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THE DILEMMA OF THE AT-RISK STUDENT
SELECTED CASE STUDIES OF ART EDUCATORS

by
Susan Christine Poelstra

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

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ABSTRACT

Virtually every school in America is being forced to cope with problems related to at-risk students. These students are those who are at risk of failing both in and out of school. Three experienced art educators who are employed by a single school district, one at the elementary level, one at middle level, and one at the high school level. Each are attempting to deal with at-risk students within their individual art classrooms. The inclusion of at-risk students affects the learning environment of the classroom and the effectiveness of the educator. With the growing concern regarding this special population it is hoped that by studying the methods incorporated by art educators who have long dealt with this dilemma, this research will help other educators learn to more effectively deal with this growing problem and improve the success of those students labeled at-risk.
Chapter One

Introduction

There are many problems facing the typical educator today. Regardless of the subject being taught or at what grade level, some common concerns are shared by teachers throughout America. One of the most prevalent difficulties confronting many educators is the recent addition of a multitude of full inclusion, behaviorally problematic, and at-risk students.

Few teachers in public schools find themselves educated or equipped to deal with these students who were hitherto hidden in special education or alternative learning programs or private schools (Arends, 1988; Moore, 1995). Preservice and novice teachers are seldom adequately prepared for the kinds of students who pose serious discipline and management problems on a daily basis (Goodlad, 1984; Schiller, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

This research proposes to study the problem of reaching at-risk and other full inclusion students in the art and general classroom, in an effort to improve their chances of success both in and out of school. This will be accomplished by conducting case studies which solicit viewpoints and
possible solutions to the dilemma of how best to deal with this special population. This information will be offered by three art educators each of whom represent one of the following levels, elementary, middle school, and high school. All work at separate schools located within a one mile radius of one another, each within the same school district located in a Southwestern state. This particular school district acknowledges, and is attempting to deal with, the problems associated with at-risk students at all grade levels and subject areas.

Purpose of the Study

Given the current crises affecting nearly every American public school as it attempts to deal with the growing problem of at-risk students and their sometimes disruptive behavior, there is a clear and immediate need for a study of this sort. It is the intent of this paper to answer the following research question: How might experienced art teachers help the novice or inexperienced teacher achieve success with the recent influx of mainstreamed, behaviorally or physically handicapped, and especially at-risk students? Due to their previous experience with this dilemma, I believe art educators are poised to assist their fellow teachers as the at-risk student and others are mainstreamed into the general educator's classroom.
Research Questions

In my attempt to understand how the educators in this study have reached a population some consider "unteachable," three research questions will be examined. The first question is: how do the geographic location of the school and the surrounding neighborhood as well socio-economic factors contribute to the labeling of a student as at-risk? The second is: What is the past and present relationship between art and the at-risk student? Third, does the misconception that art is a non-academic class contribute to the increased placement of a large number of students considered to be at-risk in art classes?

Delimitations

There are several delimitations that are worthy of note. First, this study does not intend to devise a cure-all solution to the problems of at-risk students. Second, this study will not attempt to involve or study a great number of educators or experts within the field of education or the at-risk population. Third, this study will focus on at-risk students enrolled in the art classes of three educators, not the general population of the district. Fourth, the art teachers partaking in this study do not consistently use the DBAE approach to art education.
Definitions

There are a number of terms which may be unfamiliar to the reader within the context of this paper.

The very term at-risk has many applications. As defined by Cairns & Cairns (1994) it describes those students who are seen by school and sometimes medical personnel as having behavioral, emotional or attitudinal problems. In most cases, it is further implied that this student has been deemed unlikely to achieve personal or academic success. Often these students are teen-age mothers, members of gangs, involved with drugs, and/or have engaged in criminal activity.

Full inclusion refers to the term used in Public Law number one hundred forty-two (PL-142), passed in 1975 it ensures that each child enrolled in a public school is entitled to a free education in the least restrictive environment. This legislation was sought to reduce and eliminate the discrimination of students who were perceived as handicapped.

Full inclusion is similar to the practice of mainstreaming students. This term refers to students who are placed and fully integrated into the general population of public school students, regardless of their perceived emotional, behavioral, intellectual, physical ability or disability.
As a result, any and all children residing in the United States are admitted to public schools. At present, this is a highly controversial issue (Nieto, 1992), as many educators feel ill-equipped to educate certain students with special needs.

**Educationally Mentally Handicapped (EMH).** This broad term can apply to one or many perceived handicaps to learning. Generally under this category are those diagnosed with one or more of the following: Learning Disabled (LD), Behaviorally Handicapped (BH), Emotionally Handicapped (EH), Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

**Gangs** are generally defined as organized groups of three or more who willfully choose to associate with one another. Today this term is used to apply to larger groups usually composed of young people (Gangsters or Gang Bangers) who participate in a variety of illegal and/or destructive activities, usually as a means of financial support, but also for the excitement generated by these anti-social acts. The two largest and best known gangs in the area being studied are the Crips and the Bloods. Both have numerous subgroups or smaller sub-gangs who may compete with each other for money, turf and/or power.
Within the gang, there a number of wannabes, who, as defined by the school district anti-gang policy, are individuals who have elected to be in an organized gang but have not yet been admitted as full-fledged members. As such, wannabes will take outrageous risks to gain full membership status within the gang.

References to the general population include the body of students in any public school who are composed of a wide spectrum of individuals with an enormous range of interests and abilities.

Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) refers to an approach to teaching art and/or an art curriculum that has been widely embraced and includes four specific areas of art to be studied. These are, art aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and art production (Clark, Day & Greer, 1987).

A school district as it is used in this study is defined as a geographical area which is governed by the school board and sets the policies and goals for both students and staff. Each school district operates individually under broad federal guidelines and the direction of a school board which is a group of elected or appointed individuals who reside within the district and oversee the policy making and general operation of each school within that school district.
General Assumptions

While reading this paper it is important to consider the assumptions made during the process of completing this thesis. All of these opinions were formed during observations I made while working and/or living in the school district under discussion. At the same time I was a part-time teacher for the county's probation department. As a General Education Diploma (GED) instructor working with a variety of adults, most of whom were likely to have once been classified as at-risk, I became better able to understand their perceptions of schools. From the probationers and numerous additional outside sources, I was able to garner much information and surmise the following.

The first assumption is that art classes are seen by students, teachers and administration alike, as non-academic places where learning anything valuable or relevant is a rare occurrence. The second assumption addresses the common misconception among educators and the public that in art classes there is a lack of discipline and classroom management skills on the part of the instructor and thereby an ideal "dumping-ground" for students who do not seem to fit the norm. Third, this study assumes that the selected art teachers have substantial previous experience and significant
insight as to ways to cope with the problems of at-risk and mainstreamed students. It is further assumed that at-risk students are a growing concern to not only the reader, but to all those involved with public schooling in America, including, and perhaps especially, parents.

Background of the Study

This study will examine the breadth of methodologies and compare and contrast the styles and philosophy employed by these select art educators who are veterans of teaching at-risk students. The manner in which they reach these students and help them to achieve success in art and other subject areas, as well as other areas of life, will be analyzed. By conducting in-depth interviews while using an observer-participant style, it is intended that detailed and insightful case studies will be developed.

The particular school district under discussion is one of great personal interest. I began my connections with the district as a high school student, continued as a student-teacher and teacher of art, and am presently a taxpayer in the district. As one of the many who sought and found refuge in the art classroom, this subject is close to my heart.

Early in my research I came across this message by Eugene Grigsby which accurately described my situation as a relocated high-school student
in the late 1970’s. He wrote: "... an individual denied self-worth, for whatever reason, is made to feel inferior, while others around him are made to feel superior; both are destructive to the personality. When a genuine sense of self and self-worth is developed, one is more likely to develop respect for others" (1974, p. 127).

Although I have been fortunate since then, and was, after much struggle, able to turn my life around, I was once among those who might today be described as at-risk. I belonged to neither a minority, nor a lower income family. I never joined a gang, or taken into police custody, nor was I an unwed teen-age mother. I was young, scared and looking for answers. Like many others, I found the solution to my problems through my involvement with art.

As Grigsby articulated so well when speaking of the art room as a place of refuge, I knew from personal experience, "This would not in any way solve the pressing social and economic needs of the country, but it would be a giant step forward" (p. 127). For me, the leap was tremendous.

While I was in high school I was aware of a few visionary educational leaders who were advocating school reform to deal with this new breed of student, soon to be known as "at-risk." As the child of two teachers I knew that there were efforts being made to restructure the public
restructure the public school system to accommodate the changing needs of
the students. Through newspapers and news magazines and television
reports, I learned that there had been a considerable increase in the number
of students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, poor families,
and/or non-traditional families. I discovered later that some educators
believed the children from impoverished and non-traditional families were
less likely to experience success, and more likely to cause disharmony in
the classroom and sometimes the entire school (Sprinthall & Sprinthall,
1990). Many educators felt themselves unprepared for the special needs of
these students, and this issue was suddenly, it seemed, of great concern at
both the local and national levels.

Over the years I watched with interest as vast sums of money were
spent on local gang and drug prevention programs. Despite the
implementation of such programs and the good intentions of those
involved, it was obvious that the problems plaguing large numbers of
students who fit into the mainstreamed, problematic, or at risk-profile
continued to grow in number and severity. It was this interest that led me
to research and write about this special population of at-risk students who
seemed an enigma to the educational world.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

There is a growing body of work which addresses the needs of those at-risk and targets the instructional methods specifically designed for these and other mainstreamed students. This literature is primarily published after the second half of the 1980's. Little of the material found, however, directly mentions art as a means to improve a student's chance of success in school and beyond.

This chapter is divided into three areas of concern and directly related to the three research questions posed in the first chapter as well as the central hypothesis which states: art teachers because of their past experience, have acquired certain skills which allow them to better cope with the at-risk, behaviorally problematic, and/or mainstreamed student than the average teacher.

