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ABSTRACT

The characteristics of marginal high school students and the social dynamics that create conditions in schools that lead to truancy and eventual dropping out are described as an introduction to a discussion on how to deal with the problem. Guidelines for effective programs for marginal students are delineated, and the activities and scope of six effective school programs designed to involve marginal students in school work and motivate them to remain in school are described. Cited are: (1) Reuther Education at Large (REAL); (2) Lincoln Educational Alternative Program (LEAP); (3) Paper High School (PHS); (4) School Within a School (SWS); (5) Alternative Learning Program; and (6) Academic Development Opportunity Program (ADOP). The characteristics of an effective anti-dropout program are delineated in the areas of administration and organization, teacher culture, student culture, and curriculum and instruction. Suggestions are made for planning a successful program for marginal students. (JD)

SP

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Effective Programs For the Marginal High School Student

by
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"Only the educated are free"

—Epictetus

Discourses

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Who Are the Marginal Students?

Most public high schools have a group of students who feel that they cannot experience success in school. Regardless of the neighborhood, family background, and general intelligence of the students a high school draws on, there will always be students in the lower half of achievement. It is not surprising that in a society that honors success, competition, and achievement, some of these students will see themselves, or be perceived by others, as losers. Thus the term "marginal student" does not refer to any set of characteristics based on intelligence or social class. Instead, the category of marginal student includes a broad range of adolescents, some bright and others less so, who find themselves unsuccessful, unhappy, and even unwelcome in school.

Typically, the marginal student is in the bottom 25% of the class as measured by grade point average. Frequently such students have failed courses and are behind in acquiring the credits needed to graduate. Some lack basic skills needed to succeed in school. Their attitude and conduct is likely to get them in trouble with teachers and administrators. The most frequent offenses committed by these students are refusal to do academic work, smoking in the school, coming to school under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and truancy.

According to many educators, truancy is the most significant problem for the marginal student because it is likely to lead to failing courses, which in turn makes graduation difficult and even unlikely. The lack of success in school pulls the marginal student into a downward spiral of negative experiences with teachers, administrators, and parents. Some marginal students drop out, others may stick it out for

four years but never graduate, and still a few others may graduate or eventually receive a diploma through an adult education program. Nevertheless, this group of adolescents gains little from the formal system of secondary education, and most of them acquire a negative attitude about formal education.

To help us better understand marginal students we decided to study a group of these youth throughout a recent school year. At Thoreau High School we found the "Hutters," a loosely knit group of about 30 students who were given this name because they hung out at a small shop called the Candy Hut located near the school. Thoreau is a large high school, about 2,000 students, that serves a predominately white, middle-class urban community. The Hutters are mostly freshmen and sophomores and are also part of a larger group that adolescents often call "freaks." While some of those who frequent the Hut are already dropouts, most are still enrolled; but they deny any allegiance to the school and rebel openly by cutting classes and doing poorly in those they do attend. There are a few students in the group who do well in one or two classes they especially like because of the subject matter or the teacher, but this is the exception. Generally they have poor academic records and are frequently truant.

The Hutters present an image of being "laid back." They describe themselves as being more relaxed and less "up-tight" than non-freaks. Almost all the Hutters smoke, and during cold weather they are conspicuous in class because they wear jackets in anticipation of the time when they can escape to the Hut for a cigarette. In casual conversations, they often bring up topics about drugs, parties, and getting "high." They also talk about music, expressing preferences for punk rock and new wave.

Our study of the Hutters was designed in part to find out how they view school, but also we were interested in why they held their anti-school views. An adult working behind the counter at the Hut made the following comments about the students who hang out there:

> This is the worst year ever for kids cutting. I think these kids need a lot of help. I don't think the parents care. The teachers used to come down here and get the kids who were skipping, but now they say they don't have time. Especially the freshmen are down here a lot this year. When the

freshmen make their friends and one doesn't go, they all think they don't want to. There's more smoking of marijuana this year. That's why they're not in school. Next year the school will tell them, "Either come or get out." And then what'll they do? Say, "Hey, Mom, guess what. I dropped out!"

In this adult's analysis of the Hutters, several explanations are offered. The person alternately blames the parents who don't care about what happens to their children and the teachers who now don't seem to have the time to pursue truant students. He also claims that peer pressure leads whole groups to cut classes when one decides to do so. Finally, the use of pot is a cause of truancy and this leads to failure and eventually dropping out of school. While each of these "causes" is probably contributory in some way to the behavior of the Hutters and groups like them, it is interesting that no criticism or blame is attributed to the school itself.

We believe it is important to take seriously the complaints and negative experiences the Hutters described when they told us why they didn't want to go to school. In our study we asked, What was it about their school experiences that caused these students to openly resist and reject an institution that claims to serve them? Did the school intentionally or unintentionally create conditions for these youth that were so unpleasant that they even led students to fail courses that were easily within their academic ability?

The Hutters attribute many of these negative experiences to the treatment they receive from teachers and administrators. One of the Hut regulars articulated what many in the group feel. "The school doesn't really care about you as a person. I mean, if you want to come to school, fine. If you don't, then don't hang around." There is no sense of belonging to the school for the Hutters; they feel unwanted. This alienation from the school is reinforced for many of them on a daily basis by their teachers. Della, one of the Hutters, offered a specific example of the rejection felt by her group:

Mrs. L. is not a very good teacher. She doesn't really care if you do the work, and the stuff that she teaches, she just skims over it expecting you to know it. Mrs. L. is here to teach for the money, she's not here to teach *us*. She throws a book at us and tells us to read these pages and write a

paragraph. I told her I need extra help. I try the best I can, but she doesn't give much personal attention.

Della went on to say that some of her teachers, rather than give her personal attention, would even give a "passing grade so they don't have to have you anymore."

Some of the teachers show open disdain for the students they teach. This is likely to be the case when a class is populated with a large number of students of low ability or motivation, or there is passive resistance to the teacher. One teacher was consistently described as impersonal, hostile, and inflexible — characteristics that increased student resentment of school. A researcher attended several of the teacher's classes with one of the Hutters and recorded the following situation:

> At the beginning of class, one student came in and took a seat at a desk among the other students. The teacher told him to take a seat at the back of the room, away from the other students. The student protested strongly: "Why, what did I do today?" The response from Mr. R. was sharp: "Just get back there, maybe you can join the rest of us in a week or so when you're civilized."
>
> As the class proceeded, it was clear the students were overtly displaying dislike for Mr. R. In turn, his manner was cynical and belittling.
>
> At one point in the lesson Mr. R. interjected, "Now we're off and running on our seventh-grade math." Later a student asked, "Where was my mistake?" Mr. R. responded with, "The fact you asked me was a mistake on your part. I expect you to know your rules by now." Still later he commented unnecessarily, "We're not doing very well. I was wondering how long before we got to the obvious?"

