

GED ACQUISITION RATES FROM AN AT-RISK YOUTH PROGRAM'S
CURRICULUM AS INFLUENCED BY THREE CRITERIA: MULTIPLE
INTELLIGENCE USAGE, CLASS SIZE, AND ITS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the

Faculty of Argosy University

In partial fulfillment of

The requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

by

Angela Rene Fleming

Argosy University

Sarasota, Florida

February 2005

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the
Graduate School of Argosy University
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Chairperson: Dr. Kathleen Malinsky

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Department: Education

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a combination of three factors: 1) a reduced student teacher ratio (class size reduction); 2) a mentorship program and 3) a varied curriculum, via use of the multiple intelligences would successfully improve secondary at risk youths' high school graduation rates. The graduation rate and GED test scores of students ages 16-18 who attended the National Guard Youth Challenge Academy in various parts of the country were analyzed. This study also analyzed the administrators' perspective of the Academy's curriculum along various facets, including the three main criteria previously listed by means of a survey.

Along this realm, the study determined that both students and school administrators found that the following three components were beneficial towards the at risk youths' academic success: a) a reduced student to teacher ratio that allowed for one on one tutoring b) a stable and productive mentorship program and c) a curriculum that provides for the multiple intelligences to be exercised -especially in terms of outdoor activities and computer skills.

This study discovered that for this particular school system, the three key components listed above were academically and socially advantageous to the youths who were considered as being at risk of social and academic failure.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	3
Copyright Page.....	5
Acknowledgements.....	6
Table of Appendices.....	7
CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM	
The Problem.....	12
Problem Background.....	13
Literature Review.....	14
Purpose of the Study.	16
Research Questions.....	17
Limitations/Delimitations.....	17
Definitions.....	19
Importance of the Study.....	21
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	
Introduction.....	23
Interactions of At Risk Youth.....	24
At Risk Youth and Their Family Relationships.....	24
At Risk Youth and Traditional School Relationship.....	27
Historical Perspective on Alternative Education.....	28
Alternative Schools Today.....	30

Class Size Reduction.....	31
Pros and Cons of Class Size Reduction.....	31
Class Size Reduction in Secondary Education.....	32
Mentorship Programs	33
Mentor Training Programs.....	34
Mentoring Secondary Students.....	34
Multiple Intelligence Theory.....	36
Multiple Intelligence Curriculum in Secondary Education.....	37
Characteristics of Effective Curriculum.....	39
Varied Curriculum.....	40
Student Preferences.....	42
Traditional School vs. Alternative School.....	43
Teaching Character Education	46
Theory and Practice.....	46
Standardized Testing.....	48
Conclusion.....	49
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	50
Introduction.....	50
Research Design.....	50
Selection of Participants.....	50
Instrumentation.....	51
Limitations.....	52
Data Collection Procedures.....	52

Data Processing and Analysis.....	53
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	55
Restatement of the Purpose.....	55
Research Question #1: GED Passage Rates	56
Administrator Surveys.....	58
Research Question #2	
Influences of a Multiple of Intelligences Curriculum.....	59
Influences of Class Size Reduction.....	65
Influences of a Mentorship Program.....	70
Findings and Central Themes.....	74
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS	
& RECOMMENDATIONS.....	78
Summary.....	78
Conclusions.....	82
Implications for Future Research In Education.....	86
Recommendations.....	87
Future Research Recommendations-Broad Spectrum.....	88
List of References.....	90
Appendices	
Appendix A: Curriculum Design Survey.....	96
Appendix B: Research Request Letter.....	103
Appendix C: Letter of Informed Consent.....	106

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND ITS COMPONENTS

Introduction

Large secondary class sizes (Kennedy, 2003) and the curriculum methods used within the secondary public education sector of American high schools have not adequately addressed (McGee Banks, 1997) the needs of our nation's youth who are at risk for academic failure. In essence, inadequate curriculum designs and overcrowded class sizes within our secondary schools (Delpit, 1995; Diaz, 2001; Plucker, 2000;) have led to an increasing number of alternative school programs developing across the country within the last two decades. Recent statistics suggest that there are over 20,000 (Lehr, et al., 2003) alternative schools within the United States.

Consequently, the secondary school system has failed to adequately address (Coeyman, 2003; Mace, 2003; Nolen, 2003) the high dropout rate among secondary students. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) annually publishes a report that compares dropout rates over time (Hollinger, 1996). According to current statistics from NCES (McMillen, et al., 1994, p.1) the nationwide dropout rates have declined during the last decade (14.6 percent in 1972 to 11.0 percent in 1992 and 1993). This slight decline, however, still represents a large group of students of whom traditional education methods have failed. For example, in 1993, there were approximately 381,000 students who were in grades 10 through 12 that had

effectively left high school for good. In addition, during the same year, approximately 3.4 million students in the United States ages 16 through 24 were high school dropouts (Hollinger, 1996, p.1).

In addition, minority students and students from low income families who tend to make up the predominant amount of alternative school enrollment populations (Preyer, 1990) suffer the worst from inadequate class sizes and an inadequate curriculum framework (McMillen, et al., 1994). Accordingly, high school dropout rates are higher (Hollinger, 1996) for minority students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 1993 (McMillen, et al., 1994) the high school dropout rate as compared to Caucasian students was nearly double for African American students and triple for Hispanic students. In addition, McMillen (1994, p.1) also notes that only 2.7 percent of the students from affluent families were high school dropouts as compared to 23.9 percent of students that were from socioeconomically disadvantaged families.

Current research (Hollinger,1996) also shows that there are an increasing number of states beginning to pass legislation in an effort to fund alternative school programs. For example, five states (Arizona, Illinois, Oklahoma, Oregon and North Carolina) between 1994 and 1997 (Crampton, 1998, p.1) had increased legislative funding towards implementing alternative school programs within their states respectively . In addition, recent research has shown (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1999) that a reduction in class size (number of students per to teacher

in one classroom) has demonstrated significant increases in standardized test scores, yet the classroom sizes for regular education secondary students has virtually remained unchanged (Finn,2002 ; Kennedy, 2003). Decreasing standardized test scores (Witherell, 2003) in core academic subject areas have also been attributed to inadequate curriculum development for at risk youth. The results of these studies indicate the need for a serious reconsideration of the curriculum methods used to educate our secondary school population in particular those who have been identified as being at risk for academic failure.

The Problem

When curriculum designs are considered in terms of youth who are at risk of academic failure, it is often acknowledged that part of the curricula will have some sort of mentoring or counseling program (McWhirter, J., et al., 1998). Mentorship programs have specific requirements (Baas, 1991) when designed intentionally for youth at risk.. The requirements for these programs have become increasingly salient when we consider the exploding jail and prison populations across the nation that is filled with young adults. In this case, the student who is at risk should be mentored towards being a productive citizen in society.

Another poignant observation that has come to the forefront in current research on education reform concerns the fact that only 50% (Cassell, 2003) of the prison and incarcerated juvenile delinquent population are high school graduates. This is a significant fact because the main goal of our secondary alternative school programs is to produce intellectually creative (Mace, 1998) and

career minded high school graduates who have strong character morals and employable skills. Thus, the specific curriculum design (Walter-Thomas & Korinek, 1999) becomes increasingly important when educators and our society try to determine how to reduce the prison population.

Two major problems or issues become apparent in analyzing this issue:

1. What are the methods that may be effective in helping youth at risk to succeed in education and ultimately in life, especially if alternative education is deemed necessary?
2. If we are educating children who have suffered from child abuse/neglect from within and outside of the immediate family, are there specific curriculum and mentorship methods that should be used for these students?

This study specifically considers the first question, that is, the identification of a successful curriculum design for at risk youth who have been placed in an alternative education school, the effectiveness of a mentorship program therein, the components and success of this curriculum.

Problem Background

History shows (McWhirter, et al.,1998) that there are many categories of youth at risk. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) issued a report titled *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983) which was one of the first major efforts sponsored by the United States government in addressing the problems of youth at risk in reference to academic and social failure. In the early 80's, George Bush's

campaign, *War on Drugs* (McPhee, 1989) and the school and correctional systems across the country also began to use the term “at risk” in an effort to identify the problems of suicide, health issues and juvenile delinquency that affects our young preteen and teenaged populations. Thirteen years later, in 2001, after the initial NCEE report, our current President, President Bush, has implemented the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Bush, 2001) campaign. In each of these cases, the general emphasis has been towards helping our nation’s youth who are at risk for academic and social failure. The reports and political campaigns on education reform bring about the need for addressing the many culprits which demoralize proper youth development. What is promising is that the youth at risk issues have been brought to our nation’s immediate attention and to its forefront (Long, 2004). The unfortunate dilemma, however, is that there has not been a definitive educational or political reform policy (Coeyman, 2003) that has been set as a tried and true productive standard of a functional curriculum for youth at risk. In each presidential campaign since the original NCEE report, the emphasis has run the rhetorical and theoretical gamut from throwing money at the at risk youth problem, in an effort to raise standardized test scores, to increasing the teacher, school and administrator accountability standards (Coeyman,2003;Long, 2004; Neil, 2003).

Literature Review

There are many youth at risk who have suffered from at least one, if not a combination of the statistics and family communication issues mentioned above. As a result, these students ultimately end up in alternative education programs. Some of the alternative education programs have proven themselves to be successful (Schwartz, 2000) because of varied curriculum methods that exercise the students’ individual intelligences. Other alternative school curriculum programs on the other hand have an extremely high (Hazler & Denham, 2002) recidivism rates. The

alternative schools that have failed these students who are at risk are demonstrating a high recidivism rate because they have not appropriately addressed the curriculum (Diaz, 2001) and mentorship needs (Campbell-Whatley & Algozzine, 1997) that should be specifically designed for youth at risk. While on the other side of the spectrum, the alternative education programs that are showing success (Keating, et al., 2002) have several key ingredients within their curriculum and mentorship programs. These key ingredients seem to demonstrate a pattern of concepts that are being implemented. The patterns often include a varied curriculum (Kashdan & Finchan, 2002), mentoring programs (Keating, et al., 2002) and an increased amount of one on one instruction (Mace & Bordenn, 1997-98) in an effort to induce varied talents and skills among the students involved in the program. This is especially obvious and emphasized more so when compared to the traditional education systems within the public school's forum.

In recent studies, several important factors have been noted in terms of helping at risk students achieve academic success. For example, Plucker (Plucker, 1988) discussed the importance of a school's atmosphere and its curriculum guide. Plucker (1988) determined that there should be mentorship programs within any school's environment and that these mentorship programs should promote self-confidence, a sense of belonging and academic achievement. These factors, Plucker (1988) believes, will thwart the development of youths becoming at-risk.

In addition, Cassell (Cassell, 2003) supports the notion of developing student character. Cassell (2003) believes that there is a definitive correlation between negative student at risk behaviors and the lack of personal character development programs that these students received. Cassell (2003) promotes the idea of orientating character development skills towards youth at risk in an effort to reduce the adult prison populations. Since there is only a 15% success rate for drug and alcohol rehabilitation (Cassell, 2003), many current educational theorists have noted the

necessity for significant counseling measures (Unger, et al., 2000). Proper personal character development programs should be encouraged in an effort to reduce the occurrence and recidivism rates of youth at risk. These programs should be utilized throughout our education system and within all mentorship programs.

Purpose of the Study

The ultimate purpose of this research was to provide additional insight and information as to what curriculum methods would eliminate or reduce the population of at risk students from being high school drop outs and societal failures. The research was based on (a) archival research and (b) the opinions and perspectives of school administrators as to whether the alternative school practices that were currently being used presented positive academic success rates for youth who were at risk of academic failure.

There have been a few articles of late that have begun to look into improving at risk curriculum for secondary schools. Recent research (Obiakor, et al., 2002) has shown that secondary students enjoy higher standardized test scores if exposed to smaller class sizes throughout their K-12 education. In addition, if individualized attention is given towards a student's specific curriculum interests (Grantham & Ford, 1998) a positive academic performance can result. A program called the *Comprehensive Support Model* (Obiakor, et al., 2002) which targeted educating youth at risk showed a positive correlation towards the relationship between smaller secondary classrooms and increased standardized test scores. Obiakor's (2002) aim in this project was to reach learners of different cultures, especially by using intervention techniques that involved the learner's family, the students' curriculum and the surrounding community. This method was used in an effort to solve the at risk youth's academic and social problems.

Spurred by Obiakor's (2002) inquiries, the specific intent of this study was to investigate

the overall affects of incorporating several factors used in an alternative school's curriculum that have been especially designed for youth at risk of academic and social failure. The specific elements of this curriculum incorporated the following criteria:

- 1) Howard Gardner's (Gardner, 1983) Multiple Intelligence theory.
- 2) A smaller number of students in the class (19 and below).
- 3) A stable mentorship program.

Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated as they related to the alternative school's curriculum:

1. How would the incorporation of the following factors into the curriculum affect the academic success (as measured by standardized/norm referenced test scores) of at risk youth who were in an alternative high school setting?
 - 1) The number of alternative high school students taught by one teacher in a class is reduced to 19 students or below.
 - 2) A well defined and stable mentorship program.
 - 3) Varied instructional techniques with an emphasis in using the Multiple Intelligences.
2. To what extent would the incorporation of the factors listed above help relieve at risk youth from being identified as such socially and academically?