The first area of concern, concentrates on some of the various rationales which attempt to explain the origin, conditions surrounding, and dramatic rise of the at-risk student. A relatively new problem to the education field, the schooling of the at-risk student is an issue that is of great interest and presently under tremendous review by a large number of researchers.
The second area of concern is the acknowledged, but relatively unexplored connection between the at-risk student and art. Although there is virtually no literature specifically relating to this topic, it is not a new problem to those who teach the arts. Determining why the at-risk student is often drawn to the arts, especially visual arts, will be discussed. There will also be an attempt made to help explain why so many at-risk children seem to be purposefully sent to art classes regardless of the student's interest or abilities.

The last area of concern focuses on the fact that art education has in the past been treated as a non-academic field of study. The reputation of art as a scholarly subject is to be discussed, as will the recent movement to make art an accepted discipline, especially at the secondary level. The numerous positive aspects of the arts and arts education are also briefly reviewed here. Not surprisingly, there are numerous testaments to the necessity and worthiness of art in our curricula and indeed, in our lives.

**Theoretical Perspectives of the At-Risk Student**

Preservice educators are those college students who are preparing to embark on a career as an educator. As these students ready themselves for their future profession, they are typically bombarded with a variety of
educational theories. As explained by Bloom (1987) in The Closing of the American Mind, many times those hypotheses contain ideas which are clearly outdated and therefore quite useless. In similar mainstream educational texts such as The Great School Debate (Gross & Gross, 1985) and The Moral Life of Schools (Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993) numerous contributors strongly implied that major reform is needed in public schools and too many future teachers are sometimes ill-prepared for the realities of an actual classroom.

It has been speculated by many educators within the field of art, (Grigsby, 1977; Feldman, 1970; Schiller, 1992; Schwartz, 1970; Susi, 1990) that preservice education courses would improve if they were somehow to address the gap between theory and practice. This problem is not limited to art educators and many of the ideas presented by the above art educators/researchers apply to most, if not all, preservice and practicing teachers.

In the preservice methods courses and the related literature for art education, there seems to be even less emphasis on how best to deal with the realities of the classroom. Although it is a recognized problem, in the literature base there is little attention is paid to students who are apt to be problematic and cause serious disruptions within the classroom setting.
This practice is especially questionable in the field of art education since it is well known that a great many of these students who act inappropriately and/or mainstreamed are placed intentionally in art classrooms by administrators (Schiller, 1991). Feldman, in *Becoming Human through Art* explains this pedagogical dilemma quite eloquently.

Confronted with stubborn discipline problems, and anxious to channel the energies of children constructively, the school seizes upon the explanation of art as a cathartic self-expression in a desperate effort to maintain itself as a peaceable community of teachers and learners. The administrative consequences of this idea of art are well known to experienced art teachers: Students who create discipline problems are thought to be more in need of the self-expressive benefits of art than those who have made better adjustments to the school routine; hence "bad" students, slow learners, academically ungifted students, culturally deprived students - all the unfortunate and unhappy and unloved are assigned to art classes, especially in the secondary level. The irony of the situation is that many an unhappy youngster has found himself in an art class. But of course, the administrative or "guidance" practice described above is a caricature of educational planning; it is typical stratagem of bureaucracies for doing a sorry deed under the umbrella of a seriously generous intention (1974, p. 37).

As Feldman noted, more than one troubled youngster has found himself in the art room. The problem may be that today there are simply too many youths experiencing difficulty adjusting to mainstream classes, for the art teacher or the entire staff to assist these students properly. Schools are no longer able to give students all that they are lacking despite
the best efforts of teachers. As Arends (1989) pointed out, "the overriding goal for schools is to provide purposeful learning experiences for students. This may be a goal but it is not always a reasonable objective when the instructor is faced with an unruly group.

One issue explored by Sprinthall and Sprinthall (1988) which may explain part of the problem with the widespread disrespect and uncooperative student behavior, is the "risky shift", a concept investigated by D.G. Pruitt in 1971. Within a group setting it was found "individuals are suddenly willing to take greater risks regarding their attitudes and behavior" (Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1989). There is also mention of the importance of group dynamics in the classroom. "Whenever there is a change in the expected behavior of any group member, the dynamic interrelationships of the entire group must necessarily change. The pressure on role behavior is so great that if a group has certain expectations about an individual's behavior, that individual usually responds in a way consistent with those expectations. The group's expectations become a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1989, p. 509). It seems that because certain individuals are expected to act out or behave in a manner inconsistent with an ideal learning environment, a number of these students will act inappropriately in any given situation.
From there the problem escalates, and a self-fulfilling prophecy is the result for many students (Edleman & Laher 1991, Kuykendall, 1990, Nieto, 1992).

Although there have always been students in the classroom who commit deviant acts, today this is not limited to a few "troublemakers" but includes a variety of challenging students who require special attention. Educational Reforms and Students At-Risk Student: A Review of the Current State of the Art (Montgomery, 1993) provided many noteworthy observations and facts about what is now known about the at-risk student. This informative report provided a substantial number of ideas and subsequent answers to some of the central questions of this thesis. Other research reports such as Summary: What Works with Low-Achievers? (Prohm, 1995 et al.), and Syntheses of Research Implications for Achieving School Success for Children At Risk (Zerves-Alves, 1993) provided factual information as to techniques presently being tested along with suggestions for additional alternative approaches to dealing with the at-risk, or mainstreamed student. Kozol's Savage Inequities: Children in America's Schools (1991) provides an unpleasant view into as to what is really going on in some troubled schools. His expose style of writing engages the reader fully, forcing him or her to question the injustice of the present system.
Various texts such as *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*, Nieto (1992) confirmed that ideas are sometimes confused with facts, with regard to the changing needs and characteristics of the contemporary student and issues that surround the inclusion of a multicultural education. Kuykendall (1992) explores similar issues in *From Rage to Hope: Strategies for Reclaiming Black and Hispanic Students* which focuses on the low self-image, learning preferences and teacher behaviors that improve achievement and motivation in many Black and Mexican American students. The contributors of *Adolescence & Poverty: Challenge for the 1990's* (Edelman & Ladner, 1991) are mainly concerned with the idea that adolescence is a time when intervention techniques may still be successfully extended to youths in this transitional stage of their lives. While Cairns and Cairns (1994) *Lifelines and Risks: Pathways of Youth in Our Time* began work over fifteen years ago on a longitudinal study to investigate the lives of children at-risk in a setting where most of the students are considered high-risk because of their background and/or living conditions. This text addressed basic patterns on the patterns of development among youth in the transition from childhood to adulthood. was very thorough and proved helpful in the attempt to better understand how to reach the at-risk student.
In the search for literature which related to the central focus of this thesis: that art educators, because of their past experience, seem to be more successful with at-risk students, some music and arts therapists take advantage of the attractiveness and healing qualities of the arts to reach and help severely handicapped individuals. Similarly, schools can take advantage of the appeal of the arts to reach and educate at-risk students (Shuler, 1991). "It is not surprising that in schools the art room is often the place of the least friction. There are two important reasons for this -- the opportunity for self-expression and for cultural identity" (Grigsby, 1977, p.1).

Issues concerning cultural identity and were one focus of the work of McFee and Degge (1977) who noted it is not unusual for the teacher to have come from a completely different background than that of the majority of his or her students. This cultural gap is a challenge that most teachers try to overcome. This phenomenon is not by any means new. It has previously been known that the realization of this fact is for some, problematic, while for others, it adds to the excitement of teaching (Grigsby, 1977, p. 34).

Goodlad (1990) also mentioned the anticipation of a severe shortage of minority teachers in all subject areas, including the arts. He stressed the
importance for all educators to be attuned to the needs and interests of their students. While it is suspected that the best role model is one of a similar background, one educator pointed out that "art teachers, because they are willing to explore the differences of cultures, also become important role models. When they embrace the art of a different culture, that culture, and its people, are, in effect, embraced. Students in art classes tend to feel more accepted and respected in the realm of the art classroom" (Ware, 1993).

Grigsby (1974) was one of the first art educators to specifically address the connection between the deviant and/or culturally deprived child. Today this type of student would almost certainly fall into the category of a student at-risk. Ware (1995) also recognized the fact that art classes still hold particular appeal to students who sometimes have difficulty assimilating into the student body, because of their non-conformist or anti-social behaviors.

In an effort to include all students in their teaching, many educators including art specialists, have rightfully strived to be more effective teachers. Today there are many theories regarding effective teaching in general which may be used to address the at-risk learner. For instance in, *Those Who Can, Teach* (Ryan & Cooper, 1984) and Arends' *Learning to
 Teach (1988) there are entire chapters devoted to classroom management, and effective teachers and schools, motivational issues, ways to improve student performance, participation and success. Texts such as Educational Psychology by Sprinthall and Sprinthall, (1988) describe many of the same problems with special attention paid to the psychology of both the student and the instructor.

Goodlad (1990) in, Teachers for Our Nation's Schools, explored many of the issues concerning preservice teachers, like other researchers before and after him, Goodlad found that preservice teachers felt the required education courses taken, were often a waste of time. "Prospective teachers want to learn how to teach they are not aspiring to be educational historians, philosophers, psychologists, or sociologists" (p. 213). Their college experiences have left most of these future teachers feeling inadequately prepared for the realities of the classroom. Schiller, is among those in the field of art education, who address the standard complaint "You university professors didn't prepare us for the real world! (1992, p. 23). There is clearly a need to better train teachers in a manner more consistent with the realities of today's classroom. If these prospective teachers wish to work in the public school system, and intend succeed, then our preservice programs must prepare them to better understand and
address the needs of those students who are considered to be at-risk (Montgomery, 1993).

**Art Class: A Safe Hideaway**

The art classroom is sometimes considered a safe place within the school for those who need refuge or sanctuary (Ross, 1995). Art classrooms have long been considered an ideal "dumping ground" for any student who does not seem to fit into the mainstream population of a school. While discussing one particular class one art therapist and educator noted that several of her students had "problems serious enough to label them misfits in public schools but not disturbing enough to get them into institutions" (Rhyne, 1984, p. 17). The number of students who might fit this description is growing and includes some of those who are considered at-risk, and/or recently mainstreamed.