While the belittling attitude of Mr. R. is somewhat more harsh and open than that displayed by other teachers, there is clearly a negative judgment rendered by many teachers toward the Hutters.

The kind of interactions Hutters have with adults in the school seem to alternate between being ignored on the one hand and "hassled" or criticized on the other. For example, Ken, a student on the verge of dropping out, says:

> School is just one word — BUMMER. I hate it. I've got one class a day. It's the only class I can pass. I started with a full schedule — six, but I haven't been to class since Christmas — just got sick of it. It's easy to skip.

On the other hand, Bill says that if you try to get back into school after skipping a lot you get hassled by the office:

> Like Mr. P. [a principal], you go to him in the hall and ask him about getting back into class and he hassles you. You go up to get a pass for an unexcused absence and they treat you like shit. Even if your parents go up to school, they give them shit. You feel like they're saying, "My god, when is this guy gonna get out of here?"

The word "caring" is a prominent one in both the Hutters' perceptions of the adults in the school and the adults' perceptions of the Hutters. The Hutters are labeled a "don't care" group, and the adults are seen as "not caring" for these students.

There is some basis for the Hutters' view of school, according to one of the school counselors. She described the place as one where "you either sink or swim." However, the school has a very good reputation with the academic students. "As future college students, the top half of the kids benefit from the program we have here, which emphasizes independence and responsibility. The parents of these kids are influential. They have no problems with what we do." The counselor went on to say that the "open campus" is not appropriate for about 30% of the students; the freedom to leave campus encourages truancy in this group and there are no disciplinary consequences for cutting classes. Ultimately, however, the consequences of truancy are either being dropped from classes or failing because of missed work. Dropped classes and failing grades are, of course, likely to lead a student to drop out of school when graduation appears remote.

In our study of the Hutters, we fully expected to find them in conflict with the school's teachers and administrators, but we also discovered another arena of conflict that we had not anticipated. This was between the Hutters and the amorphous group of peers called "jocks." So sharp and significant did the Hutters see this conflict that it may be more important in some respects than their conflict with adults. It is important because conflict with their peers seems to have an impact on their identity and future orientation. As we will describe later, the Hutters compared themselves to the jocks in terms of differences in compliance with conventional roles and values in the larger society, and of what lay in store for them in the future. The conflict between the Hutters and jocks

indicates that there is not only a specific rejection of school but also a general alienation from the society represented by the jocks. The jocks are seen as the symbol of conventional society.

The jocks and Hutters are in conflict over a number of issues. There are differences over the value of school achievement, athletics, clothes, drugs, and space that is occupied for socializing. In talking to students, the major distinctions between the two groups are easily identified. A jock was asked, "Who are the freaks?" The answer was, "People who hang out down at the Hut and don't go to class much." A Hutter was asked about the jocks:

> They're into athletics and classes and popularity. They think, "I've got to get the most popular guy to go out with me."

Other comments we received describing the two groups were:

> Freaks roam the halls and skip classes. They don't get into school and smoke pot a lot.

> The freaks hang out at the Hut. The caf and the IMC are for the jocks — you never see a freak in the IMC.

> Jocks talk about baseball and football. Freaks talk about drugs. Jocks wear sports-looking clothes, more clogs. Freaks have blue-jean jackets, black t-shirts, and boots.

A female Hutter described the difference between the groups as follows:

> The line between them is the motives. With freaks, it's part of life to smoke [pot], like things are getting heavy and I have to get away from it, no matter what anyone else thinks. For jocks school is a big showplace for them. They dress up and see how many boys they get to run after them. Jocks want to be like everyone else. Freaks are all so different. There's lots of individualism. I think the freaks are a little bit open-minded and carefree and easy going. And they are happy with themselves. Whereas the jocks are always worried about what others think of them.

A jock was asked what the term freak means to him:

> Beats, dirtballs, quaaludes — call them anything that has to do with drugs. A freak is a person who smokes marijuana during the school day. It's someone who doesn't know the meaning of soap.

It became apparent to us that the conflict between the Hutters and

jocks went beyond the use of negative labels and stereotypes. One Hutter reported that a person she knew was afraid to come into the Hut because she "might get beat up." Another girl said that "There's a lot of them [jocks] in our chorus class. There's only three of us and when we start talking they just look at us, but when they start talking there's so many of them. So one day Jenny just said, 'Shut up, you're so immature.' " In another situation, a Hutter told about walking down the hall one day: "I walked past this jock chic and she just said, 'You bitch.' So I just turned around, because I wasn't sure that I heard her right. I said, 'I'm not a bitch, you stupid jock.' She was standing with five of her friends, so I just asked her if she wanted to step outside. She wouldn't."

Ted, who is especially articulate about his feelings, made the following comments about jocks:

> Sitting in English class reminds me of sitting in a bowl of Froot Loops. The jocks are unbearably idiotic. They laugh at anything they say. The big jocks make totally stupid faces and comments at the girls. I find it positively sickening listening to their synthetic talk, such as, "Oh, how are you, you look so nice today. Are you going to the mixer Friday with a big jock? Are you going out for sports? Oh, my hair, I can't do a thing with it." Sometimes I think I'm playing a part in Alice in Wonderland.

From time to time one can hear similar comments in the Hut about a class that is disliked because there are too many jocks in it that receive preferential treatment from the teacher. A typical Hutter view was expressed to the observer by Della: "You can tell who her favorites are. They are Doug, Erin, Jerry, and Laura. Erin is her favorite because she's a straight A student." The students pointed out by Della all sit on one side of the room, resulting in a segregation of "favorites" and "failures." Whether intentional or not, this grouping of students was noticed by several who resented it.

It is clear from our observations during the school year that each group has its own space. The jocks have staked out the cafeteria and conduct their socializing there. No freaks hang around in the cafeteria during their free time. Instead they break into subgroups and establish "ownership" of various areas around the fringes of the school. The territory each group occupies has psychological significance. The jocks feel comfortable within the school and thus occupy the center of the

building. The Hutters feel uncomfortable within the institution and choose to put distance between themselves and the school by going to the Hut, which provides them with a place to feel psychologically and physically secure. They can engage in conversations without fear of reproach, play "their music," and smoke without concern for school rules. This territorial factor of the Hutters tends to foster group identity. The "we-they" dichotomy is strengthened. The group identity reinforces Hutter behaviors and attitudes. The rejection of school, cutting classes, dislike of jocks, and use of drugs is legitimated in the Hut. Similarly, the isolation of the jocks in their territory strengthens their group subculture.

This setting of conflict and stereotyping appears to influence each group's self-concept regarding their future career goals. Members of each group were asked to project what they thought members of their own group and the other group would be doing after high school. A pattern of agreement was evident both within and between the groups.