Limitations/Delimitations

The study was limited to alternative high school students in one specific residential alternative high school program. Therefore, the results could not be generalized for at risk high school students who were in traditional alternative high school settings that were generally an adjunct to the traditional high school within the public school system. The size of the sample

population and the inconsistency in which teachers implemented the Multiple Intelligence theories within their individual classrooms also prevented the results from being generalized for other alternative schools. It was recognized that students queried were considered at risk for academic and social failure and would be randomly selected based on the fact that they were already participating in the school's program. It was also recognized that the alternative school's administrators queried would be from one school setting and had varying opinions considering that they were profound stakeholders in the school's program.

Differences in individual student perceptions/opinions in reference to their individual experiences with the mentorship program and curriculum implementation were also possibly present. These differences may have caused variations in student survey results and GED score results. Additionally, the alternative school program that was studied admitted only students who met the following criteria: a) The student had to be physically fit and between the ages of 16 to 18 years old b) The student had to be a high school dropout c) The student had to be a U.S. citizen or legal resident of Georgia d) The student had to be unemployed or underemployed e) The student had to be drug free and f) The student had to be free from any entanglement with the legal and court system.

Therefore, based on the current stipulations that were in place for this alternative school's program, the students who were selected for this program had several parameters that often contributed to the at risk youth problem eliminated from the onset. Methods used to eliminate these effective parameters (i.e. drug addiction counseling, counseling for court/legal battles, job skill training and mental/physical health issues) which could possibly have a strong influence on mentorship relationships and GED acquisition rates, were not addressed in this study.

Definitions

During this study, the following terms were used:

Academic and Social Success - Achievement in each academic (ex. math, English, Social Studies, etc.) and extracurricular subject area with at least a 75% average or higher based on a percentage scale of 0-100. In addition the student correspondingly enjoys one or more of the following benefits :1) Proper communication skills in terms of school issues and personal progress. 2) Volunteering for school programs. 3) Working positively with his/her community. (Epstein, 1995).

Alternative School – A school that is defined as separated from traditional school, and egalitarian. It has comprehensively incorporated specific curriculums aimed towards youth at risk (Glass,1995).

At Risk Youth or Youth At Risk - A teenaged student (13-18 years old) who exhibits one or more of these criteria: a) Poor academic performance. b) Misbehavior and discipline problems. c) Socioeconomic/family stressors and d) Negative attitudes toward school. (McWhirter, et al., 1998).

Dropout - A high school student who has left school before graduating from his/her assigned academic program of study..(Crowder & South, 2003)

Failure - Students who failed to meet minimum competency standards on their statewide graduation proficiency exam for English/language arts and one or more other academic subjects. In addition, the prospective graduate is among those students within a graduating class who have a failure rate for both English/language arts and math proficiencies ranging from 25%-63%. (Nichols, 2003).

GED- General Education Development. A 7 ½-hour exam that is on writing, reading, social

studies, science, and mathematics. The test stresses analytical ability and skills in problem-solving. If the student passes this test, a high school equivalency certificate will be given to the student, who will be then considered a high school graduate after passing this test (GED). (Gehring, 2002)

Mentoring- The process of counseling that occurs between a one on one relationship between a student who is at risk and his/her mentor. The student has been identified as being in dire need of academic, social, and career advice in order to help the student reach his/her full potential. The mentoring is given by an adult who is in good standing to give this type of advice. (Shevitz, et al., 2003)

Mentee-An at risk youth who is matched with a mentor. Clearly defined roles and expectations between the mentee and mentor are in place during their relationship and throughout the mentee's time in and out of the school's program. (Shevitz, et al., 2003)

Mentor - A prequalified individual (usually a male for the at risk male youth and a female for the at risk female youth) who has been deemed as being wise and a trusted counselor, teacher, and friend to the mentee. (Shevitz, et al., 2003)

Mentorship Program- A predesigned program that allows for specific meeting times and activities between the mentor and the mentee. (Shevitz, et al., 2003)

Multiple Intelligence- Eight intelligences that have been defined by Howard Gardner (Gardner, 1988) as existing in every individual. Some intelligences may exist to a greater extent than others. The intelligences are interpersonal (i.e. an introvert), intrapersonal (ex. an extrovert), artistic, bodily/kinesthetic, linguistic (verbal oriented, ex. entertainers), logical/mathematical, nature, and musical. (Nolen, 2003)

Small or Reduced Class Size – Small classes of 19 students and below with one teacher

present within the classroom. An emphasis is placed on this class model as having only one small set of students within the four walls of the classroom and with only one teacher present (Finn, 2002).

Traditional high school- A large and cumbersome school, organized by classrooms that are generally overcrowded. The number of students assigned to one teacher can range from 20 and up. The general secondary curriculum plan usually does not attribute itself towards the multiple intelligences. The main schedule is generally designed around 55 minute periods each, Monday through Friday (Wood, 2003).

Importance of the Study

Research shows that alternative schools and traditional schools throughout the history of public schools in America are not properly addressing the curriculum needs of their students (Plucker & Slavkin, 2000). As a result of this deficit in curriculum practices, our educational systems and culture has systematically produced youth who are at risk for academic and societal failure (McWhirter, et al, 1998).

The study of this problem is significant because there are currently very few research articles that have specifically addressed definitive and productive curriculum methods for at risk youth. There is also a dearth of information in terms of final assessments of current at risk youth curriculum programs. As a result, this study will add to the current body of literature that concentrates on the specific curriculum needs for secondary at risk youth in general. In addition, the study of this problem should provide more information as to what curriculum methods can help or hinder youth at risk. The research from this study may provide information that can be used by secondary school counselors, therapists, alternative education programs, educators and other human service disciplines since the study concerns the Multiple Intelligences (Nolen,

2003). Possibly, the study may provide guidelines for future educational policy for youth who are at risk for academic and societal failure.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review is divided into five sections. The first section provides a brief summary of the various relationships that affect at risk youth; and alternative schools, how they are considered, and how they function across the country in general. The second section presents a background and historical perspective of research on alternative education within the United States and how this literature may be connected to this study. The last three sections concern the basic components of this research: 1) class size reduction; 2) mentorship characteristics; and 3) multiple intelligence curricula and the aspects of an effective curriculum in reference to alternative education.

There are very few empirical research reports that refer to what actually encompasses a truly successful curriculum for youth at risk within alternative schools. Thus, the focus of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of one alternative school's specific components in deference to its curriculum design and framework. The research design has been executed in an effort to explore the successful components of an alternative school's curriculum. One of the main problems in education today is that the secondary student who is at risk for social and academic failure has been virtually ignored (Kashdan & Finchan, 2002) with respect to a stabilized and proven creative designs of curriculum reform within the traditional school system. The need for change with respect to how educators in general address the peculiar needs of youth at risk is salient because the traditional school system has been unable to satisfy the need for class size reduction (Kennedy, 2003; United States Department of Education, 1999) when used in combination with a technology oriented or a curiosity inspired curriculum design (Bergen, 2001; Kashdan & Finchan, 2002; Cassell, 2003).

Interactions of At Risk Youth

As a general rule, the principal portions of our country's prison populations are comprised of men and women who were youths at risk for academic and social failure. Excluding inherited mental illness, these are individuals who did not receive (Elias, 2001; Dallos & Hamilton-Brown, 2000) the love and/or support that is often extremely necessary for healthy childhood development. This is especially true for a child or adolescent who has experienced some sort of trauma in his/her life or who is from a dysfunctional family (McWhirter, et al.1998). In order to thwart (Lemaire, et al., 2002; Walter-Thomas & Korinek,1999) the negative statistics that are associated with at risk youths, these individuals must have positive relationships with their family, their school and their community.

There are currently staggering statistics in reference to crime and at risk youth. For example, a ministerial program, Breakaway Outreach (Breakaway Outreach, 2004) reports the following statistics:

- *More than 2.5 million juveniles are arrested every year in America.
- *The Center for Juvenile Justice predicts a 300-400% increase in youth violence by 2010.
- *70% of juveniles convicted of crimes have gone on to commit crimes again.
- *Our U.S. prison population is increasing 15 times faster than the general population.

Consequently, much of this disparaging data can be alleviated (McWhirter, et al., 1998) if there are more exemplary relationships and constructive role models within their lives.

At Risk Youth and Their Family Relationship

Current research suggests that family values (Hazler & Denham, 2002; McWhirter,et al.,1998; Preyer,1990) play an extremely important role in terms of communicating with youth who are at risk of academic and social failure. In addition, the at risk youth's environment

(Crowder & South, 2003), that is, the community in which he/she lives, can be a positive or negative force within his/ her life. If family communication links fail (Dallos & Hamilton-Brown, 2000) via family dysfunction or juvenile rebellion, disaster (Crowder & South, 2003) can occur in terms of the student's ability to successfully navigate life's bumps and bruises, let alone graduate from a traditional high school. These circumstances if left unchecked (Long, 2004; McGhee, 1997) certainly can prohibit at risk youths from becoming a contributing member to society (McWhirter, et al., 1998).

The family, whether single parent or traditional, and the student at risk needs the support of our society from various avenues that can provide comfort, education, and social services. For example, the single parent needs the help and the support of affordable daycare to help her/him with raising the child while at work or school. The dysfunctional family needs the support of family counseling or therapy, social services and mentorship programs (Keating, et al., 2002) and other positive family members to help alleviate an at-risk set of circumstances that may be hindering family development.

The relationships within an at risk youth's life are definitive factors towards their propensity (Baas,1991) for academic and social success or failure. For example, the relationships between adolescents and parents can often incur conflict (Dallos & Hamilton-Brown, 2000). This is especially true when one considers the hormonal challenges involved with adolescence. Training in conflict resolution and in interpersonal communication (Bass, 1991; Hazler & Denham, 2002; McWhirter,et al.,1998) can be extremely beneficial to parents when it comes to rearing adolescents. If this occurs, the parents or guardians involved, will be effective role models (Dallos & Hamilton-Brown, 2000). This parent training could quickly help solve communication problems with their adolescents. The family will not function properly (McWhirter, et al., 1998)

if internal family problems are left unresolved and if communication with the adolescent family member is ineffectual. Family members should be solution focused (Breakaway Outreach, Inc., 2004) and not afraid of being penalized for sharing their feelings as long as they refrain from offending the other family members. There should never be any verbal attacks, shouting or power play between the family members (Martin & Martin, 2000) as this will only provoke internal anger among each family member involved.

Consequently, very often poor communication tactics (Dallos & Hamilton-Brown, 2000) as suggested above, remain prevalent in today's family. A myriad of preteen and teenaged at risk behaviors often occur as a result of poor internal family relationships and deficient communication skills (McWhirter, et al., 1998). This is one of many possible precipitating factors for family dysfunction within the youth at risk's family. It is extremely important that youth at risk receive positive feedback and motivation from his/her family unit. Accordingly, recent studies (Campbell-Whately & Algozzine, 1997) have found that if this does not occur, a system of problems in terms of academic motivation, overall communication skills outside of the family and with socialization within the student's community (Crowder & South, 2003) can occur. Dallos (2000) notes the following after a group case study:

In contrast in the problems current (PC) group the accounts indicated the absence of (positive) inputs and offered instead a picture of the families as being caught in a cycle of negative constructions of events, pathologizing definitions of their child's actions, a sense of incompetence as parents and of feeling on their own with the escalating problems.....our study provided some support for our hypothesis of a 'critical' period of problem development wherein pathologizing or resilient patterns could quickly develop and rapidly crystallize to determine the shape and direction of the problem pathway.

Avoidance of pathology was achieved through constructive feedback, validation and emotional support during this early period. (Dallos & Hamilton-Brown, 2000, p. 2)

Unfortunately, training in the proper methods of communication and the induction of proper therapeutic family counseling (McWhirter, et al.1998) does not occur often enough within the youth at risk's family in order to avoid the negative statistics that are associated with the youth at risk and their families. Hence the need (Campbell-Whatley & Algozzine, 1997) for mentorship programs. Mentorship programs were primarily designed to provide academic support for youth who are at risk, however, they have become much more important lately and are a source of providing overall role-models (Keating, et al., 2002) for secondary youth at risk students when family crisis occurs.

At Risk Youth and Their Relationship With Traditional School

The students and their families need the support of the entire school system in terms of providing an integrated and creative secondary curriculum (Lemaire, et al., 2002). Along this framework, schools can make progress (Bush, 2001) towards producing an academically astute; a socially and morally conscientious individual.

In the mid 1980's the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) (Bush, 2001; McMillen, et al., 1994; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) introduced several methods in an effort to thwart the population growth of youth at risk within our country. For example, there were approximately 10 separate points (Bass, 1991) that were outlined in detail that pinpointed the main solutions needed in our tradition school systems across the country. Many of the details listed then are still under consideration today and have been outlined in hundreds of books and journal articles throughout the last 20 years.

The methods described by the AASA and the NSBA were as follows:

- 1) Early prevention programs within kindergarten and first grade.
- 2) Stronger leadership from curriculum leaders within the school system.
- 3) Involve parents within the school system with more significance;
- 4) Provide school centered solutions that are integrated within the school's curriculum, i.e. local-level decision making.
- 5) Eliminate remedial programs for children while stressing more moral, ethical standards and values within the curriculum.
- 6) Train teachers and principals with the above goals in mind.
- 7) Teaching focus on continuance of language skills, teamwork and problem solving.
- 8) Smaller class and school sizes.
- 9) Respect individual student needs and self-esteem enhancement.
- 10) Integrate educational goals with community health and social services, i.e. involve the entire community in the school's educational efforts. (Bush, 2001; McMillen, et al., 1994; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1-15)

The focus items above were phenomenal in terms of breadth and compassion for the at risk student's academic and social plight, however, many of the programs that were implemented as a result either fell very short (Coeyman, 2003) or the mark financially and intuitively (Bush, 2001; Crampton, 1998; Diaz, 2001). In addition, if the student came from a low socioeconomic status, many of the corresponding programs that were necessitated by the focus list above were simply not implemented (Crampton, 1998; Delpit, 2001; Diaz, 2001) due to the low tax base and funding of the school system involved where the student resides.