Regardless of the quality that sets a particular student apart from the others, this type of student is often thrust into an arts program (Schwartz, 1970). Seen as a type of therapy to calm problematic students of all sorts, art programs have been a second home to many of those who are considered to be at-risk or socially maladjusted (Contant and Randall, 1959; Feldman, 1970; Rhyne, 1984).
Art classes have long been the safe-haven of students considered who for whatever reason seem to experience trouble adapting to adolescence, and assimilation into the general population of their school (Ross, 1995). There have always been a number of students who fit this profile and, would today, be considered to be at-risk (Cairns & Cairns, 1993; Kuykendall, 1992; Nieto, 1992; Schwartz, 1970).

Some students do not intentionally seek out the arts but are placed there by administrators or counselors. In some cases, students are placed in art and other classes considered to be less stringent, through a practice known as tracking. This occurs when students are classified and grouped together based on standardized test scores, and previous performance in the classroom. Ability grouping is no longer legal, as it is seen as discriminatory, yet many schools manage to get around the law (Arends, 1988; Kuykendall, 1992; Sprinthall and Sprinthall, 1988).

Typically in art classes, unlike the general subject area classrooms, these types of students have for many years not been the exception, but the rule (Grigsby, 1977). Any student who did not seem to "make it" in the mainstream was encouraged, usually by administrators and counselors, to take art classes as a means to vent aggression and to explore their sometimes volatile emotions (Feldman, 1970; Ross, 1995). Perhaps this
could be due to the concept that "creativity has been considered the opposite of conformity" (Lowenfeld, 1975). Thereby making the art room an acceptable place for those who, for a variety of reasons, do not conform to the culture of the school (Feldman, 1970, Grigsby, 1977; Guay, 1995; Moore, 1995).

For reasons not yet determined, there seems to be a strong and definite tie between social deviance and the field of art. Those students who, for whatever reason, intentionally become or are seen by others as non-conformists, often seek refuge through the arts. It is there within the safe confines of the art room where they are more likely to find acceptance, encouragement, and a sense of hope. (Feldman, 1970; Grigsby, 1977). "With hope, there is a reason to look to tomorrow. Without hope life is meaningless. Without hope, there is greater propensity for negative behavior. When young people lose hope, they often wind up with an excess of another emotion -- RAGE" (Kuykendall, 1992, p. xv).

Szekely, through his work with prisoners enrolled in art classes, found that "the art of the prisoner is not only about prison life, but about the healing capacity of hope that we can all recognize. Their art helps us to recognize and value the freedoms that we so often take for granted. But the major benefits are to the prisoners themselves" (1982, p. 40).
Similar results are often seen at the secondary level, where in the past, students who expressed hostility and aggressiveness were routinely "dumped" in the classroom. Here in the safety of the art class where there grade is not based solely on written work, many students are able to find success, and as a result, experience an improvement in self-esteem and confidence. As Grigsby noted, "Probably every art teacher has seen an individual student tune in and turn on to some phase of art (Grigsby, 1977, p. 36).

Clearly not every individual is going to find the solace he or she seeks in the art room. Today the problems associated with those deemed to be at-risk seem epidemic in some areas, especially those in urban settings (Cairns & Cairns, 1993). It is not so much that difficult and at-risk students did not exist in past generations it is simply that they were prone to early dropping out hidden away by and/or school personnel (Arends, 1988). However, older art education texts such as those written by Feldman (1970), Grigsby (1977), and Schwartz, (1970) indicate that art educators had been entrenched in the experience of teaching mainstreamed students of long before this became a contemporary societal concern.

Another factor for this phenomenon, is that arts classes offer at-risk students a chance to develop a positive relationship with a teacher (Michael,
1970). For many troubled youths it seems this may be the first time they have a meaningful positive relationship with any adult (Contant & Randall, 1959). It is not out of the ordinary for students to go through their entire school experience without bonding with a teacher or any school personnel. However, it is fairly common for a bond of some sort to be formed with an art teacher, who sets realistically high expectations for the student (Grigsby, 1977). This may be attributed to the nature of the arts, where much one on one contact occurs between the instructor and the student (Feldman, 1970; Lowenfeld, 1975; McFee, 1977). Individual instruction is routinely given during the process of creating a work of art. Informal critiques and friendly advice is often given, usually at the request of the students themselves, who want to do his or her best on the project (Contant & Randall, 1959; Feldman, 1970, Parks, 1994).

At times it may be difficult for the mainstreamed or at-risk student to achieve success in classroom in some cases, it is simply a matter of finding the correct learning style for that particular individual (Hanson, Silver & Strong, 1991). Most educators have been informed through research that many students' learning styles differ from those addressed by traditional modes of instruction. Music and other arts classes provide these students, many of whom are at-risk, with an opportunity to learn in their
preferred styles, which are often addressed through artistic activity (Hanson, Silver, & Strong, 1991).

While it is impossible to list all of the traits that may indicate whether a student is at-risk, there are a few observable characteristics which provide warnings to educators and other adults who work with school age children (Shuler, 1991). They include:

- Academic underachievement
- Lack of self-esteem and self-respect
- Inability to communicate thought and feeling on an intimate level
- Limited conflict resolution and problem-solving skills
- Boredom with traditional schooling
- Need for a supportive peer group with whom they can establish a social bond
- Learning styles that differ from those addressed by traditional modes of instruction
- Interest in artistic expression and eagerness to pursue tasks they find interesting
• Need for a experiential, hands-on approach to learning
• Avoidance of academic risk taking
• Need to experience success somewhere in the school setting

These issues can cause a student to be pulled in directions which later prove detrimental to his or her personal well-being and future chances at success. Many art educators including myself and others involved with this study, have watched as individual students who at first appear lost and confused by their inability to fit into the mainstream, turn their considerable energies to art of some form. Sadly, there is little or no documentation to back up our personal findings.

At the elementary level, many certified art teachers complain that they are often seen as glorified baby-sitters (Mims & Lankford, 1995, p. 93). Referred to as a "specialist", those who have devoted themselves to arts education sometimes face severe discrimination and lack the respect of their peers. Although it is an accepted title, specialist is hardly a term of endearment. It seems that because of the minor place the fine arts hold in general, this attitude is reflected in the way the arts are valued in schools (Mims & Lankford, 1995).
Few peers or administrators of art teachers realize or understand all the responsibilities we, as specialists, assume. "How can a discipline-based art education address the mounting social problems and issues that define our times? With all due respect to those who maintain that such concerns are 'not our job', the social realities of the lives of contemporary children have become a paramount concern for many art teachers who live these realities with their students" (Delacruz and Dunn, 1995). In this same article the authors also point out "...As is becoming apparent, multiculturalism demands, like DBAE theory, that we move 'beyond creating', that we approach the study of art as a more scholarly intellectual pursuit, and that we, so to speak, change our pedagogical ways" (Delacruz and Dunn, 1995). Clearly art education is no longer about simply making things. For the contemporary art teacher, it is far more complicated than that (Galbraith & Bryne, 1993).

The Positive Role of Art

The role of art in public schools is another area that has been studied by more than a few writer/researchers. Some of the better known educational theorists, such as Elliot Eisner and Ernest Boyer and John Dewey, are among the many in and out of the field of art education who
have concluded that art is a key component and the mainstay of a well-rounded education. According to at least one practicing educator, art class is the only reason some students attend school at all (Reed, 1995). Still, the usefulness and relevance of art as part of a public school education has been seriously questioned and remains subject to controversy, despite the inclusion of art in the National Education Goals and America 2000.

Any student of art will find it easy to locate a wealth of information on the major role art plays, in its various forms, as a part in our lives. The role of the arts in schools varies greatly from school district to school district and sometimes from school to school. Among other things, art is seen by some as a means to help create a multiculturally sensitive, global citizen who is a well-rounded individual (Delacruz & Dunn, 1995). Meanwhile other individuals in education are hard at work promoting the arts as a place to hone the critical thinking skills and problem solving abilities of the average student (Crawford, 1989; Risatti, 1989).

There have been numerous art advocates, including highly influential individuals such as President Kennedy, who in 1963 wrote, that the arts are "...the free and unconfined search for new ways of expressing the experience of the present and the vision of the future" (cited in Eisner, 1966, p. 405).
However, it would seem that it does not matter what is said about the value of art. For, in reality, whether or not the arts are offered to children in public schools is subject to the whims of school boards and administrators. If there is a sacrificial lamb within the field of educational finance, it is surely the arts programs. This is especially disheartening since in a "1992 Americans and the Art" Harris Poll reported that ninety-one percent (91%) of the people believe that it is important for children to learn about the arts and develop artistic skills in school: many arts programs across the nation are still fighting for their lives" (Clarke, 1992 p. 12).

Despite the many positive attributes and wide-spread acceptance of the arts as an integral part of the curricula, the field of arts education has endured countless queries into its significance and purpose in schools. The reputation of art and art teachers also undergoes intense scrutiny in many districts, possibly because of the mythic link between the artist and madness (Pariser, 1988; Rothenburg, 1992). Regardless, it seems the art teacher, despite his or her credentials and years of experience, is not always taken seriously by other educators (Feldman, 1974; Schwartz, 1970). This is especially disconcerting since there have been considerable efforts to improve the image of art education in recent years (Clarke, 1992).
Chapter Three
Methodology and Case Studies

The use of case studies in educational research is today a common practice. Such qualitative research practices are especially helpful and insightful for those who desire to know what is truly happening in the schools (Nieto, 1992; Stewart, 1995). By providing a personal commentary on their experiences and philosophy, the teachers who participate serve as models of living history (Eisner, 1966; 1993).

The participants for these comparative case studies in this thesis were not randomly selected. Teachers who were experienced in working with youths considered to be at-risk were purposefully sought. Those used in this study are instructors of art who seemed to understand and were attempting to close the gap between educational theories and the realities of teaching. These three teachers shared similar experiences and worked in the same general location with the same type of student, but at different grade levels. Those who participated in this study are teachers of art who were supplied with similar classroom materials and resources, budgets, and administrative support. In addition, the teachers who participated had significant similarities and differences, but met the following criteria:
• Participant must work within the selected school district.
• Participant must hold a minimum of bachelor's degree in art education.
• Participant must have been an art educator in the selected district for more than five years.
• Participant must hold the belief that art education is an integral part of the educational experience of the children they serve.
• Participants must acknowledge that the population with whom they work is considered to be at-risk for a variety of reasons.

Those selected for this study, it was discovered, share many commonalities. This discovery was not anticipated, but plays a role in the conclusions that were drawn from this study. There were, of course individual differences as well, which are to be compared later.