A female Hutter said, "Most of them [jocks] get a good paying job or go to college, but the people who hang out at the Hut just get a job. Some of them join the Army. It's something for them to do." A friend agrees with her. "Most of the jocks will go to college — school is all they're into. They're not outgoing in life like we are. A lot of jocks, they'll go to college for four years and marry a doctor and have kids. I want more out of life." On the other hand, this person described her group as getting "small jobs." The girls will work as waitresses. The guys will be working in gas stations.

A female jock predicted that most of her group will go to college. "Some will go higher, like a master's." On the other hand, she saw freaks getting "minimum wage paying jobs." Freaks tend to agree with this assessment of their future. For example, when asked what his group would be doing in five years, Tom replied, "getting fired from jobs or collecting unemployment."

There is a curious ambivalence in what these adolescents say about their future role in the work force. The Hutters seem to assert a sense of superiority over the jocks. The jocks are seen as frivolous and shallow, excessively concerned about conformity and achievement. The Hutters project a future in which the jocks get the "good jobs," but this is said in

a way that seems to deny those jobs are desirable. The jobs are "good" only in the conventional culture, but the Hutters do not want to be part of this culture. They want "more out of life."

Is this posture genuine? Are these adolescents representative of a counterculture that has a different value of what constitutes the good life? Or is this attitude all "sour grapes"? It may be that putting down the jock's culture as "inferior" is a simple defense mechanism and, when a few years have passed, the Hutters will be disappointed and bitter about their lack of success in the mainstream of American society. There may well be a sense of hopelessness as they face the future with no diploma, no skills, and few opportunities to engage in other than entry-level positions at minimum wage. Our interviews with other dropouts who are now young adults indicate that a substantial majority of them feel a sense of missed opportunity as a result of their failure in school. We expect that many of the Hutters who feel rejected by the school and who respond by rejecting the school will someday regret their situation.

This case study of the Hutters may not be generalizable to every high school in the country. The divisive conflict between the Hutters and jocks may not be present everywhere, but there is probably a group in most schools who have learned from their day-to-day experiences that they are losers and that school is not for them. The Hutters articulate at least some of the perceptions and feelings that adolescents hold as a result of their school experiences. We believe that important questions about the problem of schooling for marginal students are found in the story of the Hutters. These need to be answered by educators who encounter the marginal student daily.

One is a value-laden question: Should public high schools concern themselves with small groups of marginal students who do not seem to fit in, or who even say they do not wish to fit in? The second question concerns the efforts of schools to respond constructively to the marginal student: Can public high schools create programs for the marginal student that replace failure with success, rejection with acceptance, and alienation with social integration and bonding to mainstream society?

In response to the value question, some have argued that schools are generally doing a fine job of educating the great majority of students, and that it is inevitable that some portion of the high school population

will be social misfits who are not reached by the school. This position assumes that schools now offer an appropriate range of courses, establish a positive learning environment, and have a staff committed to the education of all students. Those who hold this position argue that those students not willing to take advantage of the opportunities offered should leave school to those who want an education.

However, it is not just a few extreme cases who are not being served by public schooling; 20% to 25% of the nation's youth drop out of high school, and in many urban areas the dropout rate is closer to 50%. These data suggest there is a serious institutional problem and challenge the assumptions that all high schools offer an appropriate range of courses conducted in a positive climate by a dedicated staff interested in success for all. When otherwise normal adolescents who have sufficient intelligence to succeed in school, such as the Hutters, become alienated and reject the school, should not educators attempt to find ways to respond constructively to this significant portion of their clientele?

There are at least three major reasons why schools should be concerned about the education of the marginal student. The first concerns the issue of equity in providing education for all in a democratic society. The second concerns the well-established correlation between lack of education and social problems of crime, welfare, and unemployment, which create stress on families. The third speaks to the self-interest of schools in an era of declining enrollments and reduced support for education.

Every student in this country has a right to a publicly financed education appropriate for his or her needs and abilities. That some students are brighter or more motivated or easier to teach does not mean the schools should direct their energies only to serving them. Just as handicapped or learning disabled students now have a right to additional resources to insure their proper education, so it can be argued, marginal students, the great majority of whom have normal intelligence, may need special programs to benefit from a publicly financed educational system. This position assumes that the same program for all students may not always be fair; marginal students probably require a different kind of program if they are to receive a fair share of educational benefits.

The second argument is that a variety of social problems are, at least in part, the result of an inadequate education. Equity issues aside, it is argued that our society can avoid more costly problems later by investing in the development of its youth. A poorly educated person or one without a high school diploma is more likely to need welfare payments, unemployment compensation, and an array of social and family services. The dropout is more likely than the graduate to become involved in the legal system as a result of criminal activities. Thus, while the costs of good schooling may be high, it is argued that the costs of poor schooling are even higher for society.

Finally, the self-interest of schools is served by the retention of all eligible students. The days of overcrowding in schools are gone. Double shifts are no longer needed to accommodate the post-World War II baby-boom population. Retaining more students means the continuation of jobs for teachers and administrators. In addition, most states fund school districts with a formula based on average daily attendance. This means that each additional student generates additional dollars for a local system; while each dropout or non-attender reduces state aid. Schools can generate income they would not otherwise have by preventing students from dropping out or by persuading former dropouts to return. A good program for marginal students can make money for a school.

But can schools devise a response that counters the experiences and attitudes we found in students like the Hutters? Is it possible to develop courses and experiences that successfully involve these students? Can a school create the kind of climate that does not result in alienation? Can schools have a positive impact on the socialization and future career orientation of adolescents? Based on an intensive study of several programs designed for the marginal student, we are convinced that answers to all these questions are a definite "Yes." Educators can make a difference in the lives of these students. The remainder of this fastback provides guidelines for and descriptions of effective programs.

Guidelines for Effective Programs for Marginal Students

During our study of the marginal student we frequently heard people ask, "What's wrong with these kids? Why don't they take advantage of the opportunities the school offers them?" Sometimes people asked these questions in all seriousness because they were genuinely puzzled about why these students rejected school. Other times it was assumed that these students were either lazy or didn't care. Proposals to help these students or "shape them up" depend, in part, on what people think is "wrong" with these students. Some have assumed that it is necessary to improve their basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics to make up for past failures and because these skills are essential to adult survival. Others have taken the position that the skills needed are not academic but specific vocational skills that will make the young adult employable after leaving high school. Still others have emphasized giving marginal students work experience, counseling them about careers, and socializing them to the attitudes and work habits required in the adult world.

While there is something good to be said for each of these approaches, none has had sufficient success with the marginal student population to be used as the primary basis for planning school programs for this type of student. Yet there seems to be a persistent effort by schools to respond with programs that emphasize some kind of basic skill remediation or vocational training. Our review of the research literature and evaluation of programs suggest that such strategies are of limited value because they are based on a limited and simplistic concep-

tion of the problem. At worst, these responses result in tracking students into unstimulating courses that stigmatize the students as remedial.