Historical Perspective on Alternative Education

Alternative forms of education that is a student obtaining his /her education by other methods than attending a traditional school system, has been in existence for centuries. What was one of the original impetus for alternative schools for at risk youth however, was the 1990 national conference among state governors (Baas, 1991) held by former President Bush II. This conference was held in an effort to look into low academic achievement among America's students. In fact, the Congressional Bill titled *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (H.R.1804: Goals 2000, 1999) was sparked by this governor's conference with the first President Bush. There were two items that were specifically earmarked for attention and aimed specifically towards at risk youth. One concerned the dwindling high school graduation rates across the nation, and the other noted the fact that the nation's at-risk youths were predominately from low-income families. In addition, these families tended to be socio-economically disadvantaged and/or dysfunctional in one way or another.

A product from this conference (Coeyman, 2003) relayed a new national emphasis on high school graduation rates. In the early 90's, the first President Bush made it more of an issue of importance than previous educational reformists in his position of public office. President Bush declared that there should be a 90% graduation rate for America's high school students (Baas, 1991). The importance of helping youth at risk and its far reaching ramifications were also discussed at the President's conference. Another major product emanating from this conference dealt with the fact that Bush, in conjunction with each of the states' governors of the nation, proposed that by the year 2000, the United States should set a benchmark in an effort to reach the 90% graduation goal. Though praise was given for the significance of the nation's current programs for at-risk youth, Bush's new graduation goal sparked much controversy (The Brookings Institution, 2004; Coeyman, 2003). that developed concerned exactly how to go about

achieving the President's graduation goal. Unfortunately, the first President Bush's goal for the 90% graduation rate was not met by the year 2000 and is still yet to be seen as we are approaching 2005.

Noting this perplexing dilemma, Bass (1991) brought to the educational forum's attention an alternative school system that showed promising results with youth at risk. The alternative school's program incorporated several methods believed to improve the academic plight of youth at risk. Henry Levin and his colleagues between 1987-1991 while at Stanford University, created the unique curriculum structure in question. The curriculum was widely used in approximately fifty Illinois secondary schools. Levin's (1987-91) methodology was coined the Accelerated Schools Program (ASP). This program primarily focused on three major goals:

- 1) Increasing student achievement levels.
- 2) Increasing student self esteem.
- 3) Enhancing effective student communication and problem-solving skills while in grades K through 12.

The collaborations of the educational staff; the surrounding school's community and the students' parents were an integral part of this program's operation. Fortunately, there were significant improvements with the graduation rates for youth at risk as a result of the ASP program (Bass, 1991). The unfortunate part, however, concerned a lack of adequate funding. Thus, this was the primary culprit for the program's demise.

Alternative Schools and At Risk Youth Today

In a recent research paper, educational theorists , Sarah Curtin and Tricia Ryan (Curtin & Ryan, 2003) made the following statement, "The World Book Encyclopedia (2003) defines an alternative school as, any public or private school that differs from traditional schools in

curriculum, purpose, or teaching methods.” (Curtin & Ryan, 2003, p.1)

This definition can be traced back to the 1960’s, when free schools were created. Today there are a variety of curriculum methods for alternative schools. In addition, there are public and private alternative school programs that are aimed at helping the at risk student. In most cases, each school is operating on principals that it has developed. That is, most schools have their own mission statements, philosophy and goals. Some alternative schools’ goals have been met, while others show a haphazard approach towards benchmarking and creating successful high school graduates. Thus, what is currently needed in light (Cambell & Campbell, 1999) of the predicament of many of our nation’s at risk youth is a tried and proven successful curriculum.

Class Size Reduction

A foremost factor that influences the academic success of at-risk youth, is the class size (the number of students per teacher in one classroom). Considering the traditional class, this has often been a vein of detrimental proportion (Kennedy, 2003; United States Department of Education,1999) where most alternative school settings have generally tended to alleviate this factor (Hollinger, 1996; Curtin & Ryan, 2003)) by reducing the class size. The benefits for class size reduction have been categorically (Finn, 2002; Witherell, 2003) discussed in more depth over the last 10 years within the United States. According to Kennedy’s research (Kennedy, 2003) in class size reduction the benefits of reducing the number of students assigned to one teacher within a classroom have been statistically substantiated. In fact, if planned and supported properly (Finn, 2002), there is indeed positive correlation between at risk student academic success rates if a smaller student to teacher ratio is implemented (Witherell, 2003) along with a sound curriculum.

Pros and Cons of Class Size Reduction

Class size reduction is extremely important (Kennedy, 2003) in secondary education, in fact oversized classes may be one of the deciding factors as to whether a student becomes at risk (United States Department of Education, 1999) for academic and/or social failure or not. Over the last ten years, the focus has been on reducing class sizes in elementary education (Finn, 2002) while virtually ignoring the plight of the secondary education sector. The secondary class size in general needs to be reduced (Glass & Weagar, 2000) in order to effectively teach our secondary students who are often at risk, however, if the class size is simply reduced without the benefit of hiring and training competent teachers (Kennedy, 2003) the change will be futile. In addition, if the class size is changed without the benefit of administrative support in terms of technology, extracurricular activities, supplies and materials needed by the class for effective instruction, the change will be fruitless.

Kennedy (2003) completed a thorough analysis of the costs involved in reducing the ratio of students to teacher, however, he is a realist. He is a proponent of class size reduction if it is implemented with forethought and preplanning. Kennedy (2003) acknowledges that this has not been done in many class size reduction programs across the country.

In hindsight, Kennedy (2003) and other educational theorists (Hazler & Denham, 2002) conclude that there are underlying fundamental principles that must be implemented and in place within the overall curriculum used by the school if a reduction in class size is to benefit the academic success of the students involved. They are as follows: (a) Teachers should be properly trained from the beginning. (b) An appropriate class size reduction program should incorporate no more than 15-19 students per classroom and (c) The primary targets for class size reduction programs should be aimed at schools that have demonstrated poor performance.

Classroom Size Reduction in Secondary Education

Positive results can occur if class size reduction is responsibly implemented as a general rule within the traditional classrooms and within the alternative class within secondary education (The Brookings Institution, 2004; United States Department of Education, 1999). The positive affects of this change within the secondary class would allow teachers to implement more creative lesson plans without worrying about logistics. In addition, this would allow for student cognitive extension through vocational and technology (Bergen, 2001; Lemaire, Malik & Stoll, 2002) applications through a varied curriculum (Diaz, 2001). Considering the students' various multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and practical real life applications the secondary student can benefit tremendously from the academic instruction introduced by a teacher if the class size has been reduced.

Research also suggests, however, that class size reduction will be futile (Finn, 2002) unless it is thoroughly supported in terms of affective outside parameters such as teacher preparation programs, community, family support and administrative provisions in reference to school supplies, etc. This has been deemed crucial before any curriculum design can be effective (Neil, 2003; Finn, 2002; Crowder & South, 2003). A comprehensive analysis of recent studies on this topic suggests that credible monetary support that is properly monitored and has pinpointed objectives can be useful if the school in question has a feasible goal oriented (Cassell, 2003) curriculum program. This has been shown to be especially true if the school receives a combination of well trained teachers in a variety of subjects (Bergen, 2001; Glass, & Wegar, 2000) that are supported by their administration (central and site centered). Indeed, if a combination of these attributes is in place, this can lead to increased academic performance.

Mentorship Programs

Implications from the use of mentoring programs for at risk youth have shown very

promising results. A large body of research suggests that mentoring is an extremely effective (Campbell-Whatley & Algozzine,1997) means of increasing the academic and social successes for at risk youth. In addition, research has shown that mentoring programs have shown promising results in raising at risk students' student graduation rates and standardized test scores (United States Department of Education,1999; Shevitz,et al., 2003; Diaz, 2001). Campbell-Whatley & Algozzine (1997) suggest that mentors are extremely valuable to minority students who are disproportionately (McMillen, et al., 1994) represented in alternative schools across the nation when compared to their percentage in the population within our country.

Mentor Training Programs

The quality of training that mentors receive prior to receiving their mentee is of crucial importance (Keating, et al.,2002). The mentor can have a tremendous amount of influence on the academic and social progress of minority as well as majority at risk youth. In fact, in many cases, the mentor becomes the surrogate parent of the at risk youth.

In essence, mentor training programs should commonly (Elias, 2001) have the fundamental theme of teaching the mentor how to functionally discuss the educational goals with his/her mentee. These programs must and the realistic necessity of practical life skills. Accordingly, mentee should be taught the following skills from their mentors (Campbell-Whatley & Algozzine,1997;Elias, 2001):

- 1) Intelligent problem solving.
- 2) Consideration of others.
- 3) Various techniques for self-analysis.
- 4) Personal, academic and career goal setting methods.

Mentoring Secondary Students

There is a pervasive question that looms considering the deteriorating family situations of youth at risk: Is there a correlation between mentoring and increased academic and social success of at risk students? There are numerous mentoring programs for students, however, are there any peculiar successes for specialized mentorship programs that are specifically aimed towards the at risk student? Dallos & Hamilton-Brown (2000) note the following study results:

In the spontaneous recovery (SR) group the accounts suggested that there had been a variety of significant positive inputs especially non-pathologizing and validating framings of difficulties, for example, of difficulties as transitory and as exemplifying normal developmental issues. There was also evidence in the SR group of fortuitous positive and supportive inputs from friends, family and professionals. The accounts indicated that this negative spiral could be avoided by some fortuitous positive inputs -- as de Shazer (1988) puts it, a matter of 'good vs. damn bad luck'. Importantly the initial presenting difficulties were no less extreme than for the PC group. The critical factor appeared to be the reactions to these difficulties rather than their 'severity'. (Dallos & Hamilton-Brown, 2000, p. 2)

Thus, youth who are considered to be at-risk according to current practice, are young people who fall prey to an assortment of traumatic events and some can get through them without any problems, while others are not able to recover without outside counseling. For example, there are a range of living conditions (McWhirter, et al., 1998) which may influence whether a youth is at-risk or not, such as a young person being born into poverty or being part of a family who has become impoverished due to peculiar family circumstances, such as a parent who has had a job loss. In addition, other youths who may be at risk are often part of a minority or they may

possibly be gay or lesbian (Hazler & Denham, 2002; McWhirter, et al., 1998). In either case, students under these circumstances may experience isolationism and disparity which contributes to the occurrence of poor student academic performance and inappropriate assessment (Salend & Taylor, 2002). This is where mentoring can greatly benefit secondary students.

Other categories of youth that may place a student at risk concerns the family's circumstances and/or living environment. Drug and/or alcohol infestation, sexual misconduct, and exposure to child abuse or neglect are contributors to a student being considered at risk (McWhirter, et al., 1998). A young person's membership in a dysfunctional family, which also necessitates psychological counseling or therapy that has not been received, may have mentoring as last resort towards removing them from the at-risk category. Youth who are part of a well structured family, possibly even an affluent family, may be part of a drug culture or crime ridden subculture, such as a gang. In situations such as these, mentorship training (Mcphee,1989) aimed specifically at the secondary student is crucial.

Multiple Intelligence Theory

A wonderful quote that comes to mind which concerns the categories of motivating the gifted and talented student is as follows, "The motivated mind is also compared and contrasted with Renzulli's three rings of giftedness, Gardner's multiple intelligences, Sternberg's successful intelligence, and Csikszentmihalyi's optimal experience of flow." (Rea, 2001, p.3).

This quote supports the necessity for addressing each of the multiple intelligences within the lesson plan. It can be extremely difficult and often time challenging to do, but here is where we determine a student's giftedness (Grantham & Ford,1998; Schwartz, 2000) and exercise it accordingly. Here is also where the direction of curriculum reform should go (Lock & Prigge,

2002). This is extremely critical in terms of creating academic textbooks, textbook selection, and teacher training.

Cassell (2003) administered what he coined a Personal Development Test (PDT) aimed towards youth at risk in an effort to provide information that can be used for curriculum revision for at risk students. The results from the PDT were profound. According to Cassell (2003), the following is true:

All children have a need for singing and music as a means of fostering their emotional development. For children or youth in a crisis state, the need for music, band, chorus, and church choir are immediate and urgent. Too often these facilities [schools] are rather select in nature, and sometimes it means the creation of experiences for an individual that involve music, singing, etc., but always there is added effect when such experiences are in concert where the team spirit is developed - band, chorus, glee club, and the like. (Cassell, 2003, p. 649).

This is a profound statement, as it supports the need for further incorporating Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theories (Gardner, 1983) into our secondary curriculums across the country. In essence, this is the direction of study (gifted/talented/vocational/technical) that should dictated curriculum for (Arnold, 2000) at risk youth. At risk students can be reached (Unger, et al., 2000) and possibly saved from being at risk for academic and social failure if curriculum design is differentiated along these guidelines.