Each participant was contacted several weeks before the interview/observation was to take place. While all three expressed an interest in this project and were willing volunteers, previous commitments and personal obligations prevented a timely completion of the interviews and case studies. It was difficult to coordinate schedules in each case.

Two of the participants had been observed on several occasions while in the act of teaching within the last three years. Notes from these previous observations were also used in this study with the permission of the participants. The conversations with all three participants were tape-recorded, again with the permission of the participants. Notes were also
taken during the interview/observation process. All remaining questions, issues, and clarification concerns were resolved through subsequent phone calls. The bulk of the entire interview/observation and the collection of notes took place over a two month time span.

Additional information was gathered from other teachers in the district by way of informal passing comments and questions whenever the opportunity arose. There was an effort made to include the opinions of a few random students at each school, as well as a few teachers and members of the security staff at each site.

All interviews and observations took place in a school setting either during or immediately following classes. A list of questions was available for each of the interviews, but was not always employed in the same manner. Because of the individual styles of each of the participants, the act of presenting a list of questions did not seem appropriate or necessary. Selected questions were asked of each. Usually many of the same questions were posed to each participant, but not necessarily in the same order or with equal emphasis. However, the process for each of the case studies was essentially the same.

With the first case study participant, Teacher A, there was an attempt to focus on the early characteristics which indicate that a child is likely to
be considered at-risk. For participant number two, Teacher B, there was an emphasis on the actions and problems posed by the at-risk student in the classroom. In case study number three, with Teacher C, there was an emphasis on what the at-risk student's future is likely to hold. This was done with the intent to determine what variance teachers at different grade levels might see or experience when working with an at-risk child.

The three participants share similar traits. All three are dedicated educators who believe their jobs play an important role in the development of the individuals they teach. Each of them spoke of at least one life they believed they had touched through art and education. Each is a talented artist and has sold his or her work in the past.

The three participants have all worked in the same three schools in the same district for more than six years. They have all worked at other schools in the past. All have witnessed great changes and growth within the district during their tenure. Each expressed concern that the district was in a state of change, and it did not seem to be a change for the better.

Each of the three individuals in the case studies also share some personal commonalities. Each is white, and over the age of 35. All are parents and have been married or are presently married. Each holds a master's degree or 45 plus hours of graduate study. Each participant lives
outside of the district in which he/she teaches.

All of the participants have at one time or another been actively involved in the National Art Education Association. Each still is a member of the organization but the levels of involvement vary. One holds a high post in the state, while the other two participate only through their school district meetings for art educators and large NAEA sponsored events.

It was noted early on that while their individual styles vary greatly, each had a similar agenda and several techniques and methods they employed routinely to reach their special population. One of the key elements in each of these educators' success with the students in their classes seems to be their organizational skills.

Each stated that planning was essential, but that flexibility and adaptability are far more important. Their classes are structured carefully to fit the needs of their students. While each accomplishes structure a little differently, it is, nonetheless, in place and is a central focus of everything they do in class.

Each participant claims that one of the most important things they do with their students is show respect for them and their culture. Each of the three educators has made an effort to include Mexican-American art as an important part of their curriculum. Lessons have been found or created
that emphasize the contributions the students' ancestors culture and contemporaries have made to the world of art.

It is also noteworthy that each participant stated adamantly that he or she works hard not to stereotype their students, but to treat them all as individuals. This, of course, is difficult when serving such a high number of students who share similar backgrounds and when many of these students openly present themselves as members of an elitist clique or a gang.

All three participants teach at different schools within a one mile radius. The population they work with is nearly identical, except in terms of age. The entire district has been declared eligible for Chapter One funding and programs. It is also recognized as a district where all of the students are considered to be at-risk. Statistics regarding income, race and ethnicity, test scores and graduation rates were not made available from the district office despite several attempts.

The collection of data for this study was done on an informal basis. Each of the participants willingly gave his or her views and answered the questions posed quite thoughtfully. While the sessions easily could have turned into a way to vent their unhappiness with the current problems with administration and students, all three expressed primarily a positive stand
for the future of the district and its students, as well as for the field of art education. Each seemed to care deeply for his or her students and saw this study as an opportunity to help other teachers and future educators develop valuable strategies and be better able to service these types of students.

Case Study Number One

The first subject is a female in her late thirties or early forties. Teacher A has been teaching art at the elementary level in the selected district for the last eleven years. Ten of those years have been spent at her present school. In that time, she has seen many changes in the structure of the school district and its policies, the school itself and the surrounding neighborhood. "Not that many of them," she claimed, "have been positive".

The elementary school where Teacher A is now working as an art specialist is located within a one mile radius of the other two schools in this study and is directly adjacent to the administration building of the district. It is, for the most part, surrounded by vacant desert lots which make it seem isolated. However, densely populated housing developments and several large mobile home parks are found within a few blocks.

The elementary school is typical on the outside. It serves a
population of approximately 650 K-5 students. The school is more than thirty years old and is beginning to show its age. Many repairs and alterations have obviously been made in Teacher A's room, and more are still needed. Although well organized, there is still a feeling of clutter in this art room. The room is furnished with shelves and a variety of other storage units. It is still clearly too small for the many materials needed to teach elementary art to a large number of students on a daily basis.

On the positive side, unlike many of the other classrooms in the district, there are large windows on one side of the room which provide ample natural light for the students. In addition, there are many art related posters and references that help to brighten the otherwise dull room.

The school is surrounded by a chain link fence, but access onto the school grounds is very easy. The fence provides little or no security. With one full-time guard, roughly ten acres, and over 600 students, there is no real sense of protection provided. In some areas of town this would seem far more acceptable, but here it is a legitimate cause for concern. This neighborhood is one that has experienced a number of drive-by shootings and other violent acts. According to police reports the area has the highest concentration of homicides. The three schools used in this study are situated in the center of an area now called the city's "deadly corridor".
As one parent in the district, Andy Acereto, noted, "Even five years ago, our kids could play out in the streets. Now we have to bring them in as soon as it gets dark" (1996, January 7, The Arizona Daily Star, Special Section, p. 6).

The school itself has a pleasant physical appearance. There appeared to be no graffiti anywhere on the campus, including the restrooms. Instead, many colorful "feel good" messages have been painted directly on the exterior brick walls by Brownie Troops and similar organizations.

The reputation of this school, like the others in this study, is well known in the Tucson area as a place you do not want to send your children. Although no publicized reports of violence or disruption have occurred at this particular school, there is a sense of "guilt by association." Due to the close proximity of this school to some of the more troubled schools in the district, the assumption is made that this school is not safe either. Teacher A stated that she personally has never felt threatened, but knows of events at this school and others in the district where security is a serious concern.

There is no evidence of drug use or blatant criminal activities, but subtle undertones abound. There is evidence of this in the children's clothing style, mannerisms, and attitudes. It is likely that there are few, if any, active gang members at this school. However, common sense indicates
that many of these students are the younger siblings of active gang bangers and this will influence the future choices of these children. "This school is full of 'wannabes' and everyone knows it. So what do we do? We get a bunch of girl scouts to write cute things on the wall and hope it will go away" said Teacher A as she shook her head.

It is easy to understand this teacher's anger and frustration. Many view this as a hopeless neighborhood, and the population Teacher A deals with, as part of a lost generation. Full of crack babies, and children with an assortment of handicapping conditions, it is commonplace for schools including this one to use acronyms used to describe the student's specific diagnosed conditions with labels such as LD, ADHD, ADD, and EMH.

After working in this school for more than a decade, Teacher A reports that she and other educators in this district are still sensitive to outside criticism of the school, but are no longer defensive. It is as though complacency has become an acceptable answer to the problems that face this district. "I try to stay away from all the negativity." She continued after a small pause, "I just stay out of it."

This school is, in many ways, very typical of the average elementary school in America. In other ways it is noticeably different. For instance, it has a much higher percentage of Mexican-American teachers, mostly
female, than the national norm (Goodlad, 1990). Bilingualism is apparent everywhere, although this is not a designated bilingual school. Teacher A does not speak Spanish, but gets by with a few words and frequent gesturing. The communication is strained. At times it was clear that some students did not grasp the directions given by Teacher A. At the same time, on several occasions she obviously did not comprehend what one of the students was trying to express.

During her lunch break, Teacher A spoke of her own teaching methods and the techniques she regularly uses with her at-risk students. She minced no words when she said, "To me, every child in this school is at-risk. What's happening out there affects every one of us in this building. We can't avoid it - - it's everywhere. All we can do is deal with it as best we can."

"I don't do anything special for those students designated as at-risk. I stress certain things regardless of their background. To me there are certain things all kids need to know." When asked if she thought her job to be a difficult one, Teacher A stated, "I teach them as much as I can under these conditions. It is difficult. I see them for nine weeks at a time, two or three times a week, for maybe thirty minutes at a time." She continued, "A lot of the time the classroom teacher is late to pick up their group and the
next one gets cheated. I try to be fair to everyone but in the end it's not really fair to anyone. Thirty minutes a couple of times a week -- (this schedule) just doesn't cut it."

The classes average around 25 students, which is fairly low for the district; despite this, the room feels cramped and overcrowded. Since there is a language barrier, "it makes it all that much harder, but we manage somehow" she said with a grin.

As president of the National Art Education Association in her state and a former State Art Educator of the Year, Teacher A is recognized as a top-notch teacher in the field of art. Yet these accolades mean little when dealing with students who seem to be struggling to survive, not to succeed.

For many of these students, art is an important part of their culture and surroundings. They often mimic the graffiti they see painted on the buildings of the community. Not limited to vacant stores, those who vandalize public and private property alike with their graffiti are known as "taggers". With little or no regard for others, taggers will paint on practically any surface that doesn't move. An expansive display of their work is in evidence throughout this southside neighborhood.

More intricate artworks can be seen on many of the gang affiliated tee-shirts worn by the majority of students, including those who do not
belong to a gang. Many adults also don this attire, sometimes without knowing of the implications and symbolism the images on the shirt express. This includes some individuals who are in positions of authority, observed on one visit to the elementary school. There are also several murals found on the walls of various schools and businesses within the boundary of the district.