We believe that the problem is more usefully conceived as one of broad adolescent development. Specifically, the accumulating evidence on adolescents points to the need for experiences that promote those dimensions of both social and intellectual development that are fundamental to the long-term success of young people as they enter adulthood. While specific skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and vocational training obviously are needed, there are more fundamental personal and social characteristics required for long-term success as a citizen, parent, and worker in a complex and changing society. The extent to which adolescents develop these qualities hinges largely on the kinds of experiences they have with their peers and adults in school, community, and work place.

The positive experiences of the Hutters and most of the marginal students we studied tended to be confined to their peer group; their experiences with other peers and adults were mostly negative. This group of adolescents was alienated from their school and from most of the conventional roles and norms of society. In short, they were not socially bonded to school or conventional society. Social bonding occurs when there is a positive attachment to parents and other significant adults, which leads to a commitment to participate in the institutions of society. Youth are socially bonded when they feel connected, integrated, and are engaged in the main activities of the school.

To secure student engagement, the school must provide them with some degree of success. Persistent failure and/or messages of rejection will likely result in estrangement and separation from the institution. Also, the failure to achieve social bonding to an institution like the school will likely have some carry-over effect relative to conventional norms of work and even observance of the law. Every student should have a niche in school where he or she can achieve success. If the school fails in this effort, marginal students will create their own social system, much like the Hutters, where an alternative social integration takes place with norms and attitudes that are contrary to the mainstream of society.

Social bonding is only part of adolescent development; adolescents must also grow intellectually. This, of course, is the formal purpose of schooling. However, it is clear that most marginal students have dropped out of school mentally if not physically. They are no longer learning, but more significantly, they are not likely to experience the fundamental intellectual development that is essential in modern technological society.

The kind of intellectual development we are talking about involves more than the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Certainly these are essential, but they are not sufficient in our complex society, and we would do a disservice to those youth we call marginal students if we aim so low in our expectations of their intellectual development. Our goal as educators should be to help all students engage in what Piaget has called "formal operations" or the ability to engage in abstract thinking. Unfortunately, many adolescents leave high school without developing the ability to perform the mental operations inherent in abstract thinking.

Abstract thinking requires a person to move from concrete objects (automobiles, tools) and particular people and events (policeman, football game) to abstractions or concepts associated with these objects and events (energy, equality of rights, fair competition). It also involves manipulating thought processes in different ways to solve problems by hypothesizing a particular condition and then considering possible relationships and consequences. For example, if the price of gasoline increases, will both consumption decrease and supply increase? Abstract thinking is required in higher mathematics, science, social science, and the law. Those who would participate fully in the technological and social dimensions of this society need to be abstract thinkers.

While there is no firm data on the proportion of adolescents who develop the ability to engage in systematic, abstract thinking, it would appear that many marginal students do not have this skill, or at least are not asked to use it while in school. There are several possible explanations for the failure of this development to take place. It is well known that adolescents develop at different rates physically and intellectually, but intellectual growth may also be stimulated by factors in the environment.

The marginal student tends to be placed in classes among peers who are less likely to stimulate intellectual development. The circle of failure and remediation, truancy, and placement in less challenging curricula all accumulate to increase the probability that these students will not develop a strong social bond with the school or engage in the kinds of intellectual activities required of a contemporary citizen. Rarely are marginal students offered alternative programs that provide intellectually stimulating experiences. Many classes do little more than warehouse youth until they either drop out or drift through four years of low-level academic work, with an occasional gesture toward employability through work-study. Many of the more interesting social and intellectual activities offered by the school are reserved for the "best and the brightest." Good students are "rewarded," while the marginal students are taught that they must pay for their mistakes and poor attitude toward school. Time and again we heard adults express concern that special programs for the marginal student should not be "too good" because these students might get the wrong message. The real world will be a tough place for them and school should not coddle them.

Fortunately, there are educators who are creating programs for marginal students that stimulate their social and intellectual development. They see their task not as narrow skill remediation or warehousing, but as providing an educational experience that can reestablish the social and intellectual relationship between student and school. In the following section we will examine six programs for the marginal student. They are similar in some respects, different in others. Some have practices that we do not wholly endorse; some do not always keep the goals of adolescent development in mind. Nevertheless, taken as a group, these are good programs and they provide educators with some insights into what kind of schooling is likely to be effective with the marginal student.

Six Effective School Programs

The effective programs discussed below have an observable impact on the most commonly cited problems for the marginal student. The term "effective" is defined operationally as program success with student truancy, credit achievement toward graduation, and testimony from both students and educators that the program was successful in altering the pattern of conflict and rejection that had previously existed in school for these students. These criteria of effectiveness are more modest than the goals of social bonding and intellectual development advocated in the last chapter, but this study was not designed to be a test of these goals. That is a more difficult task and will have to wait for a later time. Instead, the study is a first step in gaining some insights into the education of those who have traditionally failed to stay in school. As initial standards of effectiveness, truancy reduction, credit achievement, and positive attitudes and feelings about school are substantial enough to provide insights into the ways marginal students can be educated.

Reuther Education at Large (REAL)

Reuther Alternative High School (Kenosha, Wisconsin)

Reuther Alternative High School was established by the local school board as an alternative to the two comprehensive high schools in this industrial city of about 100,000 residents along Lake Michigan. The school is authorized to have 550 students, most of whom transfer from the two traditional schools after becoming dissatisfied or getting into academic or disciplinary difficulties. Thus Reuther is already attracting a substantial number of students that are high risk and fit the category of

marginal student. Not unexpectedly, there are those who continue to have problems and become what are called "contract breakers," i.e., they do not meet the academic requirements they undertook when entering Reuther. From this group about 25 are selected who, after an interview, are judged likely to benefit from the REAL curriculum.

The program has one full-time counselor/coordinator and three half-time teachers certified in math, science, English, and social studies. The program is self-contained and the students stay together as a group, taking all their courses from the four staff members. It is possible to earn a maximun of seven credits per school year in the program. This is attractive to credit-deficient students who can make up some lost ground toward graduation if they are willing to undertake the program plus an optional extra credit.

REAL has the immediate objective of providing an alternative route to a high school diploma. While basic skills in math, science, social studies, and English are all stressed, there is an effort to make them applicable to real-world experiences. Through the use of group activities there is an emphasis on building self-esteem and responsibility. In part, these objectives are met by having students engage in decision making as group projects are planned and carried out.

One important feature of the program is the flexibility afforded both staff and students by programming blocks of time that can be used in various ways. A second feature is the group identity that is established by keeping the 25 students together during the day. A third is the innovative curriculum developed by the REAL staff. The most inventive aspect of the curriculum is an "experiential" component that places student volunteers in day-care centers and nursing homes for three hours each morning during their first semester in the program. Part of the academic curriculum includes studying child development and aging, in which students are required to keep a journal of their experiences and to develop a small study relating some part of the academic curriculum to their volunteer experiences.