Multiple Intelligence Curriculum in Secondary Education

In terms of a curriculum that is attributed to the multiple intelligences, Rea (2001) states the following:

.....two co-evolving psychological subsystems: cold-ordered thinking expressed as serious intelligence and hot-chaotic thinking expressed as fun creativity. When these co-evolving

subsystems become fully differentiated and integrated, students' complex capacity for giftedness emerges as fluid-adaptive thinking. This enhanced thinking capacity is both seriously intelligent and playfully creative....(Rea, 2001, p.3)

The 'cold- ordered thinking' that Rea discusses is equal to structured academics (Rea, 2001). Along this spectrum, Gardner's theory on the Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983) are involved. Gardner defines an Intelligence as "an ability or set of abilities that permits an individual to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting" (Walters & Gardner, 1986, p. 165). Gardner (1983, 2000) proposes nine distinct but interacting types of intelligences: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, natural, and existential. These intelligences represent specific domains of intellectual content for which students possess varying degrees of talent. Secondary students (Bass, 1991;Diaz, 2001) may have a genetic predisposition to excel in one or more of these intellectual domains. If the appropriate educational stimulation is introduced into the secondary curriculum, regardless of whether the student is mildly disabled (Algozzine & Ramsey, 1999) or not, terrific strides can be made with the at risk student in jeopardy of not graduating from high school. The secondary at risk youth needs the educational and social support (Bergen, 2001) from the school's administration and the surrounding community (Epstein, 1995) for a curriculum such as the one described to be successful. With these steps in place, many students who were previously classified as being at risk can possibly be eliminated (Crowder & South, 2003) from this category.

A school that mandates the incorporation of all nine intellectual domains within the secondary teacher's lesson plan is progressive, as the institution is facilitating the reduction of the at risk youth population. Granted, some students are risk because of poor academic skills and or poor language skills (Salend & Taylor, 2002; Schwartz, 2000), however, a genuine curriculum

that is conducive to educating can attack these issues with fervor. If secondary curriculum methods are reorganized (Glass, 1995) along these terms, many of the academic, artistic and/or vocational talents of the secondary student who is at risk can be recognized and developed to the fullest.

Characteristics of Effective Curriculum

Little can be found on the success rates (Hollinger, 1996; Bush, 2001) of various alternative school programs that have been increasingly developing across the country. Quite often, current research has been limited to the existence of alternative schools are without the benefit of a definitive evaluation (Bush, 2001; Coeyman, 2003; Finn, 2002) of these programs. In addition, a curriculum's ultimate aim should be to inspire student cognition. Whereas the theory of multiple intelligences focuses on nine distinct domains of intellectual content, the theory of the motivated mind emphasizes three universal processes of motivated thinking that are in common with all these domains. In other words, cold-ordered thinking, fluid-adaptive thinking, and hot-chaotic thinking can be applied to any of the domains to aid students in developing their specific talents. These three types of thinking, especially fluid-adaptive thinking, are essential" (Rea, 2001, p.8).

Thus, an effective curriculum for secondary at risk students will have the following characteristics, as defined by brain compatible instruction (Lock & Prigge, 2002):

- 1) Teach students about their brain structure-to help them regulate their own behavior.
- 2) Help the student to set personal goals.
- 3) Teach students the importance of sleep, and good nutrition.
- 4) Teach students about the different learning styles.
- 5) Maintain a positive learning environment with music, " Research on music and learning has

shown that music that plays at or near 60 beats per minute improves learning and memory, actually slowing down brain waves and increasing optimum functioning.” (Lock & Prigge, 2002, p. 241).

5) Use an active, dynamic and interactive environment that reflects the current lesson’s theme. Various sensory perceptions should be incorporated.

6) Allow movement. “Integrating movement into learning activities increases circulation and oxygen flow to the brain, which in turn can increase student attention” (Lock & Prigge 2002, p. 242).

7) Use relaxation or break time to allow students to process the information.

8) Create lessons that involve creative drill and practice.

9) Create lessons that uses various learning strategies.

10) “Remember the importance of first and last. The brain remembers best what is presented at the beginning and the end of a lesson. Therefore, it is important to create powerful beginnings and endings in teaching and learning. Present new material early in a lesson, and make sure your lesson closures include a brief review of what was accomplished as well as a preview of what is next.” (Lock & Prigge, 2002, p. 243).

Varied Curriculum

Methods that profoundly addresses the specialized (Sullivan & Reborn, 2002) curriculum needs of the students involved are motivated by targeting the specific needs of the student. The key operational term here appears to be ‘support’ (Walter-Thomas & Korinek, 1999). For example, education today still consists of a curriculum that is haphazard and off target within the traditional school. The secondary student who is at risk has been virtually ignored (Kashdan & Finchan, 2002) in terms of creative curriculum reform and technology

oriented curriculum (Bergen, 2001). Fortunately, there are a number of research projects that have demonstrated the value of a varied curriculum. For example, a successful (Mace, 1997) residential alternative school, such as, the 1983 math and science academy developed by Dr. Lederman, former director of Fermi national Accelerator Laboratory in Illinois showed remarkable results with student achievement.

On the other hand, there are still varying opinions by educational theorists in terms of utilizing a varied curriculum. Project zero, which was led by James Catterall of U.C.L.A and Ellen Winner a psychology professor from Boston University was a research group from Harvard University, that aimed to improve learning in the arts determined (Manzo, 2002) that the arts is not necessarily an impetus for academic improvement.

According to Manzo (2002), Project Zero's report concluded that there was not enough research available in order to see how arts education directly impacted learning in other subjects.

In actuality, however, students often end up being bored and lack motivation because their curiosity and creativity has not been exercised enough within the classroom (Kashdan & Finchan, 2002). A varied curriculum reduces boredom. In essence, it inspires curiosity and creativity, which are often reciprocal in terms of metacognition. Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983) incorporated within a curriculum automatically induces curiosity. What is interesting, however, is that no one knows for certain, how far reaching a varied curriculum can have on a secondary at risk student. In this vain, Kashdan and Finchan (2002) make the following observation:

We are not suggesting that high curiosity leads directly to high creativity but that high curiosity is necessary, though not sufficient, for creativity. There are many unanswered questions about the biopsychosocial mechanisms that facilitate and constrain curiosity and creativity. Why do individuals gravitate toward certain disciplines and not others? For

highly curious individuals, what predicts creative compared with noncreative work? What are the consequences of channeling the majority of one's resources into a single domain (e. g. , as in the life of Thomas Young; see Martindale, 2001) as opposed to multiple life domains? What role do gene-environment interactions play? With the advent of continual psychometric improvements in the theoretical underpinnings and measurement of curiosity (Kashdan, 2002) and creativity, psychologists can begin to formulate and test cohesive theories of the multifaceted pathways to creativity. (p. 36)

Student Preferences

Student choice comes into play in reference to the at risk secondary student. The secondary student should be listened to and accommodated along definitive curriculum guidelines that addresses each academic and vocational subject (Lemaire, Malik, & Stoll, 2002) within the realms of Gardner's (1983) Multiple Intelligences. Accordingly, the current frame of thought in terms of curriculum adjustment corresponds to tailoring the curriculum towards personal interests. In an article that's related to this frame of thought, Rea (Rea, 2001) stated the following:

.....talent-related tasks are highly relaxing but offer low excitement. Motivationally, students become optimally serious, when talent-related tasks are personally important and allow calm opportunities for mastery attainment. These serious tasks stimulate cold-ordered thinking..... (p.6).

The theory that "psychological subsystems" (Rea, 2001, p.3) exists is fascinating because it explains the difference between a student just remembering the facts and that same or a different student being able to show genuine excitement in learning something new-which will often lead to more student preferential decisions along the curriculum outline. The haphazard thinking that

Rea (2001) often referred to will make a delightful mixture of concrete intelligence and creative fun if a student is exposed to a proper learning environment that coincides with needed resources, materials and a competently trained instructor. Accordingly, many educational theorists believe the same as Kashdan and Fincham (2002) in that a curriculum should consistently invite curiosity and creativity in an effort towards maintaining a student's motivation.

The benefits of having student preference (which have led to the creation of magnet schools, alternative schools for gifted and at risk students) is that creative minds will begin to feed off of each other without the hindrance of boredom and lack of motivation. Fortunately, according to Manzo (2002), student choice makes a difference indeed. Students should be academically accommodated from the gamut of curriculum choices ranging from art to calculus. Along this frame of reasoning, Manzo (2002) made the following statement:

Strong arts programs are also linked to improving certain communication and critical thinking skills, as well as student motivation for learning and school climate.....there's ample evidence that arts programs improve reading, language development and writing skills and that certain forms of music instruction improve spatial-reasoning skills that are important in learning mathematics and reading and writing said Richard J. Deasy, the director of the Arts Education Partnership. (p. 1)

Traditional School vs. Alternative School

One of the categories that places youth at risk concerns students with ADD or ADHD. A student with this problem may exhibit any of the following characteristics:

- a) very short attention span
- b) easily distractible
- c) fidgeting

d) trouble keeping still, squirms

e) touches/physically manipulates everything in sight

In addition, problems at home, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, child abuse, etc., may be causal factors to ADD/ADHD (McWhirter, et al., 1998) that contribute towards placing a student's education at risk.

Unfortunately, many teachers (Glass & Weagar, 2000), as well as traditional school systems have woefully failed (Salend & Taylor, 2002) to handle the student who can not be classified as needing special education services, but still has ADD/ADHD problems. Students with these issues have specific curriculum needs (Unger, et al., 2000) that mainstreaming will not necessarily address.

There is a problem (Keating, et al., 2002) that is pervasive in the traditional and alternative educational settings. According to Keating (2002), implementing creative curriculum methods that are tried and true is the deficiency in our secondary curriculum today. A creative curriculum has shown itself to be effective in helping youth at risk to succeed in education and ultimately in life, and should be mandatory for a student's academic and social success (Kashdan & Finchan, 2002). This is especially true when we consider the alternative education systems that are currently being used within our public school systems.

There are several major questions that concern this problem. For example, what are some of the best proven methods and programs that can be used in an alternative education curriculum in order to help youth at risk succeed in their education and career goal endeavors? There is a scarcity (Preyer, 1990) of information that is related towards answering this question. This is especially true in reference to a well defined alternative school curriculum for youth at risk. There are those in education who have also noticed this problem. Along this line of reasoning, Unger

(2000) describes this problem's dilemma and he has made an attempt to try to address it:

Prevention programs for young children are becoming more prevalent in schools and community centers. Practical evaluation methods are needed that can inform program design and implementation as well as assess a program's overall success. An evaluation model is presented that provides both program process and outcome information. . A case example illustrates practical issues related to designing and implementing evaluations for prevention group projects for young children at risk for *child abuse* and *neglect*.

Implications for educational and psychological consultation are discussed. (p. 3)

Schultz's research (Schultz, 2002) concurs that in the past, many underachieving students were simply not motivated because they were virtually ignored and/or overlooked. In addition, poor curriculum plans that do not incorporate or tap into the various gifts and skills of these students have also contributed to the youth at risk population. Quite often, various literature (Kashdan & Fincham, 2002) over the years has gently alluded to this fact. It has been often suggested (Sullivan & Rehorn, 2002) that a greater exposure to mentorship, internship and independent study programs that actually tap into a student's identified talents would alleviate many frustrations within the student's academic life. Thus, it appears that the underachieving youth at risk should:

- 1) not be ignored.
- 2) be given hands-on activities.
- 3) be given more fun projects.
- 4) be given more one on one help.
- 5) have a teacher who asks the students what they want/think about the project.
- 6) be given choices for assignments according to their personal interests.

7) have a teacher who literally asks them what their expectations are and what do they expect to learn from the class.

8) be allowed to meet in peer counseling/tutorial groups

(Grantham & Ford, 1998, p.101)

Teaching Character Education

Accordingly, other major contributing factors to youth at risk are fundamentally based on a parameter of socioeconomic factors. These parameters (McWhirter, J., et al., 1998) appear to follow the following criteria: 1) Membership in a impoverished minority family; 2) Parents who are poorly educated and/or motivated; 3) Youths who are exposed to (through no fault /or fault of their own) drug abuse, alcohol abuse or sexual misconduct/abuse; 4) Exposure to child neglect or child abuse; 5) Living at or below the poverty level; 6) Having membership within a single parent family that lacks a family/friend support network; 7) A child who does not have adequate child supervision (regardless of age- as teenagers also need positive social supervision) and 8) Poor health care.

Unfortunately, if socioeconomic factors such as those listed above, become extraordinarily pervasive within a student's life, the student may become deficient in character education. Many impoverished parents, and parents who may be struggling themselves with various addictions, simply do not have the time or energy to instill every character tidbit that is needed by their children. Thus, the child becomes an adolescent who is at risk. At risk socially as well as academically.

Along this spectrum, mentoring and character education along morality issues that are (Breakaway Outreach, Inc., 2004) incorporated in the curriculum for an at risk youth becomes crucial (Bass, 1991) towards enabling the student to become a positive contributing member in

society.