Being surrounded by art daily is beneficial, but mere viewing is not enough for Teacher A, who tries her best to incorporate the DBAE concept into each of her lessons. She manages this by discussing works of art at every chance and exploring aesthetics, criticism and history with her students. Her classes are filled with enthusiastic youngsters.

Due to her longevity in the same position as an art teacher, the majority of her pupils have been exposed to this style of teaching for several years. The experienced students often help the newer students as they get used to the routine employed by Teacher A. According to one school official, many of this school's population is considered transient, with a large number of students moving within a span of six months after their arrival.

During one observation, a class of third graders was complimented by Teacher A as they entered the room. They immediately went to their
assigned seats and settled in quickly as they waited for instructions. There was a clear and definite routine to Teacher A's teaching. She took the time to give praise to the entire class as she thanked them for listening to the directions, which were given as soon as every student was seated and the room was silent.

As they began to work, Teacher A circulated constantly, stopping only to return previously graded work. The pace was fast, but it had to be. With only thirty minutes available for each class, rushing is not an option, but a necessity. At every opportunity, positive verbal feedback was given to students who came up to her and formed a line. This happened regardless of where she was in the lesson or in which activity she was engaged. The line of students followed her everywhere, causing Teacher A to look a little like the Pied Piper.

When clean up time rolled around, after what seemed to be only a few minutes of production time, everyone was reminded of his or her assigned job. Some students returned materials, others picked up paper or other scraps from the floor, another group was responsible for washing the tables, and the fourth stored the art works created during this small segment of time. This class was the epitome of cooperation, which is not always easy for students of this age. Teacher A has taught her students the
importance of working together.

Issues such as the clean-up methods are of importance to every art teacher. But for those with the type of schedule Teacher A must adhere to, it becomes especially vital. Working out details such as who does what during clean-up is but one small part of maintaining a smooth-running art class.

Classroom management is important to all teachers, but for the art teacher who lacks adequate managerial skills, it quickly becomes a nightmarish situation. Unless the teacher has carefully planned and pre-prepared for the onslaught of students who pass through the art room daily, chaos will almost assuredly result. Teacher A seems to be a master of organization, despite the cluttered appearance of her classroom. Without directly saying so, it was indicated that good planning has proven essential to her success. "I always have things to fall back on," she said, then continued with a smile, "I think I even have back-ups for my back-ups - you just never know!"

Teacher A then spoke of the status of art in her school. Despite her achievements, for which she has received great personal recognition, art continues to lack respect or support on all levels. "This year," she reported, "some of the classroom teachers have offered to help display the
student-made art in the library on several occasions." Other than that, she stated, "there is limited support for the arts here." Despite all the negative factors that face Teacher A, she seems to have boundless optimism and a surprising amount energy. "I still like teaching, and I still like art ... I'm hoping it will get better with the Goals 2000 program." Thinking about it for a moment she smiled and said, "We'll see I guess, besides...it could be a lot worse!"
Case Study Number Two

The subject of this case study is a middle school art teacher, male and approximately 50 years of age. He has been teaching for 26 years. After his many years of experience, he considers himself a master teacher. He has taught in England and Australia, in addition to his numerous years working in the American public school system.

Seated comfortably on a stool, Teacher B settled in for what would turn out to be a lengthy interview. Tall and dressed more like an attorney than an urban school teacher, Teacher B spoke for several hours on topics ranging from the war in Bosnia to his personal philosophy of education.

With his dual major in Art and Science Education, it was not surprising to learn that Teacher B's favorite type of art is creating and teaching scientific illustration. He believes it to be one of the truest forms of art education.

He stated early on that he teaches his students in a manner he believes is consistent with the population with which he works. Some would call his system a sort of "dumbing down," since it excludes anything that formally acknowledges or involves a discipline-based approach to art education (DBAE). He readily admitted that his lessons contain no real art history lessons, few references to well-known artists, or any adult-created art. The
exception would be the few sample pieces he himself has prepared. While he does, on occasion, use the work of a popular artist, his preference is to use the work left behind by previous students. By the way he speaks, it is obvious he considers this practice to be his own brand of art history, aesthetics and criticism.

The words "aesthetics" or "criticism" were never used in his classroom, although Teacher B made almost constant reference to the students' sample pieces and put much emphasis on comparing works in progress. Carefully wording his evaluation of students work, he does in a sense, employ both aesthetics and criticism in his teaching of art, as defined by Donald Crawford, (1989) "Aesthetics is that branch of philosophical activities which involves the critical reflection on our experience and evaluation of art."

Art criticism when employed, did not follow the DBAE model. As expressed by Howard Risatti (1989), art criticism, "seeks to inform and educate people (including artists) about art by providing insights into its meaning so as to increase the understanding and appreciation of art and to illuminate the cultural and societal values reflected in it." Teacher B believed that he had incorporated a form of art criticism by his use of art examples found around the room. There were various displays of what he
has deemed to be successful pieces, as well as unsuccessful examples throughout the room. Using these as points of reference, the students easily gleaned what was expected of them. During instructions, he explained how the previous students had achieved success, then indicated that he expected no less from them. Furthermore, it was indicated that he expects them to surpass the efforts of previous students and to produce even better results.

While there is definite evidence that this instructor focuses on the production of art, he goes about this in a somewhat unusual way. Because Teacher B clearly believes he is dealing with a special population, he uses art as a way to teach success and survival. Loosening his tie after a long day, he stressed heavily that the students should learn to listen and follow directions, as this will be a much needed life skill, regardless of their individual endeavors or personal pursuits. In addition, this art instructor believes that the process of creating is far more important the product that is created. What is gained during the process, the feeling of accomplishment as each step is completed, is his central focus, regardless of the student, project, or any other variable.

Teaching almost exclusively in a step-by-step manner, each student is encouraged to use critical thinking skills at every turn to evaluate his or
her progress, or more to the point, his or her success. More than anything else in this classroom, it is success that is the objective.

Clearly not an advocate of DBAE, this is an educator who believes that what he does day in and day out is far more important than the mere teaching of art. He explained that DBAE, "simply doesn't work with these kids." He continued, "How can these kids talk about, read or write about art when they don't possess rudimentary skills to read or write. Most of these kids function at a very low level, I can't change that or get them to appreciate the beauty of some painting when they barely have enough skills to survive."

He firmly believes that what he does is take youths who know nothing of success or anything that is truly positive, and turn around not only their attitudes, but indeed their lives. He, in his own opinion, teaches them what it takes to succeed, not only in art but in any and every aspect of their collective lives.

When speaking casually with this veteran art instructor, many insights as to his methods and ability to reach this certain population were shared. It was made abundantly clear almost immediately that he enjoys his work. Although not always on good terms with the principal or many of his fellow teachers, he firmly believes in what he is doing and the way he is
doing it. His self-confidence and enthusiasm were obvious. This is a man who believes in himself and his program, with or without the backing of his peer group or the administration.

As one of the estimated 90% white teachers in a district which is 75% Mexican-American, 20% white and 5% other ethnic groups, Teacher B fully understands the implications of what it is to be a part of both a majority and a minority. Limited in his use of Spanish, the lack of proficiency in the language used by many of his students is sometimes problematic. He has, to his credit, learned some basic instructional terms and many words that are art-related, in order to better communicate to his students.

While observing this teacher, it was clear that his pantomime and exaggerated gestures allow him to better reach those who speak little English. Not afraid to act silly, or make a spectacle of himself, he is popular with many of the students. According to Teacher B however, this was not always the case, he was once among the least liked teachers at the middle school. Without directly saying so, he indicated that he believes many of the other teachers in his school continue to have problems because they fail at their attempts to communicate with students.

The inability to speak Spanish is not a problem for Teacher B. In his
eyes, he succeeds with the majority of his students because he has adapted to his environment, but never surrendered to it. He contrasts this with some of his middle school students and fellow teachers. He refuses to give up or in to the circumstances he and all those at this school must face.

The environment of the surrounding area of the schools is important for several reasons. It is at first glance a degenerating neighborhood, dotted with vacant lots, boarded up houses and rundown trailers. There is a Section 8 apartment building (welfare dependent residents) directly across the street which is primarily occupied by what appear to be young welfare mothers.

When I visited the school I immediately noticed the front of apartment where there was a group of young, mostly Hispanic women clumped together and appearing to be engaged in gossip, as their toddlers ran shirtless and barefoot in the gravel parking lot, which doubles as a playground. On the other side of the complex, a large group of young men who appeared to be gang members were gathered. Dressed in a similar fashion, they alternated between speaking in a hushed tone, and loud street talk. They seemed to be having a good time as they passed around several forty ounce bottles of beer, laughing and kidding as if they had not a care in the world.
These young men, who, based on observations, are likely to be gangsters, seemed to know they were safe here on their home turf. In fact, it seemed as though everyone in the neighborhood knew that unless there is an obvious problem or true indication of gang activity, they would not be bothered. There were police present across the street as indicated by the two parked police vehicles and at least one undercover car found in the school's lot. Several patrol cars passed by, never even glancing at the groups who were apparently residents of the neighborhood. They seemed to be as much a fixture as the apartment building itself.

At the middle school where Teacher B has taught for the last 12 years there is a chain link fence which surrounds the campus grounds but offers little protection. But no one here seemed to be even slightly afraid. Being surrounded by examples of such obvious poverty and gang activity is simply a part of both the students' and teachers' lives. While the teachers go home at night to a better neighborhood, the students stay, watching and learning more about what is almost certainly their next destination in life. This school, even at the middle school level, has experienced many incidents of violence.

Violence is simply a fact of life in this section of town. The fact that the schools are run-down, the neighborhood considered unsafe, and crime
is rampant, is certainly not new. However, while it is an acknowledged problem, little positive change has been seen in recent years.

Situated right on the edge of the city border, the children who live on this side of the city, "are surrounded by prostitution, drivebys and drug deals, not new streets, big parks and beautiful schools" (Arizona Daily Star, 1996, January 14 p. 1). The inequality is evident everywhere in almost every aspect of the students' lives. The popular students are those who are considered to be the toughest. Those who have been involved in numerous gang fights are those who receive most of the praise and attention from the other students.