The experiential component is continued in the second semester by gutting and renovating an old house or building that is owned by the local community. In conjunction with contractors and labor unions, students are taught about wiring, plumbing, heating, dry walling, and a

variety of construction skills. While skill acquisition is important, this group experience is probably more significant because of the self-esteem, confidence, and feeling of accomplishment that result from undertaking a difficult task and making a contribution to the community.

In addition, REAL has developed an experiential component in which students start a small business based on the Junior Achievement model. In one project, students made wind chimes from scrap brass available from a local factory. This item was popular in the community and the students had no difficulty selling their entire stock and making a profit.

Lincoln Educational Alternative Program (LEAP)

Lincoln High School (Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin)

Lincoln High School, with about 1,700 students, is the only public high school in this community of 18,000 residents, located in the heart of the state's forest and paper mill industry. LEAP serves 25 students selected by the program's two full-time teachers. The program is two semesters long and prepares students to reenter the school's traditional curriculum. LEAP courses are individualized to remediate students and build their self-confidence in their ability to perform academically. Building self-confidence and self-esteem extend well beyond academic areas, however, to skills in dealing with personal and social problems faced by the students at home and in their relations with peers.

The program is self-contained, although some students are mainstreamed for certain courses, and there is a strong effort to establish a family relationship among the students and staff to make everyone feel comfortable and accepted. An important element in this strategy is the psychology course taught by one staff member at the beginning of each day. This course is designed to do two things. It serves as a group counseling setting in which students can get help in dealing with their personal, social, and family problems, and it serves as a source of formal knowledge about psychology and how this knowledge can be used to understand human behavior. The psychology course sets the tone for the entire program, and students develop a close relationship that enables them to explore their own problems and learn the ways

in which problems of human behavior can be understood and dealt with rationally.

To maximize the possibility of academic success, there are firm guidelines to structure student time and effort. In matters of attendance, students falling below 90% must make up the time after school; chronic truancy is grounds for dismissal from the program. Assignments must be done and, generally, they must be done correctly before credit is given; follow-through by the teachers on this standard is a high priority item. Class participation in discussions or in group assignments is mandatory: students are never permitted to sleep or "space out." Finally, writing is emphasized by having students write at least once a week, usually in a journal that describes various personal experiences. All of these standards are designed to build student self-confidence in their ability to reenter the main program and succeed by graduating.

Paper High School (PHS)
Oconomowoc High School (Oconomowoc, Wisconsin)

Paper High School is a school within a school designed to serve the full range of students attending this rural comprehensive high school of 1,300 students. At any time, the large, centrally located room that is the home of PHS may have a mixture of students from the brightest and most motivated to those who need remedial work to make up for skill or credit deficiencies. The full-time staff of PHS is small — one teacher, an aide, and a secretary. However, the reading teacher usually can be found in the PHS room as well because that is where most of the students in need of help will be found. Similarly, the school social worker is often in the area because most of his clients will be there at some time during the day. In addition, faculty from the regular program volunteer to teach special or experimental courses of interest to them and a few students.

As an alternative program, PHS is designed to offer three kinds of educational services to Oconomowoc students. First, there is a full-time program in PHS for selected students. These are generally the marginal students who have encountered serious difficulties in the regular school. Such students, with parental consent, are admitted as volunteers after going through an interview and other admission procedures. Those who

demonstrate skill deficiencies must take an individualized program to work on these; the curriculum comes from a large library of individualized courses, many of which are on video cassettes. In addition, most of these students are involved in a group guidance course focusing on personal and social problems. Many community people are used in this course including police officers, lawyers, community agency personnel, and teachers from the regular high school. The goal of the full-time program is to equip the student to return to the mainstream school, although it is possible for students to continue course work and graduate from PHS.

A second program in PHS allows students to develop a specific skill or to obtain enrichment in some regular school offering. For example, a student who is deficient in science credits could propose to make up a semester of biology during the summer by doing independent study under the guidance of the local Department of Natural Resources biologist, who has expertise in marine biology. Or a gifted student might develop a course with the reading teacher on speed reading. Similarly, a student interested in music could develop a program of lessons on an instrument not taught in the school music program.

A process has been established to ensure that quality and standards are maintained in special courses that may be a one-time-only offering. All courses require a contract that specifies in detail the need for the course, objectives to be achieved, the means to achieve them, and the method of evaluation that will demonstrate a level of competence. To ensure quality, teachers in the regular program are often involved in setting up the contract.

The third program in PHS provides an opportunity for faculty to initiate experimental courses. Faculty who wish to try out a new course can do so without going through the regular channels of the school system. Such experimental courses may eventually become part of the high school curriculum, or a course may simply be a response to a unique group of students. Recently for example, an English teacher taught a course to a group of gifted students on the world's great philosophers.

From this description it is apparent that Paper High School is not only a drop-out prevention effort; it is an all-purpose program that avoids

easy labeling. It brings together the potential of a wide range of teachers and students. It facilitates change and experimentation as well as providing the flexibility needed by students who have found it difficult to succeed in conventional classes.

School Within a School (SWS)

Parker High School (Janesville, Wisconsin)

Parker High School, with about 1,400 students, is one of two comprehensive high schools in Janesville, a community whose economy is heavily dependent on a General Motors car and truck assembly plant. SWS was established as a program for those students who were having serious difficulties in regular school courses. The enrollment in SWS is maintained at about 60 students. Most of these are eleventh-graders, although there are always a few tenth- and twelfth-graders. There are two full-time teachers, several part-time staff, and a secretary. They offer a one-year, self-contained curriculum that includes math, reading, English, group guidance, science, and social studies. An important component of SWS is the first-hour class called "personal development/careers," the group guidance course. The large staff in this program is made possible in part by a Department of Labor grant, which the program has obtained for a number of years.

The goals of the program are divided between academic achievement and social development. On entering the program, the student, the student's parents, and the program director meet to discuss the standards and requirements of the program. These include: responsible use of chemicals, regular and punctual attendance, participation in class, accepting responsibility for one's actions, and being courteous and respectful to students and staff. A contract is signed by the parties involved, with the understanding that if it is broken the student can be expelled from the program.

SWS is carefully structured to maximize student success. Any student who is about to be late or absent must call the secretary in advance to provide an excuse. Academic work is carefully paced to ensure that each student is making progress. Homework is regularly given, but sufficient time is always provided in class to guarantee that students will have their work done for the next class session. Classes are small (8 to 18)

and, where needed, academics are individualized. But there is a special emphasis on group and cooperative efforts to maximize opportunities for students to help each other. More advanced students are urged to finish early and help their neighbors. The use of group activities carries over into intramural sports events, parties, field trips, and student-planned courses.