Theory and Practice

In reference to current research (McWhirter, J., et. al., 1998) the following statistics are affecting our secondary students as well as our elementary students: 1) In 1993 there were 6 million more students in all age ranges living below the poverty level in the United States than in 1973; 2) In 1993, 46% of African American, 33% Asian American, and 41% Hispanic children lived in poverty compared to 14% European American children; 3) An average of 3 minors die per day from child abuse and only 33% of the reported cases are actually legally acknowledged by the social service system; 4) 54% of America's students in all age ranges are being raised in single-parent households because the divorce rate has quadrupled over the last 20 years ; 5) About 2 out of 3 high school seniors use illegal drugs ; 7) 27% of high school seniors have at least 5 drinks in a span of two weeks; 8) An average of 77% of eighth graders have reported using alcohol ; 9) 30% of teenagers below the age of 15 are sexually active; 10) 25% of our teenage population will have been infected with a sexually transmitted disease before they graduate from high school; 10) The birthrate for high school girls has jumped up from 14% to 69% between 1941 and 1991, the highest level ever recorded; 11) In 1992, 12,000 teens died a violent death due to crime and for African-American teenagers, murder is the major cause of death; 13) 13-19 year old high school girls who gave birth will live in poverty, have lower education skills, no help from the baby's father and few career goals/choices; and 14) Every year, 7000 teenagers commit suicide, the statistics for teenage suicide has risen 75% for 10-14 year olds and 35% for 15-19 year olds over the last decade years.

The reasons listed above are just a few reasons (McWhirter, et al., 1998; Bush, 2001) as to why more and more of our young population is at risk in terms of their education, achieving a

fruitful life and in terms of achieving a productive career. Statistics such as those listed above lead to the question: How can theory really relate to practice? The pervasive question that seems to beg for a solution relates to meshing realistic (Elias, 2001) educational and social goals for the at risk youth. These goals should relate directly (Cassell, 2003; Hazler & Denham, 2002) to the at risk youth, with a problem solving motif and towards their particular predicament with socially framed solutions (Preyer, 1990) in mine first. The academic solutions in reference to increasing academic performance must be intertwined delicately. It is very difficult for a student to concern him/herself with Algebra if he/she is contemplating suicide because of serious dysfunction in the family such as sexual, drug or physical abuse. Efforts to mentor (Bass, 1991) a student who has encountered any one of the statistics mentioned above would be in vain if the mentor, the at risk youth's family, community and educators are not make working together towards the common goal (Campbell-Whatley & Algozzine,1997), that is, removing the at risk youth from this category all together.

Standardized Testing

A further case for smaller student to teacher ratios within a classroom is represented by the ongoing decline in our nation's SAT scores. This is partly due to over crowded classrooms (Rubenstein, 1994). Rubenstein discusses the decline in SAT scores in reference to the current SAT statistics compared to those from the 1960s. Rubenstein (1994) suggests that federal and state spending in education has increased over the years, however, the government has yet to explain the phenomenon of reduced SAT scores in spite of increased government expenditures in education. To date, there is still a dearth of current information that can explain why there is not a positive correlation that can be demonstrated between increased government funding in education and progressive SAT score results.

Recent research has shown that secondary students enjoy higher standardized test scores if exposed to smaller class sizes throughout their K-12 education, however the class sizes (Glass & Wegar, 2000) within secondary education have remained overcrowded and continue to contribute to poor academic performance and poor curriculum standards that do not in general, promote creativity (Lock & Prigge, 2002) within every academic subject within our nation's secondary school systems.

Conclusion

This case study examined the work being conducted in one such alternative school system's curriculum's design and specifically analyzes the ultimate outcome in terms of GED test results. When a combination of mentoring, small classroom size and a multiple intelligence curriculum is implemented, this study will make an effort to definitively determine if a basic outline for an alternative school's curriculum can be prescribed as a general basic guideline. This study will examine how to best design an alternative school's curriculum design, considering the ultimate effects of its mentorship program, varied curriculum and its reduced student to teacher ratio. As a result, this study will be completed in an effort to determine what components as mentioned above or combination thereof creates a successful alternative school program.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if an incorporation of three factors within an alternative school's curriculum would improve secondary at risk youths' high school graduation rates. The factors that were under consideration were as follows: 1) a reduced student teacher ratio (class size reduction); 2) a mentorship program and 3) a varied curriculum, via use of the multiple intelligences. In this study, the success rate of the alternative high school's curriculum program will be measured through analyzing the school's GED passage rates of its students. The study of this problem should provide more information as to what curriculum methods can help youth who are at risk of academic and social failure. The research from this study may provide information that can be used by an assortment of secondary school personnel such as counselors, therapists, educators and other human service disciplines, in addition to alternative education programs that are currently operating in the United States.

Research Design

The research method used a survey that was in correlation with archival research. The survey that was used determined if the three factors mentioned above affected the rate of graduation for at risk youth. The archival research that was incorporated gathered raw data in reference to the previous three years' worth of GED test scores from different Youth Challenge Academies surveyed. The Youth Challenge Academies were located in different parts of the

country.

Selection of Participants

A random sample of 12 school administrators from 12 alternative high school programs that were affiliated with a nationally recognized at risk program were chosen for this study. The schools were located in various regions across the country (North, South, East and West). Letters of informed consent were given to each participant (Appendix D). A nationwide alternative school program, the National Guard Youth Challenge Academy, was the program analyzed in this study. At the time of the study, the program was incorporated within practically every state in the country. This program has been known for its military style; smaller class environment; use of physical activity and varied curriculum practices. The administrators in the sample were knowledgeable of the curriculum outline and GED test results of their respective school. At the time of this study, the Youth Challenge Academy was only comprised of high school dropouts ranging between the ages of 16 and 18. The Academy represented students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures who met the following criteria before acceptance into the program: a) the student had to be drug free; b) the student could not be involved or have had pending court cases with the criminal judicial system; c) the student had to have an official mentor that was registered with the Academy and d) the student had to be physically fit.

Instrumentation

The researcher used an Internet survey (see Appendix A) that consisted of 10 close ended questions and 2 open ended question for this descriptive/archival study. The first 10 questions had 4 Likert scaled items. The two open ended questions reflected the administrators' opinions. The survey was designed to gain information about the curriculum program's specifics, and the results of GED test scores over the past three years from the time the survey was originally

administered. The questions were asked in an effort to determine if a combination of or possibly one or more factors mentioned in the Introduction reflected on the GED test scores and passage rates of the at risk youth attending the Academy. The survey participant names were kept anonymous.

The survey instrument that was created used information from the review of the literature on classroom size reduction; mentorship programs and the Multiple Intelligence theory. The findings of the following researchers were employed during the creation of the instrument: Gardner, (1988); Algozzine & Ramsey (1999); Cassell, (2003); Epstein, (1995); Keating,(2002);Glass (1995); Nolen, (2003) and United States Department of Education, (1999).

Limitations

The study was limited by the number of administrators and the type of alternative schools studied. It was also limited by the number of schools that had not maintained comprehensive GED/graduation statistics over the past three years.

Finally, the results of this study may not be applicable to other alternative school programs other than those alternative schools that were selected for this project.

Data Collection Procedures

A letter of introduction and permission to conduct this research at each National Guard Youth Challenge Academy was gathered (see Appendix B) from each administrator involved in the study. Permission to conduct the research as proposed was also acquired from the Human Subject Review Committee of Argosy University (see Appendix C).

Internet surveys with letters explaining the study and requesting that assistance was needed with the study were emailed to each administrator of the alternative schools chosen for

the study. The letter also included a request for anonymous GED test scores over the previous three years. The administrators were then asked to email their responses of the survey and archival data, within two weeks of receipt of the original survey, to the researcher's email address. When a response was not received within the two week time period, the researcher sent 1 email reminders to the respective administrator's email address for the alternative school in question. This had to be done for approximately 33% of the administrators that were surveyed in an effort to encourage him/her to complete and return the survey. After phone calls and a couple of email reminders each to clarify questions, etc., the results were finally received from this final group of administrators.

Data Processing and Analysis

The results of the completed survey were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative analysis. The data that was gathered from this study will be described first with descriptive statistics from one graduating class's GED test scores for each of the years 2001-2003. Youth Challenge Academy graduates two classes per year. The scores that were gathered from this survey were from 3 different Youth Challenge Academies that were located in different parts of the country. In addition, the responses of the schools' administrators will also be reported quantitatively and qualitatively. There were twelve administrators who were queried altogether. The statistical outline will include discussions of correlation, central themes found and percentages. This initial data analysis will allow for the following research questions to be addressed:

1. If the number of high school students taught by one teacher in a classroom is reduced to 19 students or below, will the amount of academic retention (as measured by standardized/norm referenced test scores) demonstrate average or above average passage

rates?

2. If the following factors are combined:

a) reduction of the number of secondary students in a single class to 19 or below.

b) incorporating a stable mentorship program and

c) incorporating a curriculum that thoroughly uses the multiple intelligence theory, will the student who is in the at risk category be relieved from being in this category socially and academically?

3. Will the student's norm-referenced/standardized G.E.D. test score be conducive for graduating from high school if the above factors are set in place?

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to provide additional insight and information as to what type or combination of curriculum methods would eliminate or reduce the population of at risk students from being high school drop outs and societal failures. The research collected was archival and from survey responses of school administrators. Thus the study is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research using the mixed model (Creswell, 1994) of reporting research findings.

Since recent research has shown that several factors, such as smaller class sizes (Obiakor, et al., 2002); mentoring (Campbell-Whatley & Algozzine, 1997), and varied curriculum methods (Grantham & Ford, 1998) have produced higher standardized test scores from students in their K-12 education, the specific intent of this study was to investigate the overall affects of incorporating each of these factors if used in an alternative school's curriculum. The alternative school of interest for this study's purposes is one that has been especially designed for youth at risk.

The specific elements of the alternative schools' curriculum studied incorporated the following criteria:

- 1) Howard Gardner's (Gardner, 1983) Multiple Intelligence theory.

2) A smaller number of students in the class (19 and below).

3) A stable mentorship program.

The content of this chapter is a presentation of the qualitative and quantitative data that was collected by the researcher. First, the data that stemmed from the archival records of the last three years of GED (Graduate Equivalency Diploma) cumulative test scores will be reported quantitatively. Second, the results from the survey of the twelve school administrators will be reported in this chapter. This quantitative and qualitative analysis focused on the survey answers that were supplied from each of the corresponding schools' administrators.

Quantitative Study

The quantitative study focused solely on the pass/fail rates for the GED taken during the years 2001, 2002 and 2003 from one of the two graduating classes from the Youth Challenge Academy. There were 342 students' cumulative GED test scores that were analyzed altogether from three of the Youth Challenge Academies surveyed: Arkansas, Oregon, Louisiana-Gillis Long Center.

For the year 2001, 108 students' scores were analyzed; for the year 2002, 78 students' scores were analyzed and for the year 2003, 156 students' scores were analyzed (Table 1). Statistics drawn from the data includes the students' GED test scores that were separated by those who passed the GED from those who failed the GED for each of the years in question. Statistics gleaned from the survey results also reflected the responses of the administrators in reference to the research questions below. The research questions below were investigated during the Fall, Winter and Spring of the 2004 school year in an attempt to discover more information about the administrators' retrospective opinions in reference to each of their respective alternative schools' curriculum design:

Research Questions

Research Question #1

Will there be a significant passage rate of 50% or higher for an alternative school that incorporated a curriculum with emphasis on using the Multiple Intelligences?

Null Hypothesis 1

H_0 : There will be no significant GED passage rate of 50% or higher for those students who have attended an alternative school that utilized a curriculum with an emphasis on the Multiple Intelligences.

The table below (see Table 1) reflects the statistics drawn from the data that includes the information from 342 students who had taken the GED after attending a full program and graduating from the Youth Challenge Academies surveyed. The students' GED test scores that were analyzed are separated by those who passed the GED from those who failed the GED for each of the years 2001-2003. Statistics gleaned from the GED passage rates were organized in terms of hard numbers and percentages from those students who either passed or failed the test for each academy. It should be noted that the Youth Challenge Academy graduates two classes per academic school year, and that the results below reflect one class for each of the years 2001-2003.

Table 1

Distribution of GED Cumulative Test Scores

GED Scores	Percent of Students Who	Number of Students Who	Number of Students Who	n
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Accumulated Per Year	Passed GED	Passed	Failed	
2001	93%	100	8	108
2002	77%	60	18	78
2003	85%	132	24	156

Total 85% 292 50 342

Of the 342 students' scores analyzed between the years 2001-2003, 292 students, or 85%, passed the GED (see Table 1). On the opposite end of the spectrum, 50 students, or 15%, did not pass the GED during this time period, 2001-2003. In 2002, 77% of the 78 students' GED scores analyzed passed the GED and in 2003, 85% of the 156 students' GED scores analyzed passed the GED.

Result. The null hypothesis is rejected. For the sample tested, there are significant GED passage rates of 50% or higher for students who have attended an alternative school that utilized a curriculum which incorporated the Multiple Intelligences.

Qualitative Study

Surveys

School Administrator Surveys

In addition, there were 12 administrators who were directly involved with their school's curriculum (one from each Youth Challenge Academy) who also reported qualitative data in reference to their respective school's GED pass/fail rates.

During the 2003-2004 school year, the researcher surveyed 12 administrators who were directly involved with the curriculum development and assessment for each of the Youth Challenge academies. There were three individual school administrators that were surveyed from each region of the country (Northern United States, Southern United States, Eastern United

States, and Western United States.) These regions were chosen purposefully in an effort to see if the academy's GED passage rates varied according to the school's location. The researcher chose curriculum coordinators who also had direct contact with the academy's students and faculty in order to obtain these individuals' perspectives about the school's curriculum.