This is especially true of the girls, many of whom compete on a regular basis to see who is the most fierce. The girl gangs in this particular school are said to be notoriously vicious in their fighting style and in the crimes they reportedly commit. Dressed in black sagging pants, with their bangs teased high and heavily hairsprayed into place, some of the girls who seemed to be among the tougher in the school joked with one of the security officers who patrol the building.

The guards, who reportedly earn just over minimum wage, seemed completely at ease with the students. While several patrolled the area looking for possible problems, others made their presence especially visible
during lunch time, as they leaned against the brick wall full of paint-overs used in an attempt to disguise the graffiti of the past. The 20ish guard, a handsome, young and moderately overweight man, engaged in a conversation which bordered on flirting as he simultaneously watched the lines progress through the lunch counter area.

While observing the students in the halls and during lunch, it became clear that the students who are less popular are those who are perceived to be "schoolboys" or "schoolgirls." Simply put, this means that these students openly care about their grades and are considered to be intelligent and nerdy. In a school such as this, they seemed out of place, as they carried their books and spoke to no one. Each of them continued looking down as the line moved forward. These students were easy to spot and were clearly a minority.

A mixed crowd of boys and girls seated nearby on a colorful plastic picnic table used derogatory names such as "nerdboy" and "geekgirl" casually in conversation as they discussed the morning classes. During the interview, Teacher B stated that,"most students, as a rule, reject gangs and do their best to steer clear of them, despite almost constant harassment and belittling by wannabes and known gang members." It seemed most students were somewhere in between nerd and gangster status.
Teacher B went on to say, "A few of the students thought to be intelligent make the transition and are accepted on a large scale by students and staff alike." Typically, these students are those who are involved in school government or some school-sponsored endeavor such as sports.

Like many middle schools across the land, students and their popularity is both vitally important and subject to the whims of others. There is no set profile as to what makes a student popular. It is usually a combination of personality, physical attractiveness, and perceived superior abilities in one or more areas of school life.

While chatting with Teacher B, he explained that he believes teachers, too, are often judged by the students on these merits. Typically, it is the specialist teachers who are most popular. He accounts this to the fact that often the specialist teacher is seen by all concerned, as not a "real teacher". The most popular teachers, according to Teacher B, are not the ones who are lenient, like one may expect, but instead, are those few who have maintained a sense of order and high expectations. He seemed to be quite sure that most kids respect order and have an innate desire for it. They lack direction, he explained. He gives it. That is not what makes him popular, he stated; that is what makes him one of the few good teachers in this or any school.
Like many art educators, Teacher B seems to accept quite readily his role as the "loner" teacher who is misunderstood by the masses. He complained of his isolation. Yet, at the same time, spoke with pride about his ability to create, on his own, a program that he believes is making a difference in the individual lives of many of his students. He knows he cannot reach them all, but he also stated adamantly that he would continue to try, regardless of how futile his efforts may seem.

It was as if Teacher B had separated himself from the school in almost every regard, viewing himself as a sort of solo missionary. Instead of trying to convert the masses to his religious beliefs, he seems to be trying to instill his values and measures of success in his students. He has long given up on trying to make "believers" of the staff or administration, but continues on his resilient path to enlighten his students on what he calls the "keys to success."

He firmly believes that each and every one of his students can be successful. He spoke at some length about his mainstreamed students. They, according to Teacher B, are at times the most challenging, but can also bring the most rewarding teaching moments. Many of these students have been labeled as emotionally handicapped (EH), behaviorally disturbed (BD), learning disabled (LD) or are suffering from attention deficient...
disorder (ADD) or attention deficient hyperactive disorder (ADHD).

To Teacher B, none of these labels holds much significance. He does not change his teaching style to meet their needs. He simply keeps trying new things. He explains that nothing is too strange to be tried at least once. Once he finds something that seems to work with an individual, then he adapts the approach -- not his style.

Using his standards of success, he elaborates on how he provides opportunities for self-improvement, rather than simply an education in art. An ardent supporter of reality-based therapy, he spoke of his involvement with this discipline program, which he believes has made him a more effective teacher. He reported that he no longer has any problems with discipline.

Using reality-based therapy, he puts the responsibility of the students' actions directly on the students. He achieves this through a series of questions regarding their behavior. For instance, if the student misbehaves in class, Teacher B calmly pulls them aside and asks them if they know why they have been singled out for a mini-conference. According to Teacher B, the student is usually fully aware of what infraction has occurred, and admits his or her guilt. At this point, Teacher B asks him quietly how this action is helping him. The student usually
realizes immediately that he has no good answer, and, feeling a bit ashamed by now, wants to return to class having learned his lesson.

While there is some variation for each individual, Teacher B routinely asks the student how he or she expects to be successful, or more specifically, what his or her dream is for the future. After a few "I don't knows," or "nothings," he continues with his questions. He begins by asking how the student expects to hold a decent job or raise children if he or she cannot understand what is beneficial to them, or cannot make the distinction between actions that help and those that hurt their chances for success.

"Typically," he excitedly explains, "they make the connection and will," in his words, "straighten out." If they fail to improve their behavior, he will repeatedly send the student out of the class until they indicate they would like to rejoin the group, which has since become emerged in an art project that has a high success rate and is enjoyed by the students at the same time.

Concentrating on reaching the largest number of students, he goes around the room trying to help those who seem to be sincere in their requests for help. While in the act of teaching, Teacher B rarely sits, but moves around the room constantly. The room is long and narrow. It was
designed to seat thirty students, but with this number of people in the room, it seems cramped and overcrowded. The cries of "Sir, can you come here?" never really stop during the observations, although there were a few lulls when a song all the students wanted to hear was playing on the radio located in the front of the room.

He uses the radio as a reward. When the majority are on task and working with only "5 ft. voices" or less, he turns on the radio to a station that plays a mix of rap and pop music. "They work best," he says several times, "when they are happy." Getting them to work at their best is one of his biggest goals and accomplishments.

Allowing them to sit where they choose is also important he felt, apparently confident of his abilities to squelch any problem that might arise. He went on to explain that he worked hard to gain the trust and respect of his students by showing them the trust and respect he holds for them. He said with a renewed strength in his voice that he had, "grown to understand his kids" and was sure he is, "both a good role model and teacher."

He emphasized several times how his technique was different from that of the other teachers. He stated firmly that he intentionally set himself apart from the others and declares this openly to the students, explaining
that he is a "different sort of teacher." He mentioned that he tells the students this on the very first day when he lays down the ground rules, which he finds fair and simple.

As the children worked, it was clear they were interested in their project, as most were working diligently and speaking quietly with their friends. Spending only a few minutes on the actual giving of instructions, Teacher B keeps the pace in his room fairly fast and steady. He gives them two minutes to locate their work and be seated. If they are late, it counts as a tardy. There were no tardies that day.

While tardies, ditching, or missing class, is a common practice among the students of this school, art class is one of the classes most students attend regularly and the room often houses up to 35 students. Under these conditions, teaching can be especially difficult, admits Teacher B, who admits he often misses what he calls "small things" like cursing and put-downs.

Teacher B interacted frequently with his students and experienced no discipline problems during the observation. He always spoke quietly even when he addressed the entire group, and always with a respectful tone. He complimented the students frequently, often for very small improvements or minimal efforts. "Building up their self-esteem is important," he stated
later, "but touching them on the shoulder, making eye contact is even more important."

Few of his students, he explained later, have any interaction with an adult all day long. Although his may be brief, he thought it absolutely essential. Teacher B also held steadfast to the belief that his efforts to make the classroom seem friendly and non-threatening paid off handsomely. Looking around the room, he pointed to his many calligraphy hand-lettered "signs of encouragement".

When one enters Teacher B's classroom, one of the first things noticed are these handwritten signs which state his expectations. They all seem to carry the same weight and are hung around the room in no discernible order. They held simple messages like the following: Try your best. Respect things and people, especially yourself. Listen. Follow Directions. Make good decisions. Think often and carefully. Learn from your mistakes.

Asked about these posters, Teacher B said that he prefers hand-made ones, but that with his budget, it really does not matter, since he cannot "afford frivolous things like posters." He elaborated and talked about how difficult it is to teach and "do his job" when he barely has enough supplies for all the children he services.
He mentioned also how he recycles many things, such as salvaging poor copies from the workroom trash. Retrieving tracing paper from the sheets that separate overhead projector plastic was another way he routinely saves on expenses. He listed several other things which cost time but not money. "Without them," he said, "I'd never make it through the school year."

The room was clean and seemed to be in fairly good repair. It was neither somber nor cheery. It is simply a clean and safe workplace. It is exactly the way Teacher B wishes it to be. According to him, the only thing he would change is, "the size of the room, and maybe a few hundred other things!"

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Case Study Number Three

The third subject is a female high school teacher in her late forties. Certified as an art teacher, her specialty is ceramics and that is the only aspect of art she now teaches. Having spent 26 years teaching art in the same district, it has only been for the last three years that she has been able to teach solely in her specialty area of clay and ceramic work.

Having spent some time driving through the surrounding neighborhood, there were several noteworthy observations. First, the "drive-by" fence (cost estimated at $100,000) put up a few years ago after a gang shooting in the parking lot of the district's other high school, provides little true protection. It does, however, have the effect of making a person feel safe, according to the students and staff. This fence, painted in the school colors, surrounds the grounds on the sides of the campus that face the streets.

The high school is located only a few blocks from the elementary school used for this paper and on the other side of the block from the middle school. Things on this side of the block seemed a little calmer. The large apartment complex across the street looked neat and well kept, unlike the one that faced the middle school campus.
Having been "claimed" by a neighborhood gang even before it was built, there seemed to be no evidence that this low rent housing development was in any way unusual. It has been rumored for years that some of the most violent and feared gang members in the area live in this complex. However, upon inspection this simply didn't look possible. Observing from the parking lot were several mothers, presumably on their way to work, scrambling to get their sons and daughters off to school. These children completed the image of a normal school-bound kid, with lunches in hand and kisses on the forehead. A few older men lingered about, smoking cigarettes and staring across the street at the teens with a sort of bittersweet look. Without speaking they seemed to be saying through their wizened eyes that youth is definitely wasted on the young.