Employment is an important dimension of SWS. While some students choose not to work, most have a part-time job. In this high-unemployment community, SWS plays a key role in obtaining a job, but the jobs available through the program are reserved for those who show progress in both their academics and their personal and social responsibility. If a student has trouble breaking bad habits like truancy, heavy drug use, or poor class effort, the SWS staff inform the student that he or she must "shape up" before a job will be available. The positions controlled by the program are of two types: one is subsidized work in the public sector through Department of Labor funds and the second includes a set of private sector jobs that have been recruited over the years by the staff and are reserved for SWS students.

The maintenance of standards for academic effort and personal and social conduct, along with the emphasis on group work and cooperation, create a very positive atmosphere in SWS. Teachers are successful in communicating their care for the students by the personal relations they establish and by insisting that students improve and achieve in terms of the goals established by SWS.

Alternative Learning Program (ALP)

McFarland High School (McFarland, Wisconsin)

With only 430 students, McFarland is the smallest high school in our study. This size factor was important in the origin of ALP because any alternative program should respond to a number of student needs. To do this, a broad special needs program was created to serve both special education students and those who were having difficulty in the regular high school. The program is built around three components: learning disabilities, work experience and career orientation, and alternative courses that will prepare students for reentry into the mainstream of the high school.

There are four staff members. The program director, who is certified in special education and vocational rehabilitation, also teaches English and a study skills course. A learning disabilities teacher teaches reading, math, and study skills. A work coordinator teaches career and employment skills and supervises work experience. There is also an aide who does both tutoring and administrative work. ALP operates as a school within a school. It develops its own courses and scheduling and runs its own employment program.

An important dimension of ALP is the role played by parents and community advisers. Parents are involved in supervising various out-of-school activities, such as picnics or field trips, and in doing certain tasks such as painting the ALP room and cooking breakfast for some of the high school faculty. The community advisers include the police chief, local business persons, and parents, who meet regularly to provide job placements and promote certain alternative courses like the "stress-challenge" physical education program. An important task for this group each year is to produce an evaluation of the program for the school board.

An especially effective instrument for communicating with parents and the community about ALP is the monthly newsletter. This describes the various activities of the program including the jobs students have and the opportunities that will be available to students. About 200 people in the community get the newsletter, and it is credited with maintaining the positive image that ALP has developed. More than most alternative programs, ALP has done an excellent job of building community support that will probably sustain it during times when a contraction of school programs is occurring.

Academic Development Opportunity Program (ADOP)

Milwaukee West Division High School, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

ADOP is designed for poor urban and minority students. The target group includes students who have failed ninth grade in the previous year at this high school of about 1,000 students. The students in ADOP are usually serious truancy cases; they probably attended less than half of the previous year's school days. Most of these students rank in the lowest quartile of achievement as measured by standardized tests. Most

are deficient in basic skills. About 60 students were involved in the first year of ADOP.

There are two major components to the program. One is the "family" concept of keeping students together and rotating them among teachers for math, English, science, and social studies. The second component is an experiential course during the last hour of the school day that can be open-ended for those willing to remain past the normal dismissal time.

The four basic subjects are generally taught in accordance with the city's curriculum guidelines, in part because this is expected but also because the students must pass a competency test to graduate. Thus most of the innovations are in the area of experiential education. There are two main thrusts to the experiential component. In one, students volunteer for community service internships, primarily in day-care centers and nursing homes for the elderly. The second focuses on topics students have identified as social issues or concerns, which, after some study and thought, might lead to some kind of community action.

The experiential component is designed to give students responsibility and, if they carry through on their responsibility, to give them a sense of achievement and success. For example, taking charge of an activity in a day-care center is an important step for many students. These experiences are also designed to expand the horizons of students who may have only a limited view of the world from inside the ghetto. For example, students went on weekend retreats sponsored by youth organizations at several cities some distance from Milwaukee, where they met new friends and saw life in a different way than before.

A sense of caring emerges from this approach to education. Students who take care of little children and the elderly are in turn cared about because of the help given. The teachers also communicate a caring about the students' success in school and in the community. For example, the development of a group to study women's issues was encouraged by one of the teachers because this was of concern to some of the young women in the program. In another example, when a substitute teacher made what the students believed to be a racist remark during class, the students found support from a teacher for writing a letter to the superintendent requesting that this person not be sent to their school

again. Not surprisingly, these new experiences and the positive attitudes they engendered changed the school climate for both students and teachers.

Characteristics of an Effective Program

From the brief descriptions of the six programs it is apparent that they differ in many respects. Each is shaped by local circumstances and the perceived needs of the students, within the structure authorized by the school administration. There is, of course, no substitute for quality teachers, and these programs have an abundance of talent.

While each program is unique, we believe there are common characteristics that contribute to success with students. There are also some characteristics that, while not present at each site, clearly seem to stand out as important elements where they do appear. Most of these characteristics appear to be consistent with the general body of research on effective schools.

The following list of characteristics is designed to help educators begin the task of constructing a program for marginal students. The particular details of a program will necessarily be shaped by local circumstances, resources, and the talents of those involved.

Administration and Organization

Size. The programs are all relatively small: 25 to 60 students and two to six faculty. This provides flexibility and allows the faculty to be responsive to the needs of students. Meetings to plan events are easily arranged. Frequent face-to-face relationships occur among faculty during the day to keep the program on course and to provide for an informal and more social dimension to teaching. Each teacher can know not only the name of each student, but a personal relationship is possible. In general, management of a small program is more personal and more efficient.

Program Autonomy. Each program is run by a small group of teachers. Each program creates its own identity by having a unique name and by having its own space and facilities. Especially important in several programs is having an aide or secretary and a phone in the program area. This permits easy monitoring of attendance throughout the day and facilitates making arrangements for special activities, such as experiential education.

Autonomy is evident in those programs that control admission and dismissal, course offerings, independent study, and unique credit arrangements. Such autonomy is justified easily when those running the program clearly state and defend the standards they use. Most teachers, parents, administrators, and union officials are willing to let the special program teachers take on administrative roles with substantial decision-making authority (sometimes even in violation of the contract), because this is, after all, the last stop for most of the students. Since the regular program has been ineffective, it seems unreasonable to oppose granting a few teachers the autonomy to deal with "hard-to-reach" students in the way they believe will be effective.

Program autonomy is important because it gives teachers a sense of program ownership. Teachers as a group feel empowered. They have control over important factors that allow them to be effective with their students. They have the mandate to take initiative and respond to students in ways that are either not usually practiced, not considered appropriate, or not possible in the regular school program. The best programs empower teachers with both the authority and the responsibility to solve problems others have not been able to solve.

Teacher Culture

Teacher culture refers to the shared set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that guide the program on a day-to-day basis. A fundamental tenet of this culture is the assumption of professional accountability for the success of the adolescents served. Teachers assume they can be effective in educating all students; there is an optimism that even those who have failed and become hostile can be turned around. Moreover, being effective with these students is perceived as a social necessity;

if these young people drop out of school, they are likely to be a social liability in the years to come.