The researcher had prepared all of the survey questions in advance. Each of the administrators were contacted via phone and email. An introduction about the purpose of the study and about the researcher were given first and then the survey was sent as an attachment or in the body of the introductory message of the email. There were some schools that had difficulty opening up the survey in MSWord, so the survey had to be sent in the body of the message instead. It took about 3 weeks on average, to get the survey answers back with the school's respective GED test results for the previous 2 school years. The survey questions which appear in Appendix A were broken into five main categories: 1) the academy's usage of and satisfaction with a multiple intelligence curriculum; 2) the average class size (student to teacher ratio) within the academy; 3) the administrator's satisfaction rates with its mentorship program; 4) the GED passage rate for the academy in question; 5) the student's perception and satisfaction with the academy's curriculum program in general.

Research Question #2

How has the incorporation of the following three factors into the curriculum affected the academic success of at risk youth who were in an alternative high school setting?

Factor #1: Influences of a Multiple Intelligence Curriculum

Varied instructional techniques with an emphasis in using the Multiple Intelligences.

Null Hypothesis 2

H_{02} : There will be no significant difference in GED passage rates between those students

who have only been exposed to a standardized, centrally focused curriculum (example math, English and science as the curriculum's sole primary focus) as compared to students who have been exposed to a varied curriculum that incorporates all of the Multiple Intelligences.

The parameters as to what specific components of a curriculum exactly entails a Multiple Intelligence (MI) curriculum was given in detail to each of the administrators questioned prior to the survey. A Likert scale was used to accumulate each of the responses from the survey, in reference to the how often the use of Multiple Intelligence components were used within the curriculum (see Table 3) and as to how satisfied each administrator was with their respective curriculum. In addition, two questions that were given at the end of the survey, allowed for personal narrative from each of the respondents.

Based on the results from this sample, the null hypothesis is rejected. The table below (see Table 2 and Table 3) reflects the responses from each administrator queried from each Youth Challenge Academy.

Table 2

Administrators' Responses About Their Multiple Intelligence Curriculum

	Very Satisfied With MI Usage	Satisfied With MI Usage	Unsatisfied/Neutral With MI Usage
Usage of a Multiple Intelligence Curriculum in general.	10	1	1
Usage of Multiple Intelligence Curriculum in general with physical activities included.	7	4	1
Multiple Intelligence Curriculum in general with art and science included.	7	N/A	5

Administra- tor Satisfaction with GED test results that show 50% or higher passage rates.	9	3	N/A
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Table 3

Amount of variance in curriculum in reference to using MI components.

	<u>Once A Week</u>	<u>2-3 Times A Month</u>	<u>Once A Month</u>
Administrator Responses	4	6	2

Survey results indicated that the majority of the administrators’ perceptions of their curriculum were favorable. Of the 12 administrators surveyed, 11 provided narrative comments on the curriculum components that they saw favorable results in reference to student satisfaction. In each of the 10 of the 11 cases from these respondents’ narrative comments, choices #2 and #3 were chosen as the specific parameters of curriculum design has helped to increase the Youth Challenge Academy’s’ graduation success rates. These choices were as follows: a) a reduced student/teacher ratio per academic subject and b) a varied curriculum that incorporated physical training, career counseling, and cadence learning-which is a form of singing).

Several comments from the administrators provided an additional insight that referenced their use of a Multiple Intelligence curriculum, stating the following:

Administrator #1

“We are currently developing more complete curriculum guides for the eight core

components.”

-Georgia

Administrator #2

“Our fast track students experience (growth) once they receive their GED is to have an option of either entering into a community college setting or to participate in a vocational school which offers numerous career experiences during the 5 months they are with us. For others the one on one tutoring in the fields they are in need of, offers a positive reinforcement that is such a benefit.”

-Arizona

Administrator #3

“Our trades school curriculum is by far the (students’) favorite” and “ Utilization of the new computer software (WIN/Workkeys) also seems to be popular”

-Kentucky

Administrator #4

“Students enjoy the varied curriculum with extra curricular activities.”

-Illinois

Administrator #5

“Our curriculum has always been varied, and we have always taken the liberty to add to it, based upon the creativeness and expertise of the staff.”

-Mississippi

Administrator #6

“They (students) enjoy the one on one attention that the teachers give them and the interesting curriculum the most.”

-Louisiana, Gillis Long Ctr.

Administrator #7

“Since we are not bound by any hard and fast curriculum guides we are able to try many different things. Probably the best combo we have ever tried is 2 weeks of challenge (non academic) and then academics 6 hours per day (5 classroom teachers one for each testable area) and 1 life skills course.....We have found that mixing life skills, job skills, educational tours and physical exercise all during our academic day seems to work best.”

-Arkansas

Administrator #8

“They enjoy the one on one attention that the teachers give them and the

interesting curriculum.”

-Oregon

Administrator # 9

“They enjoy the one on one attention that the teachers give them and the interesting curriculum.”

-New Mexico

When asked to tell whether they would recommend a combination of incorporating a varied curriculum that is reflective of a Multiple Intelligence curriculum (ex. Academics that are coupled with extracurricular activities such as physical training, some form of music, etc.) there were a few discrepancies however, the majority of the administrators showed favoritism towards a varied curriculum, while others seemed a bit hesitant to demonstrate resounding approval. The following results were obtained (see Table 4):

Table 4

Administrator Recommendations for a Multiple Intelligence Curriculum

	<u>Definitely</u> <u>Will</u> <u>Recommend</u>	<u>Probably</u> <u>Will</u> <u>Recommend</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>Probably</u> <u>Will Not</u> <u>Recommend</u>	<u>Definitely</u> <u>Will Not</u> <u>Recommend</u>
<u>Administrator</u> <u>Responses</u>	9	2	1		

Student Satisfaction With A Multiple Intelligence Curriculum

Survey results indicate that the majority of the administrators’ had favorable responses after

their school's students were queried in reference to student satisfaction with the curriculum. First the administrators were asked if they had conversations with their students and if so, whether the students were satisfied with the current curriculum design. Specifically, the schools' administrators were asked to pinpoint what their students' responses were given a set of parameters. The results of their responses are below (see Table 5).

Table 5

Student Satisfaction With A Multiple Intelligence Curriculum

	Yes, with Academy and Instructors	Yes, because of the parameters outside of the Academy's curriculum design	No, they spoke of problems that were not resolved.	No problems, No contact with students
Administrator Responses	9	2		1

It should also be noted that when the students were asked directly by the administrators, as to what they particularly liked about the Youth Challenge Academy's curriculum, the students mentioned the one on one attention; the varied curriculum because there were extra curricular activities, such as sports and field trips; the hands on activities that were provided by the trade school components of the curriculum, and the computer simulation classes.

Factor #2: Influences of Class Size Reduction

A reduced student teacher ratio, that is, the number of alternative high school students taught by one teacher within one classroom that consisted of 19 students or below.

Null Hypothesis 3

H_{03} : There will be no significant difference in GED passage rates of students within

larger classroom sizes of student to teacher ratios of 25 to 1 or higher as compared to smaller classroom sizes of student to teacher ratios or 19 to 1 or below.

The tables below reflect the results of the survey questions that were given in reference to each administrator's knowledge of their respective school's student/teacher ratios. The Youth Challenge Academy's main goal is to focus on student achievement for at risk youth. It was the researcher's intention to discover what role classroom size, as defined by student/teacher ratio, played in the sample surveyed towards the Academy's goal. The administrators were asked several categorical questions in relationship to the student teacher ratios from their respective schools. The categories reflected inquiry as to a) the actual student to teacher ratio used at each respective Academy (see Table 6) b) the administrators' satisfaction with the student/teacher ratio that was in place at their Academy as compared to the student/ teacher ratios within a traditional classroom (see Table 7) and c) the administrators' likelihood of recommending reduced student/ teacher ratios for future classes (see Table 8). In addition, the administrators were also asked whether they would recommend incorporating a combination of reduced student to teacher ratio, along with a varied curriculum and mentorship program for their Academy's future students (see Table 9).

Based on the results from this sample, the null hypothesis is rejected. The tables below reflect the responses from each of the administrators queried from each of the 12 Youth Challenge Academies.

Table 6

Actual Student To Teacher Ratio Present At Each Youth Challenge Academy

Survey Question: How Satisfied are you with the presence of small (15/1 or below) student/teacher classroom ratios present in your Academy over the last two years?

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied	Not Applicable
Academy Choice & Location	*Arkansas Mississippi Virginia (after GED placement)	*Oregon New Mexico *Louisiana -Gillis Long Georgia- Ft. Stewart Arizona		Louisiana- Camp Minden Kentucky Michigan	Illinois	

**Reflects Youth Challenge Academies that supplied 342 student GED test results.*

Table 7

Administrators' Satisfaction With the Student/Teacher Ratio in Place

As Compared To the Student / Teacher Ratios of 25/1 or Greater, Within a Traditional Classroom

	Much Better	Somewhat Better	About the Same	Somewhat Worse	Much Worse	Don't Know
Academy Choice	*Arkansas Mississippi New Mexico Georgia-Ft. Stewart *Louisiana -Gillis Long Ctr. *Oregon Virginia	Arizona Michigan	Louisiana-Camp Minden Kentucky	Illinois		
Total	7	2	2	1		

**Reflects Youth Challenge Academies that supplied 342 student GED test results.*

Table 8

Administrators' Future Likelihood of Recommending A Combined Curriculum With: a) Reduced Student to Teacher Ratio; b) A Multiple Intelligence Curriculum and c) A Mentorship Program for Future Students

	Definitely Will	Probably Will	Not Sure	Probably Will Not	Definitely Will Not	Never Used
Academy Choice	Kentucky Virginia *Oregon Louisiana-Camp Minden *Louisiana-Gillis Long Michigan Arizona Georgia New Mexico Mississippi	*Arkansas				

	Illinois					
Total	11	1				

**Reflects Youth Challenge Academies that supplied 342 student GED test results.*

Below is a comment from an administrator that provided additional insight as to how this particular school viewed reduced student to teacher ratios within a classroom.

Administrator #1

“I believe small classes can be effective if students have similar skills.... I do believe that classes with only 4-5 to 1 are able to improve with the extra attention. I also believe some of our best work has been done with more teachers in the classroom rather than lower ratio. Team teaching with 2-3 teachers in a room with 20-25 students has really worked out well for both teachers and students.”
-Arkansas

Factor #3: Influences of a Mentorship Program

Incorporation of a well defined and stable mentorship program as a required part of the curriculum.

Null Hypothesis 4

H₀4: There will be no significant difference in GED passage rates of students who have been exposed to a constructive mentorship program (as identified by administrator satisfaction rates) when mandated as an integral part of the student’s curriculum.

The tables below reflect the results of the survey questions that were given in reference to each administrator’s knowledge of their respective school’s mentorship program. The Youth Challenge Academy’s main goal is to focus on student achievement for at risk youth. In this

portion of the survey, it was the researcher's intention to discover what role a mentorship program would have, in reference to GED pass/fail rates, if it were an integral part of a curriculum that was designed for at risk youth. The administrators were asked several categorical questions in relationship to their respective school's mentorship program. The categories reflected inquiry as to a) how satisfied the administrator was with the design of his/her school's mentorship program (see Table 9); b) whether they would recommend incorporating a mentorship program in a school's curriculum if it was in combination with a reduced student to teacher ratio and had multiple intelligence influences within the curriculum for other school systems in general (see Table 10); and c) how likely the administrator will continue to incorporate this sort of multifaceted curriculum (mentorship program, varied curriculum and reduced student/teacher ratio) for the next school year (see Table 11).

Also, when asked the question "When you had discussions with the students of your Academy, were they satisfied with the current curriculum design to your complete satisfaction?" an overwhelming majority, 92%, of the administrators (see chart A) reported that their students were happy with the Academy and its instructors. Based on this particular portion of the survey sample, that concerns social adjustment, the results of this survey sample showed that 11 out of 12 administrators viewed a positive school social adjustment between the students and the Academy's staff.

Based on the results from the sample surveyed along the lines of the Academies' mentorship program, the null hypothesis is rejected. The tables and Chart A below reflect the responses from each of the administrators queried from each of the mentorship programs present for each of the 12 Youth Challenge Academies.

Chart A

Student and Staff Relationships At the Youth Challenge Academy

Survey Question: “When you had discussions with the students of your Academy, were they satisfied with the current curriculum design to your complete satisfaction?”

Choices: a) Yes, with the Academy and its instructors

b) Yes, because of parameters outside of the Academy’s curriculum design

c) No, they spoke of problems that were not resolved

d) No problems/No contact with students

Results: 11 administrators, **Arkansas; *Oregon; Louisiana-Camp Minden; Mississippi; Virginia; New Mexico; *Louisiana-Gillis Long; Georgia-Ft. Stewart; Arizona; Michigan and Illinois*, chose “a)” Yes, with the Academy and its instructors.

1 administrator (*Kentucky*) chose “b)” Yes, because of parameters outside of the Academy’s curriculum design.

Table 9

Administrator Satisfaction With His/Her Academy’s Mentorship Program’s Design

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied	Not Applicable
Academy Choice & Location	<i>*Arkansas *Oregon Louisiana-Camp Minden Mississippi</i>	<i>New Mexico *Louisiana-Gillis Long Georgia-Ft. Stewart Arizona</i>		<i>Kentucky Michigan</i>	<i>Illinois</i>	

	<i>Virginia (after GED placement)</i>					
Total	5	4		2	1	

**Reflects Youth Challenge Academies that supplied 342 student GED test results.*

Table 10

Administrators' Likelihood of Recommending A Combined Curriculum With: a) Reduced Student to Teacher Ratio; b) A Multiple Intelligence Curriculum and c) A Mentorship Program for other school systems.