The high school is among the oldest in the district having been built in the early fifties when most of the surrounding area was still vacant desert and considered "the boonies." Located not far from of the city's "industrial areas" and the city airport, the district has changed dramatically in the last twenty years. There are few undeveloped sections in the once pristine area now.

Tract housing developments and large trailer parks account for much of the surrounding residences. According to Teacher C, the student
population is now estimated at 1800. The school grounds are quite large but not enormous for a school of this size. Among other things it houses the only year-round heated public pool in this section of town.

The windows of the classrooms were bricked in during the early eighties when the school board decided it was too expensive to keep replacing the windows broken by area vandals. Since then the problems have only grown worse, say the more seasoned teachers.

The grounds were clean and manicured, especially for a school with such a high traffic area of both cars and people. Graffiti was found on almost any and all surfaces that seemed permanent. Most of it was gang related, but there were also an intermittent, "I love ----" and "For a good time call ----".

The campus is "closed", meaning that students are not supposed to leave the grounds without permission. Apparently, many of the high schoolers had obtained permission or were ignoring this rule as the parking lot across the street and adjacent areas were filled with teenagers engaged in lively conversation, cigarette smoking and the occasional bit of lunch.

During the lunch break, the security guards hired by the district congregated together and showed little interest in the goings-on around them. They did not ask for ID or seem to question anyone or anything.
Uniformed, off-duty police officers also patrol the campus during lunch traveling in pairs; they too seemed oblivious to the students and their activities.

Although there were no incidents that day it is easy to understand how a small misunderstanding could turn into a full-fledged riot. Indeed, exactly that had happened earlier in the school year. Although a few students were arrested for disorderly conduct, the incident went fairly unnoticed by the local press. On this side of town, such events are almost expected and seldom considered newsworthy.

This high school is sometimes considered to be among the worst in the area in terms of behavioral problems, crime and academic standards. In truth, it is most likely no worse or better than the average American high school. The reputation of this school is based on past incidents, and most importantly, on its location. Very few things on this side of town are considered up to par.

With many of the local residents living below or just above poverty level, this working class neighborhood has slowly turned into a violent and crime-riddled area where welfare moms and gangsters are the norm, not the exception. Primarily composed of Hispanics, there are many single mothers in the area who live there only because they have to because of
their financial burdens.

Approximately 85% of the population is made up of Hispanic or Mexican-Americans. There is evidence of the cultural influence in a Diego Rivera style mural located not far from Teacher C's classroom.

Walking through the halls, there was further evidence of the presence of the Mexican-American culture. The hall is filled with a mixture of both Spanish and English being spoken, or in some instances, yelled. Many of the lockers opened between first and second hour, were filled with religious ornaments. In that particular hallway, it seemed that nearly every student spotted, wore a gold crucifix or some obvious form of gold adornment.

Upon my initial visit to the ceramics room, I arrived with a last minute rush of high schoolers, just before the final or tardy bell. Looking around I spotted Teacher C sitting at one of the potters wheels on the far side of the room. After exchanging greetings, it was noted that Teacher C was dressed casually in clean, but obviously well-worn jeans and a work smock. She immediately welcomed and introduced me as a teacher/observer to this group of students and later to each of her remaining five classes.

Always polite and respectful in her tone, she wasted little time
Always polite and respectful in her tone, she wasted little time getting each of her groups started on the day's project. Some were receiving their first set of instructions about how to throw pots on the wheel. Others were working quietly on a clay shoe sculpture which is a required and immensely popular lesson with the ceramic students.

"In many ways," she went explained, "this is a typical high school. Teachers complain about overcrowding and low wages. Students complain about too much homework and being bored." But that's just "surface talk" according to Teacher C. She alluded to an undercurrent and the presence of an impending sense of danger on the part of some of her co-workers. She mentioned an incident involving a class a few doors down the hall where a gun was taken away from a student just a few days prior to this observation.

After speaking with Teacher C throughout the day at every convenient moment and for almost a full hour during her plan period, much information was shared. While talking to her about the neighborhood and how it has changed, she confided that most of the seasoned teachers believe it's more than a mere change in the neighborhood's appearance; they claim it's primarily the residents that are different.
At exactly that moment there was a loud "boom" at the door. Teacher C leapt out of her chair after making sure I was not harmed and chased after the perpetrator. Unable to catch him, she called the office through an intercom with a direct line and asked to have the security guard informed and sent to her room.

After a short while a young woman dressed in a T-shirt emblazoned with the words "Security Team" arrived and took a statement, asking for the "alleged assailant's description." For a few moments it seemed like we were in a police state as the officer wrote down the information Teacher C supplied in a calm and subdued voice. 'Just another day in the hood', her eyes seemed to say.

After a heavy sigh she sat down once again and continued, "everyone seems eager to admit there are problems with the school and the neighborhood, but no solution has been reached that can be agreed upon"...her voice trailed off as she noted, "Teachers seem to blame parents and parents seem to blame the teachers. It's an age-old problem."

At the secondary level, there is little participation on the part of the parents. There is no PTA or any organized group for the general population of parents of high school students. Many, although certainly not all, teachers also seem to be putting forth minimal effort according to
Teacher C.

In her classroom like MB's and LN's there is a slower, more controlled pace than there seems to be in the other teacher's classrooms who were not formally observed. All three spoke with directness and a calm voice regardless of the student's actions, inactions, or reactions to any given situation. Not showing emotion, or overreaction to any given situation seems to be the preferred tactic when faced with problematic students.

Teacher C's classroom was more of a work space than a place of learning. The room was decent-sized, approximately 30 x 45 ft., with an additional kiln room and a small storage room for works waiting to be fired. These rooms were modest in size, but the space was well used and every shelf was carefully labeled with all of the contents organized for easier processing and production of finished ceramic pieces.

In the main workroom there is a white board but no chalk board. On the white board the day's directions are written. She explains the student's options first verbally (for the auditory learners), then points to the board for those who are more visual in their learning style. Many of the students immediately copy down the information, as this is part of their grade, keeping a notebook and keeping track of which tasks have been
completed and when.

There is little written work assigned. Teacher C said she tried to give tests but had so many of her "good students" do poorly on them that she began to focus solely on the production of art, sacrificing the more, "intellectual approach, such as DBAE," she said while shaking her head. "Trying to teach these kids history or aesthetics is pretty pointless," she continued. "It's almost counterproductive" she claimed and implied that it turns off most of the students. Some written work is required: the students are expected to review a minimum of three articles out of "Ceramics Monthly" over the course of a semester.

Teacher C then abruptly changed subjects and began to talk about the different types of students she typically has problems with in her class. As a purely elective course, the students have chosen to be there. This is unlike the situations of other art teachers where there were no such choices. She indicated that this works in her favor, and gives her a "sort of advantage over many art educators working in the district or anywhere, for that matter."

She spoke of the usually relaxed atmosphere in her classes and how she tries to involve her students so heavily in their work that they have no time or interest in harassing her or making trouble. Teacher C made
reference to the idea that prisons and high schools have quite a bit in common. "As a general rule, discipline ceases to be a problem when people are doing what is important to them" Szekely (1982, p. 35). Like the prisoner, a high schooler is sometimes one, "who becomes involved in art gains a new audience and an ability to communicate in socially acceptable ways" (p. 36).

When there is that occasional confrontation, the offender is sent directly to the office, where the administrators or counselors sort out and settle the matter. Teacher C was quick to point out that she receives fairly good cooperation and an almost immediate response from the staff members who work with the students prone to behavioral problems.

Speaking of those few who have created a scene, she said she always tries a number of alternatives before a student is sent to the office unless, of course, she senses that there is any threat of physical harm to anyone present. "No assaults or any truly violent acts have occurred in my class," she told me as she knocked on a wooden table with a laugh.

Her manner was light and easy-going, but there was a definite business-like quality to her words and actions when she spoke, and even more so during the observation while she interacted with the students. It was clear that she took her job seriously and wanted others to do the same.
Returning to the subject of her students, Teacher C described their style of dress from extremely fancy, even elegant to very casual. While admitting there were definitely gang members on campus who looked and acted the part, she said the flashing of signs or colors was seldom problematic. Aloud she decided this was because most of them belonged to the same Crips gang. She laughed again before explaining, "I don't know if this (unification) is a good or bad thing." After a short pause she went on, "The gangs are united against a common enemy...the teachers and administration, and society as we know it," she joked.

Asked what sort of reward system she used, she smiled and noted that few of the students at this level seldom need anything other than a word of encouragement. Lots of feedback and some constructive criticism were given where and when needed. "Critiques," she said, "are a big part of my classes and I think, the learning process in general. It's hard to improve on something unless you can see you work as others perceive it."

From there the topic of learning styles came up, along with the problems related to the inclusion of students with physical handicaps and learning difficulties. She seemed a bit distressed and there was a slight detection of anger when she talked about how this particular district tended to place groups of LD or bilingual students together, supposedly with the
hopes that these students would help each other through the class. This was seldom the case among those who have been recently mainstreamed into the general population of students, she said somewhat sadly. Instead, she professed, "the students did not improve comradery but actually made their segregations easier for all to accept, including myself." The practice of ability grouping or tracking, she concluded, was among the many problems of education. "There is no one right answer," she explained as she looked around the room with an observable sense of frustration with the public school system.

One technique she excitedly mentioned was cooperative learning. She stressed heavily how successful this has proven with her particular type of students. According to Teacher C it, "gently forces people who wouldn't ordinarily associate with one another to work together toward a common goal." At least once a week they do some sort of cooperative activity where they receive both an individual and group grade. For her she assured this was an excellent way for students to alleviate that sense of isolation that leads so many teenagers on the path to trouble.

Toward the end of the interview she offered another method as possibly valuable to other teachers. She seemed very supportive of what she called "bell work". "What this means," she explained, "is that the
students come in and immediately copy down information in their journals or notebooks, forcing them to settle down to work almost instantly upon their arrival." She explained how she had been using this method for years and it seemed very successful with all types of learners.

The next and last group of the day was a beginning ceramics class comprised of a fairly equal mix of boys and girls. The students were all working on their individual projects with minimal interaction with the instructor, except when they requested help. Since her classes average between 25 and 30 students, there are few "down times" or moments when none of her beginning students need help.