A second tenet of the culture is the extended role of the teacher. Unlike some teachers who see their role primarily as a purveyor of subject matter, the special program teachers see themselves as working with the whole student. Students bring to school problems that may have originated in the home or the community but nevertheless interfere with the student's success in school. In carrying out this extended role, the lines between teacher, parent, counselor, and student advocate become blurred. For example, teachers help students obtain drug counseling; one teacher we observed was able to help a family join AL-ANON. On other occasions teachers told of having students into their homes on evenings and weekends to help them resolve personal problems. These examples are somewhat unusual but they suggest the extent to which most teachers see their responsibility to serve the whole student. More typical is the willingness to lend a sympathetic ear, to help students think through their problems, and occasionally to be an advocate for the individual who is in conflict with the school or another teacher.

The practices associated with the extended role communicate a sense of caring for the students. There is no specific personality style needed to communicate caring. Some teachers are warm and friendly and establish a very personal relationship with students. However, there are probably as many teachers who use a style we call "tough love." Students are confronted with their problems, rule violations, or inadequate performance in a stern and honest manner. They are challenged to "shape up"; strong reprimands are issued; they are informed of the certain consequences that will result if these behaviors continue. Strong language may be used but a session between teacher and student concludes with a warm handshake or other positive sign and a reminder that tomorrow is a new day with a chance for a fresh beginning. Teachers make a conscious effort not to hold a grudge against a student.

In the recent research on effective schools, much has been written about the need for teachers to have high expectations of their students. We have already pointed out that program teachers are optimistic about student success, but this is qualified by their realistic judgments of the academic abilities of individuals. They assess the performance level of

individuals and then set high expectations about where students can go from there. For some students, passing an eighth-grade-level reading and math competency test is a "high expectation." For others, it is reasonable to expect some work at the college preparation level. Teachers try to individualize the academic portions of the curriculum in response to skill and ability level. Thus one can observe great variation in the academic work of a program.

While the academic expectations vary, there is a more uniform set of expectations regarding behavior. Attendance, punctuality, completion of assignments, and demonstrating trustworthiness and responsibility are expected of everyone. Rules on these matters are enforced firmly and fairly. Of special interest is the expectation by some teachers that their students will "behave better" than regular high school students. Thus, for example, one program has a rule against any profanity in the classroom. This is indeed a high expectation considering the tough and worldly students who populate the program. The teachers see this as a good rule on two counts: it makes the classroom more pleasant for everyone, and it teaches students a form of self-control they need, since some of them have been in trouble for verbally abusing someone in the school.

Collegiality is a key characteristic of the teacher culture. It is the cement holding many programs together. Without collegiality the strain of dealing with these students could be extremely wearing. Team work is considered essential and takes precedence over individual teacher autonomy. Personal differences and prerogatives are put aside in order to build program success and, ultimately, student success. Collegiality is fostered not only by teamwork, joint decision making, and sharing in the success of marginal students but also through a host of group activities from soft ball games and fishing trips to "Fifties dress-up day" and old-fashioned poker parties on Saturday night.

In the course of our studies, it was heartening to hear teachers report that working in the programs was a professionally rewarding experience. Several teachers volunteered comments that they found working in their program much more satisfying than teaching in the regular program. Some of their former colleagues were dumbfounded to hear these teachers say they actually enjoyed teaching what most faculty consider the "bottom of the barrel."

Student Culture

According to students, the single most valued characteristic of the programs is the "family atmosphere." Time and again students volunteered that they liked the program because they feel comfortable with both the adults and peers. In contrast to the jocks-versus-freaks atmosphere, there is an accepting but not uncritical atmosphere. The criticism is offered in a constructive manner, however, and students see this as quite different from the attitudes they encounter in regular classrooms. Whether the situation is helping a student with a personal problem, like admitted drug abuse, or the group planning for a weekend retreat or the rebuilding of a dilapidated home, there is an honesty and genuineness in the relationships. Many students reported that they really cared about the people in their groups.

Cooperative learning was a characteristic of several of the programs. Students reported that they found this aspect of the program very important. They do not like the competitive, self-centered atmosphere they find in many regular classes. They have usually not been successful in the competitive classroom and they reject it, which no doubt accounts for their status as marginal students. There is still wide variation in ability and success in academics, but the onus is removed from being "slower" in some subject. The cooperative effort encourages students to admit their need for help and seek out a peer or teacher for help. Some of this cooperative spirit is promoted through team learning, games, and tournaments, which are actually competitive at one level, but the emphasis is on team cooperation and sharing.

Another important characteristic of an effective program is the supportive peer culture that develops. It is supportive of the rules and goals of the program, which makes the task of the educator easier. Students tend to believe that the rules and requirements are in their interest. They sense that a good thing is going for them; they are making academic progress; they are not in trouble with vice-principals; their parents are relieved that the reports about truancy from the school have stopped coming. As one boy was overheard saying to another, "Hey, shut up! Don't screw things up here." Once student support is mobilized, many other educational problems disappear.

One strategy that some programs use is the "initiation ceremony" to

establish a positive set of attitudes among students. Individuals are screened; they are told that not everyone can get in because there are standards and requirements that must be accepted. A contract is signed; in some cases by parents as well as the student; the consequences for contract breaking are spelled out. Confessions are heard: students admit to their parents' surprise that, yes, they were frequently truant; yes, they often used pot and this is a reason for their lack of success in school; yes, they were involved in a burglary. They want another chance and they believe the program can give them a good shot at turning things around. They want to get that diploma.

Curriculum and Instruction

Several aspects of curriculum and instruction that seem to make a difference with marginal students have already been mentioned. The individualized approach in subjects like math and writing skills is essential. The cooperative approach used in some classes is helpful. In addition, there is a much greater use of real-life problems in the curriculum. Figuring the amount of one's wages for a week based on rate times hours, minus federal and state taxes and social security, is a simple example. More complex examples include helping a student explore better ways of communicating with a hostile father who is frequently drunk, or deciding what to say to the superintendent of schools regarding a substitute teacher whom the students believe to be racist. Other examples of a real-life, problem-solving curriculum include deciding how to go about remodeling a house or how to create a product that will sell in a Junior Achievement business.

The most significant insight gained from our study was the effectiveness of an experiential curriculum. There are both classroom and non-classroom dimensions to this learning. At the heart of an experiential curriculum component is the involvement of students in community service career internships, political/social action, community study, and outdoor adventure. These activities place the student in roles different from their customary one. These new roles provide opportunities for student involvement with people and institutions not accessible in the traditional curriculum. Students provide service to those in need; they interact with the very young and the aged. There is the potential for

close relationships with people of another race, ethnic background, and set of life experiences. Young people can meet adults who are successful in a career and who have the social characteristics necessary to achieve in the mainstream of society. Dealing with "real" work or social issues is much more likely to provide personal involvement than is the conventional curriculum. Such experiences are designed to be educational because teachers are involved in selecting and monitoring the activities and because teachers help students reflect on what they have experienced.

