the subject
   - Liking the teacher
   - Being liked by the teacher
   - Pleasing your parent
   Other:
5. As you think about your classes now, what do you wish were present in them, so they would be more like your favorite one?

6. If you have additional ideas to share to help me better understand what students need from teachers, please comment in the space provided.
Appendix E

Training Instruction
Reader Training:
1. Review information sheet.
2. Discuss definitions. Clarify for commonality of understanding.
3. Discuss examples of definitions. Clarify for commonality of understanding.
4. Discuss codification.

Component Colors: liking me: red
time for me: blue
realistic expectations: green
mastery learning: yellow
experiential learning: pink
cooperative learning: aqua
conflict management/problem solving: brown
high expectations: azure
progress: seafoam

Quality Colors:
positive: black pen
negative: red pen

5. Clarify communication; expectation
6. Read one script.
   a) Discuss questions, concerns. Ability to identify subsets.
   b) Read for component liking me.
      Compare frequencies and citations
      Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.
      Discuss interrater reliability.
   c) Read for component time for me
      Compare frequencies and citations
      Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.
      Reclarify definitions
   d) Read for component realistic expectations
      Compare frequencies and citations
      Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.
   e) Compare/contrast the three components. Clarify discriminations
   f) Read for mastery learning
      Compare frequencies and citations
      Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.
   g) Read for experiential learning
      Compare frequencies and citations
      Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.
   h) Read for cooperative learning
      Compare frequencies and citations
      Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.
i) Read for conflict management/problem solving
   Compare frequencies and citations
   Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.

j) Read for doing school
   Compare frequencies and citations
   Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.

k) Read for high expectations
   Compare frequencies and citations
   Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.

l) Read for progress
   Compare frequencies and citations
   Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.

m) Read components for value +/-
   Compare frequencies and citations
   Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.

7. Read second script
   a) Read for being components
      Compare frequencies and citations
      Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.
   b) Read for cognitive components
      Compare frequencies and citations
      Discuss differences. Celebrate likenesses.
   c) Read components for value
      Compare frequencies and citations

8. Calculate interrater reliability on components
   a) each subset
   b) all subsets as total

9. Retrain if reliability is not significant
   a) retrain on specific subsets
Reader Training

Outcome: To analyze and code information using three functions
a) identify (color code)
b) quantify (frequency)
c) qualify (+/-)

General Information:
The scripts you will read represent videos of focus group interviews that were conducted in local junior and senior highs. In those interviews, two types of classrooms were discussed, most favorite and least favorite. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into students' perceptions. Two types of perceptions were examined, affective and cognitive. By definition, affective has to do with perceptions relating to feelings; cognitive has to do with perceptions relating to thinking or academic domains. Further information will be withheld to maintain "blindness" which reduces reader bias.

Procedure for Training
1. Review focus group interview questions
2. Review definitions - discuss meaning
   - discuss dichotomy: affective
cognitive
   - discuss dichotomy: liking me
   respecting me
3. Review areas of potential breakdown
   *script understanding: call me 393-7611 (8-5)
   7 7 2 - 4 6 8 9
   (other times)
   *data isn’t distinct enough: "****"
   *2 codes per comment: distinguish between affective/cognitive
4. Discuss a) codification (note color patterns)
   b) frequency
   c) qualifiers
5. Discuss questions
6. Experiment with phrases
7. Check for agreement R/R; R/J R/J
8. Re-explain; rethink

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9. Re-clarify definitions
10. Do script
11. Recycle #7/8/9
12. Redo #7/8/9
Appendix F

Coding Sheet
Appendix G

Definitions
Definitions

**AFFECTIVE:**

**LIKING ME**

Liking: Expressing liking overtly (being) or respect (effort) for the student

Examples:

"being": positives

- nonverbals (smiles, warmth)
- when outside of class communicated with me
- doesn't put me down
- told me he liked me
- personal sharing
- noticed personal things

"being": negatives

- never smiled
- never recognized me outside of class
- embarrassed me
- made me feel dumb
- didn’t like me

"respect": positives

- still liked me even when I screwed up
- took into consideration my abilities/was empathetic
- gave me positive feedback
- appreciated my effort
- gave attention to my effort

"respect": negatives

- judged me on my reputation
- told me I screwed up
- never gave me positive feedback

**TIME**

Time: Providing adequate time for the student to feel cared for

Examples: Positives

- gave me all the time I needed
- gave me time before/after school
- never rushed my learning
- talked 1-1 with me
- his time was on teaching me, not on his own preoccupations
- walked around class and helped students
- provided equity of time (everyone had = access)

Examples: Negatives

- never had time for me
- didn’t have time to explain it
- didn’t give me second chance
- went on to another before I understood it
LEARNING

Expectations: expected me to be able to do the work and provided appropriate support to meet my need

Examples: Positives
- vocabulary was at the right level
- explained so I could understand
- gave me work that I could do
- told me I could do it, believed in me
cared that I learned the information re-explained the problem 'til I got it

Examples: Negatives
- vocabulary was too difficult
- I didn’t understand the explanations
- didn’t care if I learned the information
told me it was my problem—he’d already explained it

COGNITIVE:

Mastery Learning: step by step learning; recycling information in varied ways until mastery (80%) is evidenced

Examples: Positive
- told me one part, had me do, then told me the next part
- when I questioned, would go over steps again
- broke the learning down step by step
- content taught, I practiced, teacher looked over the work, retaught where I didn’t understand

Examples: Negative
- rattled off notes that I couldn’t follow
- had a watch a movie, then take a test
- went through the information once, then went on lectured

Doing school: teaching me how to do the work, so I could be successful (teacher active)

Examples: Positive
- gave me guidelines on what to know
- modeled the work on the board
- used examples to show me how to think
- used other students’ papers to show how it should look
- gave me cues on how to read the material
- used demonstrations to show each step of the way

Examples: Negative
- never showed me how to do the work
Experiential learning: providing opportunities for "hands-on" learning (student active)
Examples: Positive
- used manipulatives
- used role plays
- acted out problems
- used lab experiments
- used token economy
- used games
Examples: Negative
- never related what I knew to the lesson
- never used my examples to tie into the lesson
- just did work sheets
- read the stuff, then answered questions

High expectations: quality of work expected explained
Examples: Positive
- teacher laid out grade % and told me to reach it
- teacher told me upfront what he expected of me
- teacher held me to the task of completion of work
- teacher used my previous grades in other classes to set expectations for me
Examples: Negative
- teacher never told me what I should do
- I would turn paper in, then the teacher would say it was too late; I didn’t know

Progress: provided feedback on success; provided information that I was doing what I was supposed to do
Examples: Positive
- encouraged by citing progress (You went from a D to a B)
- verbal words: "go for it"; "good job"; "wow!"
- verbal congratulations
- private praise
- public praise
- compliments
- notes on my paper
Examples: Negative
- never told me how I was doing
- never praised me
- would say "some of you are doing a good job"; knew it wasn’t me!

Cooperative Learning: working in small groups to a) share learnings, b) learn to work in a team, c) gain relational interaction skills
Examples: Positive
used small groups
team ed me with a smart person
allowed us to do homework together
allowed me to work with my friends
used cooperative learning (as a construct)
allowed us to talk about the ideas

Examples: Negative
never used small groups
put me with the dumb kids
group worked slower than I did; I didn’t like that
group is ok when I don’t know the information; but
generally I don’t like groups
I can work faster alone

Problem solving: teaching the problem-solving method
(define the problem, brainstorm options, select 3 options, analyze strengths/weaknesses of each, choose 1 option, create an action plan)

Examples: Positive
helped me figure out what to do rather than just
telling me
helped me define the problem
used problem solving when classroom conflict occurred

Conflict management: handling conflict in the classroom

Examples: Positive
teacher talked with the group about their actions
teacher asked students to sit down and discuss the issues
teacher suggested others might have a different idea/opinion
teacher was fair to all involved
teacher sent to the office only if problem solving in the classroom didn’t work

Examples: Negative
teacher yelled at us
teacher sent us to the office immediately
teacher took sides with her pets
teacher told us we were always causing trouble
Appendix H

Desired Classroom Elements
Desired Classroom Elements

Rank Order: Most to least frequent response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Practices</th>
<th>At-Risk</th>
<th>Non-At-Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative learning ‡</td>
<td>Variety of strategies †</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive learning ‡</td>
<td>Interactive learning †</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance ‡</td>
<td>Progress †</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking for Understanding ‡</td>
<td>Cooperative learning †</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t move on until I understand ‡</td>
<td>Doing school †</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress ‡</td>
<td>Checking for understanding †</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games ‡</td>
<td>Time to practice - learn †</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visual aids</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-1 help</td>
<td>Explanation time</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic expectations</td>
<td>1-1 help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-by-Step</td>
<td>Projects</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Role plays</td>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback on where to change</td>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of strategies</td>
<td>Role plays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing school</td>
<td>Content hooked together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Relations</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher shares time, expertise §</td>
<td>Encouragement §</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps me feel secure §</td>
<td>Cares how I learn §</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes me §</td>
<td>Likes me §</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cares what I think §</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect §</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-Risk</td>
<td>Non-At-Risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal sharing</td>
<td>Provides time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels like family</td>
<td>Personal idea sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Relaxed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enjoys teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eye contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Human</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for me to be me</td>
<td>Humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant tone</td>
<td>Alert to class management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>Uses novelty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives</td>
<td>Learning styles compatible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colored chalk (right hemisphere)</td>
<td>Fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in subject</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning styles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \ddagger = 71\% \text{ responses} \]

\[ \dagger = 63\% \text{ responses} \]

\[ \$ = 51\% \text{ responses} \]
Appendix I

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval
Date: May 4, 1992

To: Jan Dalman

From: Mary Anne Bunda, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 92-03-22

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research protocol, "..." has been approved after expedited review by a subcommittee of the HSIRB. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the approval application.

You must seek reapproval for any change in this design. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

cc: Smidchens, EDLD

Approval Termination: May 4, 1993
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Erickson, R. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. Wittrock (Ed.) Handbook of research in teaching (3rd ed., pp 119-161).


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