	Definitely Will	Probably Will	Not Sure	Probably Will Not	Definitely Will Not	Never Used
Academy Choice	Kentucky	*Arkansas				
	Virginia					
	*Oregon					
	Louisiana-Camp Minden					
	*Louisiana-Gillis Long					
	Michigan					
	Arizona					
	Georgia					
	New Mexico					
	Mississippi					

	Illinois					
Total	11	1				

**Reflects Youth Challenge Academies that supplied 342 student GED test results.*

Table 11

Based on Their Experiences, Administrators' Likelihood of Implementing A Combined Curriculum With: a) A Mentorship Program; b) A Multiple Intelligence Curriculum and c) Reduced Student to Teacher Ratio for the Next School Year.

	Extremely Likely	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Somewhat Unlikely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
Academy Choice	Virginia	Michigan				Arizona
	Louisiana-Camp Minden	New Mexico				
	*Arkansas	Kentucky				
	Georgia	*Louisiana-Gillis				
	Mississippi	Long				
	Illinois	*Oregon				
Total	6	5				1

**Reflects Youth Challenge Academies that supplied 342 student GED test results.*

Findings and Central Themes

The surveys that were completed by the Youth Challenge Academies' administrators resulted in the emergence of four central themes in reference to an educationally at risk students' GED pass/fail rates. These themes are as follows: a) the influence of a specialized curriculum that is targeted towards the needs of educationally at risk students; b) the influence of a varied curriculum, that emphasizes the Multiple Intelligences on student achievement and school personnel satisfaction; c) the influence of student to teacher ratios within a classroom relative to student achievement and school personnel satisfaction and d) school administrators' and students' views on the overall affects of a multifaceted curriculum that mandates the components of a mentorship program, reduced student/teacher ratios and a varied extracurricular and academic program of study. These emergent themes show indication on how salient a multifaceted curriculum is towards a student, who is at risk educationally and socially, in obtaining academic and personal success in general.

A summary of the findings from this study are below (see table 12). It should also be noted that one school in particular made poignant comment as to the academic readiness of some of the students who initially enter Youth Challenge Academy. This administrator pointed out that some 16-18 year old students enter the Academy with mild learning disabilities, especially in reference to reading and mathematics. In some cases, the administrator noted that some students have entered the Academy with only 2nd grade reading and math levels and were not able to pass the GED. These students, however, were able to show progress or excel in other components of the curriculum. The academic readiness prior to acceptance into the Youth Challenge Academy appeared to vary across the country, however, each student was required to take the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) prior to entering the Academy.

Table 12

Summary of Overall Findings

(Parts A & B)

Part A:

(Percentages Reflect Administrators Responses On Curriculum Affects)

	Factor a: Mentorship Program	Factor b: Reduced Student /Teacher Ratio Within A Classroom	Factor c: Multiple Intelli- gence Curriculum	Youth Challenge Academies that use a Curriculum with combined efforts of factors a, b and c	2001-2003 GED Pass/Fail Rate (Sample size =342 students)	General Favor- ability for using a multi- faceted curric- ulum for future classes
Positive (Satisfied- Very Satisfied) Influence On Helping At Risk Youth	75%	75% (Reported "Better or "Much Better" Student/ Teacher Ratio compared to traditional	92%	92% (Student & Adminis- trator Responses)	85% (Passed GED)	92%

		schools)				
Neutral or Negative Influence on Helping At Risk Youth	25%	25%	8%	8%	15% (Failed GED)	8%

Part B:

92% of Youth Challenge Academy administrators queried reported students were satisfied with “Academy and its instructors”. 8% of Youth Challenge Academy administrators queried reported that students were satisfied with “parameters outside of the curriculum”.

The final chapter of this study, Chapter 5, will provide a summary of this study in general; the implications from this study; and in addition, it will provide the researcher’s recommendations for future studies. It is hoped that the information that will be provided in Chapter 5 will help educators and other concerned individuals in aiding youth at risk who are educationally and socially disadvantaged in the future.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

A major observation that has come to the forefront within the current research on education reform concerns the fact that only 50% (Cassell, 2003) of the prison and incarcerated juvenile delinquent population are high school graduates. A salient impetus for this research was to try to discover possible leads into how to alleviate or at least reduce the prison population of juvenile delinquents. It was the researcher's opinion that one of the methods to reduce this population is to address some of the curriculum issues for youths who are at risk educationally and socially.

Addressing curriculum issues for youth who are at risk of academic and social failure is a significant endeavor because the main goal of our secondary alternative school programs is to produce intellectually creative (Mace, 1998) and career minded high school graduates who have strong character morals and employable skills. Thus, the specific curriculum design (Walter-Thomas & Korinek, 1999) becomes increasingly important when educators and our society try to determine how to reduce the prison population and ultimately increase the number of productive members and young people within our society.

When analyzing curriculum issues that are aimed towards youth at risk, there are two major problems that become apparent:

1. What are the methods that may be effective in helping youth at risk to succeed in education and ultimately in life, especially if alternative education is deemed necessary?
2. If we are educating children who have suffered from child abuse/neglect from within and outside of the immediate family, are there specific curriculum and mentorship methods that should be used for these students?

This study considered both questions, however, the first question was this study's primary focus. That is, the identification of a successful curriculum program for at risk youth who have been placed in an alternative education school. The effectiveness of a mentorship program is often an integral part of the majority of residential youth at risk programs, so the study also considered the affect of a mentorship program in conjunction with the components of a reduced student to teacher ratio on the overall success rate of at risk students in general.

The method that was used for this study was by means of a survey. In this respect, this case study examined the work being conducted in one such alternative school system's curriculum program. The alternative school program, National Guard Youth Challenge Academy, is a nationwide program that has alternative schools in practically every state in the country. It is known for its military style; smaller class environment; use of physical activity and varied curriculum practices.

Twelve of these Academies, located in the four major areas of the country (North, South, East and West) were part of the study. A curriculum survey was distributed via the internet to 12 different Academies' administrators within the Youth Challenge organization. These surveys were given to an administrator from each of the Academies who was directly involved with their respective school's curriculum development and assessment.

The researcher used an Internet survey (see Appendix A) that consisted of 10 close ended

questions and 2 open ended question for the study. The survey consisted of categorical questions that related to each Academy's mentorship program, student to teacher ratios within the classroom and the degree to which a varied curriculum was incorporated within the school's curriculum. These three factors were considered in correlation with each Academy's GED test results.

The first 10 questions contained 4 Likert scaled items. The two open ended questions that were in the survey provided information that reflected the administrators' opinions in reference to their individual satisfaction with various aspects of the curriculum that was in place. The survey was designed to gain information about the curriculum program's specifics, and the results of GED test scores for the years 2001-2003. The questions that were asked made an effort to determine what criteria was conducive to passing the GED at Youth Challenge Academy.

Each administrator was initially introduced to the researcher by means of a formal letter that was distributed by the Youth Challenge Academy's national director. Letters of informed consent will be given to each participant (Appendix D). After this introduction, the researcher contacted each administrator via a letter of introduction that informed each administrator about the researcher's background and the ultimate purpose of the study. After approval of the study's proposal from the Human Subject Review Committee, the survey was then sent as an attachment or placed within the body of the message for each of the contacts with the administrators.

Each of the 12 administrators from the 12 alternative school programs of the Youth Challenge Academy, were also asked to supply either hard data or qualitative information. The information that was requested was from the previous three years', 2001-2003, of GED test results for 1 of the 2 graduating classes that graduated for each respective year. The records that were requested were asked to be kept anonymous, and the pass/fail rates were requested only. Of

the data received, the researcher used a representative sample of 342 students' GED test results from three of the schools that supplied this information. The GED test results that were used in the study represented the pass/fail rates for the years 2001-2003.

The overall findings from this study found that an overwhelming percentage (92%) of the administrators and students, from the 12 Youth Challenge Academies surveyed across the country, enjoyed the results of a multifaceted curriculum, in particular, a curriculum that employs job skills, computer and hands on application, sports, teaming, some form of music (cadence) and extracurricular activities such as job shadowing and life skills. This percentage (92%) is also reflected in terms of the number of administrators who plan to use a multifaceted curriculum for their respective Academy's future students.

In addition, this same percentage number (92%) was reflected by the administrators who would suggest incorporating this sort of curriculum for other school systems. 8% of the 12 administrators surveyed in both cases, however, reported that they were either neutral or not satisfied with the multifaceted curriculum that was being used and that they would not recommend it to other school systems.

In addition, 85% of the 342 students who had been exposed to a multifaceted curriculum (Multiple Intelligence; Mentorship Program and a reduced student /teacher ratio) passed the GED exam. The 15% of the 342 students who did not pass the exam were described as individuals who may possibly have learning disabilities that hampered their success with this exam.

Another finding from this study is that 75% of the administrators reported favorable results from their respective mentorship programs. 25% of the 12 administrators surveyed, reported that they were either neutral or not satisfied with the progress of their mentorship program that was in place. Since many of the categories of youth that may place a student at risk

concerns the family's circumstances and/or living environment, a strong and productive mentorship program is extremely important in terms of helping youth at risk succeed educationally and socially. Drug and/or alcohol infestation, sexual misconduct, and exposure to child abuse or neglect are contributors to a student being considered at risk (McWhirter, et al., 1998), and in this respect, this 25% of administrators who were not satisfied with their mentorship program, acknowledge this fact.

In addition, 75% of the 12 administrators reported that their was a reduced student to teacher ratio present within their respective Academies of 19 to 1 or below. 25% of the administrators reported that they were not satisfied with the number of students present in one classroom per teacher. Of this 25%, the administrators admitted that the number of students present per teacher in a classroom was the same as a traditional classroom, which averages 25 to 1 and that they were not satisfied with this ratio. Of this 25%, their were administrators that reported a higher ratio of 30 to 1 stator above prior to student placement after taking the GED. The administrators that reported the higher ratios admitted that this circumstance lasted between 1-2 weeks in the beginning of the of the program, and that the ratio was quickly reduced to an average of 15 to 1, after this period for the remainder of the program.

Conclusions

Archival data, surveys, and interviews with the curriculum advisors and administrators of the 12 Youth Challenge Academy participants indicate several positive outcomes that can occur from a specialized curriculum that is aimed at youth at risk. The information gathered from this study indicates that a multifaceted curriculum is a curriculum that incorporates a mentorship program, the Multiple Intelligences and a reduced student to teacher ratio within one classroom can have remarkable results in reference to GED passing rates for youth at risk of academic and

social failure. Indeed, this specialized curriculum and residential program had several positive outcomes because it concentrates its efforts and resources towards the specific needs of the youth at risk immediately upon entrance and acceptance into the Academy. The results of the multifaceted curriculum that was used throughout the students' stay at the Academy included improved student attitudes toward education and camaraderie with his/her peers and faculty. As a result of the three criteria hypothesized about as a basis of this study, that is, a curriculum that contains an a)mentorship program; b) reduced student to teacher ration and c) integration of the Multiple Intelligence precepts, an overwhelming percentage of the students succeeded both academically and socially. 92% of the students were reported as appreciating the Academy and its instructors. The remaining 8% of the students reported appreciating extracurricular activities and sports, which were considered parameters outside of the curriculum by the administrator who reported this percentage. These results support my original hypothesis, in that a specialized curriculum that provides a multitude of learning adaptations with a comprehensive reduced student to teacher ratio will make a difference in terms of the educational and social attainments of youth at risk. Granted this is a small sample, however, the number of student GED test scores (342) that were analyzed is significant. The fact that 85% of these students passed the GED, who were previously high school dropouts, further supports the original hypothesis of this study. Indeed, what makes the results of this analysis even more significant is the fact that the GED test scores were collected over a three year period, which tends to implicate a thematic trend for the formula that is needed for a successful curriculum that is targeted towards youth at risk.

Since 75% of the administrators reported that they were satisfied with their mentorship program, it is believed that the administrators realized in general, how important it is for students who are in the category of being at risk for academic and social failure sincerely need positive

role models who may indeed be outside of their immediate family. What's very interesting is that the 25% (Kentucky, Michigan and Illinois) of the administrators who reported dissatisfaction with their mentorship program are also the same administrators who reported dissatisfaction with their student to teacher ratios. This percentage, based on this sample studied, demonstrates that there appears to be a correlation between the Academies whose mentorship program was lacking and the schools' organizational plan. Furthermore, since these same administrators reported "unsatisfied" to "very unsatisfied" with respect to their respective student to teacher ratios, this demonstrates that they see the importance of reduced student to teacher ratios when it concerns educating youth at risk for academic and social failure. Indeed, these administrators reported that their student to teacher ratios were not significantly different than a traditional school's classroom, which is where the at risk student originated from before dropping out of high school.

Considering the traditional classroom size as compared to an alternative school's classroom size, there is supposed to be a significant difference by definition between the differences that separate the two types of educational programs. Since classroom size has very often been a problem within the traditional school systems of detrimental proportion (Kennedy, 2003; United States Department of Education, 1999) the results of this study demonstrate that the 25% of the administrators who were unhappy with the classroom sizes within their respective Academies, also acknowledge the saliency of this aspect within any educational program. In essence, most alternative school settings have generally tended to alleviate this factor (Hollinger, 1996; Curtin & Ryan, 2003)) by reducing their student to teacher ratios within a classroom.