The programs studied do not all have experiential components; however, REAL and ADOP are good examples of what can be done. Experiential learning is the most powerful component of these two programs. The vocational components of ALP and SWS were also significant elements in those two programs. The primary differences between experiential and vocational/work components are that the latter tends to emphasize personal monetary reward for the students and is more likely to be limited in the roles and opportunities students can undertake. Also, there is less likelihood of reflection about social issues. Experiential learning settings are more likely to provide opportunities for students that they would not otherwise encounter, in contrast to work settings where there is often a tendency to minimize risks for the business and to provide only entry-level tasks for the student.

Despite its limitations, work experience can foster initiative and responsibility in students. Moreover, the attraction for marginal students of getting a job can be a powerful incentive to participate fully in a special program. Some successful programs are using both voluntary experiences and paid work. One model utilizes the voluntary component early in the program and, after successful completion of this component, students progress to job internships and eventually to full-status employment. One program in a community with extremely high unemployment impresses on students that they need to establish a creditable record of voluntary service to convince potential employers that they are reliable and competent.

Whatever the particular form experiential education takes, there are general criteria that, if observed, can maximize the possibilities of adolescent development. The following criteria applied to experiential

education can contribute to social bonding and provide students opportunities to think abstractly and broaden their social perspective.

Optimal Challenge with Manageable Conflict. Experiences can be either too easy or too difficult; different levels of challenge are appropriate for different students. The task of the educator is to create constructive tension and dissonance. Some students who lack confidence can be overwhelmed by an activity, while for others it can be a manageable and rewarding effort. Students need to be stretched by the challenges presented to them, but the challenge must be within their capabilities.

Initiative and Responsibility. Adults frequently express concern that adolescents are unprepared or unwilling to accept responsibility in school, at work, or in the community. This concern may be justified if responsibility is defined as obeying rules, being on time, and generally conforming to the norms and expectations of adults. However, true responsibility must be defined in terms of a person's ability to take initiative and follow through on an assignment. Society today places adolescents in a passive role with few opportunities to exercise initiative and take responsibility. Experiential education can break this pattern by creating opportunities.

Integrity and Dignity. There is always the risk that experiential activities can be demeaning because of the nature of the work or insensitivity of adults. "Make work" projects typical of some youth programs may be tolerated but are not likely to be developmental. The task is to create challenging but honest activity that will provide the adolescent with a sense of integrity and dignity.

Competence and Success. At a minimum, experiences should provide the adolescent with a sense of competence and success. They gain confidence by knowing that they can do a job and are acquiring skills valued by others. They need to reverse the pattern of failure associated with school work. Again, good judgment by educators will ensure that students will be able to complete successfully the tasks required, resulting in a sense of accomplishment and a positive view of self.

Reflection. The final criterion concerns the need to engage students in reflection about their experiences. This intellectual process is designed to assist in the cognitive shifts required in moving from concrete to

abstract thinking. The reflective period with adult guidance is essential to stimulate students to consider a whole range of questions and issues about conflicts, contradictions, and the gap between what was hoped for and the reality that was achieved. Adults need to help students consider the complexity and uncertainty of the world about them. The reflective experience helps students to develop social perspective as they interact with people and institutions.

We believe there is sufficient evidence about the effects of experiential education that meets these five criteria to argue for it as an essential component of any program for marginal students. Experiences meeting these criteria will stimulate the adolescent development that has stagnated as a result of repeated school failure with the consequences that accompany it.

A Final Note to Educators Planning a Program

The schools we examined in our study are not unusual or blessed with especially charismatic individuals. Certainly the teachers are competent people who are willing to work hard for the success of their program and students. We believe most schools could develop an effective program for marginal students. Two conditions are essential before starting with plans for a program: There must be a group of teachers convinced of the need for a program and willing to work together for its success, and this group must have the enthusiastic support of the administration. If these conditions exist there is no reason why the effort will not result in success.

For those interested in undertaking the planning process, we offer the following suggestions based on several years experience in helping school systems create programs for marginal students.

1. Planning will take considerable time, usually more time than people anticipate. Set aside whole days, or at least four-hour blocks. Get released time during the school year and/or time during the summer.

2. Agree at the beginning that your group will produce a formal written plan or proposal that spells out a rationale, describes the target population, states program goals, outlines administrative operations, and describes courses to be offered. Write the plan for two reasons: to get on paper what you all agree to do and to have a well-thought-out proposal that can be a public document for teachers, administrators, parents, and school board members to see. This will prevent misunderstandings and give you something solid to defend if needed.

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3. When discussing various ideas, be realistic but do not dismiss good ideas with the argument that "The superintendent will never buy that," or "The union contract says we can't do that." At one time or another someone objected to almost every practice we observed in our study of effective programs. Most union contracts allow for experimental practices on a limited basis. Usually a "memorandum of understanding" can be signed by the union and educators to provide a basis for exceptions to the contract.

4. Early in the planning process make an inventory of your assets and strengths as well as any roadblocks or weaknesses you may encounter. Build on your strengths and think of ways to minimize weaknesses. You may, for example, need to put in motion a political campaign to convince key people that your program will not destroy the integrity of the school. Keep the right people informed during the planning process. Use the support of those who already favor your ideas to anticipate implementation problems.

5. Survey your community to identify sources of support and sites for the experiential and work components. Optimists, Rotary, Junior Chamber of Commerce, police, social service agencies, nursing homes, day-care centers, environmental organizations, shopping centers, technical colleges, and universities as well as a host of small and large businesses are all potential resources.

6. Both in the planning stage and the operational phase there needs to be regular "community-building" activities — parties, ceremonies, rituals, events, games. The program should be a place for good times for both students and faculty.

7. In planning academic components keep the following in mind:

- Some work will be individualized, even drill and practice.
- Some work will be cooperative and group oriented.
- Some work will be explicit, short-term, and clearly achievable. Contracts and competency tests can be used to document progress to the student, public, and profession.
- Some work will be designed to stretch students beyond the basics and rote memorization toward problem solving and abstract thinking.

- Some work will help students look at themselves; there will need to be a group counseling component.
- Some work will deal with social responsibility and social issues.

8. In planning an experiential component keep the following in mind:

- Considerable "foot work" will be needed to recruit sites.
- The sites will need to be monitored by the staff to ensure that students are punctual, helpful, and reliable.
- The sites will also need monitoring to ensure that the adults understand the purpose of the experiential component, that they are in fact educational.
- Write out a brief explanation of the purpose; discuss it with those in charge of the sites. Eventually the good sites will do enough self-monitoring to ease this burden on the staff.

9. Design an evaluation component for your program that will provide information to the administration at the end of the year. This should be a simple plan that speaks directly to a few easily documented objectives for your program: attendance, skill achievement, credit achievement, and testimony from students and adults associated with the program.

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