These particular circumstances appear to be an indicator that the Academies in question may still be in a transitional phase, in that the administrators in this instance do not feel that their

Academies have reached the program goals of the Youth Challenge Academy in general, i.e., reduced student to teacher ratios within a classroom and a productive mentorship program for its students. In this respect, the hypothesis of this study is supported, in that these curriculum criteria are salient towards a productive curriculum for at risk youth. The fact that findings such as this one reflects the benefits of the design of this study, because the results tended towards not only reflecting relevant percentages that supported positive observations from each Academies' administrator, but the results of this study also reflect the negative observations from each Academies' administrator. This was beneficial in analyzing both ends of the spectrum.

In general, the Youth Challenge's Academy is to help youth at risk and the fact that 92% of the administrators surveyed, acknowledged that a multifaceted curriculum such as the one analyzed for this study, is needed for at risk youth. That is, since this large percentage of administrators reported the importance of these three criteria (a reduced student to teacher ratio; a comprehensive mentorship program and a implementation of the Multiple Intelligences) within a curriculum then it stands to reason why 25% of the administrators surveyed were not happy with class sizes that were the same as a traditional school's or higher. Indeed, the fact that an overwhelming majority (85%) of the students taking the GED over the three year period while this sort of curriculum was in place, says a lot to the curriculum advisors and administrators of the at risk youth program. An overwhelming majority of the administrators as a result of their various observations, have acknowledged a curriculum formula that works. They have acknowledged a specialized curriculum formula that works for at risk youth.

In essence, each of these administrators have said that these criteria: a) a mentorship program; b) a reduced student to teacher ratio and c) incorporation of the Multiple Intelligences within a curriculum is actually needed to maintain academic success for their at risk youth. The

results from this study are significant, as they are in correlation to the researcher's original hypothesis.

Another promising result from this study concerns the fact that the majority of the administrators reported that they intend to continue to use a curriculum that has the three major components as well as recommend the curriculum to other school systems as well. This is an important find because it demonstrates the trust that the administrators have in implementing a multifaceted school program when it concerns youth at risk and especially when it concerns raising their GED passing rates in general.

Since the administrators were able to report specifics as to what exactly kept former high school drop outs in their program, a wealth of knowledge is gained from this information alone. Several conclusions can develop as a result from their comments in this area. For example, one can conclude that at risk students need variety and outlet opportunities to express their possible talents that had not been tapped into before within a traditional school setting. The mentioning of students who stayed with the Academy because of its real life job skills programs, sports outlets and hands on activities speaks towards the significance of the Multiple Intelligences that need to be exercised in the teenaged population. This is a relevant finding of this study because the main goal of our secondary alternative school programs is to produce intellectually creative (Mace, 1998) and career minded high school graduates who have strong character morals and employable skills.

Implications for Future Research in the Field of Education

The results from this particular study demonstrate the need for further research in the field of implementing Multiple Intelligences concepts to grades 9-12 and the affects of reduced student to teacher ratios within a classroom on secondary students in general. Other studies for the future

would concern discovering the characteristics that contribute towards an effective mentorship program for youth who are educationally and socially at risk. Granted, most teenagers begin to realize what fields they are interested in pursuing during this stage in life, however, there are many who do not. Further study as to the positive affects of adding variety to the method of lesson plan delivery to various secondary fields of study would provide more information towards reducing the population of at risk youth within our school systems.

In addition, future research that provides hard data in terms of reduced student to teacher ratios within a secondary classroom would be very beneficial to the high schools and alternative schools across the nation. Most alternative education programs and private schools in general have realized the benefits of reducing this ratio, however, there is not a plethora of statistics, hard data and research in general circulation to corroborate what is already being practiced in the majority of alternative and private school programs.

Recommendations

Studying alternative school programs that begin at the secondary level, 9-12 grade, and the affects of reduced student to teacher ratios; what constitutes a productive mentorship program; and what constitutes a productive Multiple Intelligence curriculum for at risk youth is recommended. Additional studies with at risk youth, faculty and administrators of at risk youth programs would enable researchers to determine if there are similar positive effects that can be observed by others who are involved in educational programs and school aimed at youth at risk. Follow-up study into the three curriculum aspects of this study would provide additional data regarding there affects on increasing high school graduation rates for youth at risk.

Focusing on at risk youth who are in the adolescent stage is extremely imperative as they are at a critical stage in life that will determine whether they will be of help or

hindrances to society in general. This is a time within their lives when they will “adopt behavior patterns” that will ultimately determine their choices for the future (Carnegie Council on Adolescent development, 1995, p. 20). Thus, one can conclude from this study, that there are three criteria that appear to be necessary towards increasing the high school graduation rates for at risk youth, they are: a) reduced student to teacher ratios, b) an effective mentorship program and c) a curriculum that incorporates the Multiple Intelligences.

The findings from this study indicate the benefits of the three curriculum criteria mentioned above towards helping youth who are at risk educationally and socially to succeed in life. The 342 student GED test results that were studied in this research were accumulated over a three year period demonstrated a positive trend when a multifaceted curriculum program is in place. As a result, this implies that the procedures used for this study may be beneficial to future researchers, especially if they are able to identify a theme of successful curriculum attributes over an extended period of time.

Practical recommendations as a result of this study’s findings indicate the need for a comprehensive curriculum program that incorporates real life job skills programs, sports outlets and hands on activities for at risk youth, and for adolescents in general. Mixing fun activities with academics is recommended because the results of the student and administrator interviews from this study indicate that this was a strong magnet for the Youth Challenge program. An overwhelming majority of administrators and their students reported that this was what made them continue in the Youth Challenge program. In addition, other practical recommendations indicate the need for administrators of at risk youth programs to continue to evaluate, monitor and possibly reorganize their mentorship programs if needed. The same is true for the student to teacher ratios within the classrooms of these schools. It appears that it is very important to maintain one on one tutoring and attention if needed for at risk youth. As a result, smaller student to teacher ratios within a classroom is recommended. At risk students need variety and outlet opportunities to express their possible talents that had not been tapped

into before within a traditional school setting.

Future Research Recommendations-Broad Spectrum

In a broader context, future research recommendations are as follows: a) research on the graduation rates and standardized test scores of private school students as well as that of other programs and schools that are aimed at risk youth; b) continue follow up studies on the students who graduate from these programs, in reference to what they do with their lives after attending at risk youth programs, and c) research on adult education programs and initiatives that are aimed at supporting adults, 18-24, who graduated from schools that were for at risk youth.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Curriculum Design Survey

Curriculum Design Survey

Dear Superintendent of Instruction /School Administrator:

As the curriculum coordinator of the Youth Challenge’s school program, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to help aid youth who are considered at risk. Please help me to continue my efforts along this avenue by taking a couple of minutes to tell me about your curriculum program and its attributes that your school has been utilizing so far. I sincerely appreciate your efforts.

How satisfied are you with the curriculum content of your school's academic and extracurricular program over the last two years in reference to the criteria below:

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
Varied curriculum (i.e. mixture of academics & extracurricular activities)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Proactive Mentorship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

program

Small (15/1 or below) student/teacher classroom ratios.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Installation or consistent use of physical/group activities for students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Usage of artistic/science experience for students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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GED test results that show at least a 50% GED passage rate for the Academy's graduates.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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How often does your Academy vary its curriculum (sports, academics, art, group activities, exposure to nature, any form of music (cadence)?

Once a week or more often

2 to 3 times a month

Once a month

Every 2-3 months

Do not use

Overall, how satisfied are you with the mentorship program design for your Academy?

Very Unsatisfied

Unsatisfied

Somewhat Satisfied

Very Satisfied

Extremely Satisfied

Compared to traditional classroom sizes in public schools (averaging 25/1 for its student/teacher ratio) the student/teacher ratio for your Academy is.....

Much better

Somewhat better

About the same

- Somewhat worse
- Much worse
- Don't know



Would you recommend a continued combination of classrooms with a reduced student/teacher ratio; a mentorship program and a varied curriculum (ex. academics that are coupled with extracurricular activities such as physical training, some form of music, etc.) for future students?

- Definitely will
- Probably will
- Might or might not
- Probably will not
- Definitely will not
- Never used



How likely are you to recommend a combination of incorporating reduced student/teacher classroom ratios; a mentorship program and a varied curriculum (ex. academics that are coupled with extracurricular activities such as physical training, some form of music, etc.) program to curriculum coordinators in other school systems?

- Definitely will recommend
- Probably will recommend
- Not sure

- Probably will not recommend
- Definitely will not recommend
- Never Used



Based on your experience with reduced student/teacher ratios; a mentorship program and a varied curriculum (ex. academics that are coupled with extracurricular activities such as physical training, some form of music, etc.), how likely are you to continue to incorporate this curriculum design within your school's curriculum plan again for the next school year?

- Very Unlikely
- Unlikely
- Somewhat Unlikely
- Very Likely
- Extremely Likely



When you had discussions with the students of your Academy, were they satisfied with the current curriculum design to your complete satisfaction?

- Yes, with the Academy and its instructors
- Yes, because of parameters outside of the Academy's curriculum design
- No, they spoke of problems that were not resolved
- No problems/No contact with students



If you have additional comments for your Academy about your experience with its curriculum design that has not been addressed in the survey, please enter them below. Example, which of these parameters: 1) the Academy's mentorship program 2) Reduced student/teacher ratios in the Academy per academic subject and 3) the varied curriculum (physical training, career counseling, cadence learning, etc., in your personal opinion, has helped to increase your Academy's graduation success rate?

Which of the 3 parts of the curriculum have you personally observed (or have been informed of by your students/instructors) the students enjoying the most (if any)?



Thank you for your feedback. I sincerely appreciate your honest opinion and will take your input into consideration while continuing my efforts in analyzing the needs and services in the future for youth who are at risk of academic failure.

Reference

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APPENDIX B

Letter to the National Youth Challenge Academy Requesting Permission to
Conduct Research

Letter to the National Youth Challenge Academy Requesting Permission to
Conduct Research

To: Director of Education and Training.

National Guard Youth Challenge Academy

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Angela Fleming. I am a secondary science teacher by trade and have taught in the Chatham County school district of Georgia for the last five years. I have taken time off from teaching recently in an effort to complete my doctoral studies in the Department of Education at Argosy University in Sarasota, Florida. As part of my studies I am required to complete a research dissertation in the area of Curriculum and Instruction. I have selected the area of at risk youth as the focus of my research.

Since I have taught in the public school sector for over 12 years, I am extremely interested in what methods educators can use in an effort to help our youth at risk for academic and social failure. I am especially interested in the effects of classroom size reduction (student/teacher ratios in one classroom), curriculum reform and mentoring.

I am writing to you to request permission to conduct this dissertation research by asking the curriculum coordinators of your program questions in reference to the topics listed above. This would involve emailing the curriculum coordinator questions relating to the trends that your Academy has observed in reference to the Academy's GED test results, its outlook on mentoring and its curriculum guide (general lesson plan). Should I gain your approval, the involvement of your academy's employees in this research would be entirely voluntary and they could withdraw from the research at any stage.

This survey questionnaire is anonymous and names of those persons and of the academy used in the research would be changed. Upon completion of my study, a copy of my dissertation would be forwarded to you.

If you have any questions about my dissertation research project please feel free to contact me via the email address attached to this letter. Thank you very much in advance, for your assistance in this long awaited endeavor.

Sincerely,

Angela Fleming

Appendix C
Letter of Informed Consent

Letter of Informed Consent

This letter will explain the doctoral research that is being conducted by Angela Fleming. It requests that as survey participants in reference to the curriculum needs for at risk youth; by reading the information below and by having that information fully explained to you, you will sign to designate your consent in an effort to participate in this research.

The purpose of this research is to determine whether a combination of mentoring, small student/teacher ratios within one academic oriented classroom and a varied curriculum will affect the high school graduation rates of youth who have been designated as being at risk for academic and social failure.

If you agree to participate in this research you will be asked to complete a question survey of 12 questions which will reflect your professional knowledge of your school's curriculum and mentoring program. It is anticipated that your participation in the survey would take approximately 30 to 40 minutes.

Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary and based on anonymity and be kept confidential. You may refuse to participate at all, or choose to stop your participation at any point during the survey without fear of penalty or negative consequences of any kind.

The raw data will be kept in a secured file by the researcher. The findings of this research will be reported only as descriptive data with pseudo-names used in all applicable circumstances.

If you wish to do so, you have the right to review the findings of the research. A copy of the findings may be obtained by contacting the researcher at the email address below:

Angela Fleming

E-mail: ary_arg@yahoo.com

There will not be any direct or immediate benefits from your participation in this research. The findings of the research, however, may help to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of reduced classroom size (i.e. student teacher ratios in one classroom); mentoring and incorporation of a varied curriculum in reference to helping at risk achieve academically and socially.

I, _____, have read and understand the foregoing information explaining the purpose of this research and my rights and responsibilities as a subject. My e-signature and the date attached to this message designate my consent to participate in this research, according to the terms and conditions outlined above.



Arizona Project CHALLENGE

ARIZONA NATIONAL GUARD

20395 East Rittenhouse Road, Queen Creek, Az. 85242

Phone: (480) 988-4100 Fax: (480) 987-5340

1-800-296-8110

www.azpc.org

March 15, 2004

Ref: Dissertation Project

To: Angela Fleming

I received your inquiry for our participation in your survey. I would be happy to be involved. Please forward your survey to my contact information listed below.

Should you desire additional information, do not hesitate to contact me.

Again thank you for considering the ChalleNGe programs.

Best Regards,

Kathy

Kathy Bachi

RPM Supervisor, Recruiting, Placement & Mentoring

(480) 988-4100 x258

(480) 987-5340 fax

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