She seldom had the opportunity to sit; but when she did, it seemed as soon as she reached the chair, it was time to get up and assist yet another student. This is a physically demanding job, not just in terms of circulating around the room constantly but also because of the logistical problems of working with clay. It involves a surprising amount of heavy lifting and a good deal of upper body strength to throw on the wheel with the ease that Teacher C showed.

Noting her job is not an easy one, she was unsure as to what she would most like change. Pausing, and clearly thinking this over, she quietly answered, "It would just be nice if someone really cared. The kids
are mostly apathetic, and for that matter, the administrators are too," she explained as she shook her head. At that point, the bell rang again and the students began to amble into the room. She looked at one young man, clearly decked out in full gang attire, and continued to shake her head as she said, "You just do the best you can, and never give up hope, I guess."

At the end of the day Teacher C prepared the room for the next day's first class. While doing so, she discussed briefly the use of planning as a sort of preventative discipline. To her, she said, "this means getting things ready before the students arrive. Knowing in advance what you're doing that day, under any given circumstances is vital, I think, to an art teacher's survival." As we moved toward the door to leave for the day, she claimed, "I guess I'm not like the other teachers - I always know what to expect." As we headed down the hall she ended the interview with a smile and these words, "I always expect to be surprised."
Chapter Four
Discussion, Implications and Summary

The problems created by the influx of mainstreamed, behaviorally problematic or at-risk students in the American classroom are far-reaching. These students once only affected certain classes, such as art, where such students have been routinely deposited for years. However, it is now a dilemma that faces each teacher, regardless of age-group or subject matter being taught.

The small number of participants in this study does not allow broad generalizations about the methods employed by all art educators or all teachers who work with a large percentage of at-risk students. The intent of this study was to compare, contrast and share the techniques three veteran art educators have devised or adopted to reap the greatest success rate with a population that is generally considered to be at-risk for a variety of reasons.

In addition, it was also essential to determine what is the relationship, past and present, between the at-risk learner and art. Further, it was necessary to ascertain if the status of art education was a factor in the dumping of large numbers of at-risk students into art classes, and, if
because of the experience with such students, the veteran art educator might be a valuable and overlooked resource with regard to managing these students more successfully. Furthermore, given the demographics and physical location of the school district within the city, it was important to determine if geographic location of the schools and students' residences, along with other socio-economic factors contribute to the labeling of certain students who are mainstreamed.

**Patterns Found**

The findings of this study suggest several commonalities in managerial, instructional and philosophical methodologies among the three teachers used for this research. Each of the three veteran teachers of art surveyed, has either devised or discovered a variety to manage the problematic or at-risk student. Some of the methods employed, observed, or stated are very similar to the other art teachers', but are modified to fit each of the individual's preferred teaching style as well as the age group with whom they work. Despite the fact that each employed an individual and distinct style, certain patterns regarding successful classroom management, methods of communication, and respect and recognition of each student as an individual could be detected within the small sampling.
Experienced teachers of art, on the other hand, including those surveyed here, have dealt with mainstreamed and problematic students for many years. Each brings with him or her an individual philosophy and a set of ideas about how to best serve this population. This study revealed at least eight commonly used methods, tactics or qualities espoused by these three teachers of art to better reach the at-risk students regardless of age level being taught.

These include strategic issues such as effective communication, relevant lessons, and types of motivation. There are also technical issues such as classroom management techniques, realistically high expectations, pleasant learning/work environment. In addition, the following philosophical issues were found to be important to each of the subjects of the case studies. They include, the valuation of students as individuals, a sincere interest and love for the subject of art, and a high degree of professionalism. These eight issues will be considered separately given their gravity in the overall styles of the three participants.

One of the first items mentioned by all three educators when asked why they seemed to be successful with at-risk students, was his or her ability to communicate effectively with their students. All three felt strongly that they had touched the lives of many of their students. The
ability to break down the barriers put up by youths as a sort of self-preservation measure, was, it seemed, one of the fundamental elements of his or her success.

Each teacher also expressed, on more than one occasion, that the ability to quickly, yet adequately, supply good and usually simplified instructions set them apart from other teachers. Each strived to make very clear to all of his or her students exactly what was expected and how to best achieve the desired results.

The three of the teachers who were studied consistently used a step-by-step method when explaining directions or giving demonstrations; yet each went about this differently. The elementary and middle school teacher repeated the step time and time again, in a sort of spin-off on the broken record approach to discipline. Each teacher did his or her best to monitor and clarify the necessity of each step as the students progressed through the lesson. Teacher B, at the middle level, in particular, expressed the importance of breaking down everything into bite-size pieces in order to better relay information to his students.

Communication, whether it related to instructional time, or on a different level, was an essential component in each individual's overall strategy. At the same time, each of the three teachers emphasized that
although certain guidelines were given verbally, students relinquished none of their own individual creativity. Allowing students to learn through experience or a serendipitous approach, art teachers are stereotypically noted, said Teacher B, for their sometimes too laissez-faire attitude toward rules. However, this certainly did not seem to apply or be an issue with any of those related to this project.

The relevance of the lessons taught or projects being created was another vital issue to all three teachers. Each does his or her best to provide a well-rounded art education, which includes the basic elements and principles of art. In addition, all three teachers indicated that adjustments were made in the curriculum to better reach and involve the population with whom they worked. At the elementary and middle school level both Teachers A & B work with other teachers at their respective schools to integrate art into the general curriculum.

Among the three, there were individual differences in the teaching styles and methodologies used to approach both their students as well as the preferred subject matter. All agreed that if the lesson was regarded as uninteresting or boring, there was a noticeable increase in the need for disciplinary measures. For that reason, if no other, all three said they went out of their way to provide relevant, hands-on projects that fully engaged
their students' hands and more importantly, the students' minds.

The way activities were directed and organized varied slightly between the three teachers, but, again, certain patterns emerged. Each had a short list of simple but sound rules or classroom expectations. The lists were slightly different in terms of their sophistication. The idea of respect for things and people seemed paramount. Clean-up and personal responsibility was also an integral part of a well-managed art classroom.

Rules seemed especially important to the Teacher A at the primary level. Stating the directions in a simple manner for her students and the instructions were repeated frequently to assure large-scale student success. Interestingly, her ideas about teaching, and even the way she approached her subject and classroom management, was nearly identical to that of the high school instructor, Teacher C.

In contrast, at the middle school level, Teacher B, had a definite and clearly different approach to everything he did while in the classroom. It seems each of his words and actions were carefully monitored to fit into the reality-based therapy approach to discipline and classroom management, which he has adopted into every facet of his teaching.

The climate of the classroom was of great importance, said all three art educators. Being consistently calm, fair, friendly yet professional was a
common theme for all the teachers, but seemed to be almost a passion to the middle school instructor. Listening, for Teacher B, seemed to be as important as talking when it came to behavior problems. "Each day," he said, "is a fresh start for every student". When a child acted up or out, if time allowed, he tried to personally investigate the reasons behind the interruption. Waiting for complete silence during inspections or demonstrations was deemed not helpful, but absolutely necessary.

Each also agreed that making things clear in terms of expectations of behavior and each individual assignment prevented many potential discipline problems. None of three teachers condoned the heavy-handed approach to discipline. Like most experienced educators, each has learned not to search for the causes of misbehavior, but instead to focus on the child and give him or her individual instruction where needed. Time was spent with the child, not his or her problems. "Assessment", said Teacher B, "in the art classroom does not always have to do with a student's portfolio".

In flourishing art classes, such as those observed for this study, children learn to produce, to see, to think, to feel, to appreciate, and, ultimately, to live. Furthermore, each of the teachers who participated in this small study truly believed that some of the students are able to transfer
these abilities to other aspects of their lives.

Respect turned out to be a critical issue for all three, who independently recognized the lack of professionalism within the field of art education, and the tarnished reputation of art teachers at large. Although age is not necessarily a factor that earns automatic respect with this particular clientele, each of these teachers does seem to have both maturity and experience on their side. The fact that these three art educators share similar professional teaching experiences in terms of length of employment, age and race is significant.

Given their individual artistic abilities and long-standing as a teacher in their particular school, these educators seem to have a built-in reputation. It appears they are seen as a sort of fixture of the institution, and are perceived almost as a tribal elder. It is as if any instructor who can survive in this district for more than five years earns a certain amount of respect automatically by students and parents alike.

While each teacher expressed some frustration with regard to the status of art in schools, all three seemed to believe their jobs are as important or more important than any other teacher's. For these teachers, the education of the whole child seems to be at the core of their teaching.

It was conveyed that none of the three believe art class should be
seen as a laboratory for the socially unacceptable or as a special provenance for those students deemed to be gifted. Each acknowledged the inclusion of mainstreamed students sometimes presented a challenge, but at the same time, each maintained that all students would be able to explore and learn to appreciate the arts, in its numerous forms.

In the end, each of these teachers indicated it was not the project that was meaningful but the process. Although only Teacher A was a strong advocate of DBAE, all three indicated they had found that art lessons and units should be taught sequentially for optimal results with the vast majority of students.

Each also addressed the different modes of learning in any given population. Art, it was determined by Teacher B, gives students, especially those with different learning styles a chance to express themselves. And the DBAE approach, thought Teachers A and C, specifically helps instructors look at the whole and break it down into parts. Integrated with other academic subjects, they all agreed, seems to lead to higher performance, improved attitudes, and greater self-confidence in their student.

The teachers in this small study did not consider themselves to be experts and did not believe themselves to be any more knowledgeable than
the average art teacher, but they are indeed a unique group. Given their years in the same district, teaching the same types of students over an extended period has given them an unusual insight into the lives of at-risk students, and has afforded them ideas as to the best ways to reach this population.

It is not surprising that over time, each has devised similar strategies and methods to teach art. Nor is it unusual that these teachers have borrowed and perfected certain techniques and philosophies that seem to be particularly successful with this population, that was once, not long ago, distinctive because of its high percentage of students considered to be at-risk. What these teachers have learned is not remarkable, it is merely a matter of experience and situational logic.

Implications for art education

Preservice teachers and experienced teachers alike, face challenges that their predecessors never encountered or even knew existed until recent years. Today there is a large and growing assemblage of students determined by others to be at-risk. These are the children who pose problems no well-known or recognized educational theory has dealt with directly, as of yet. However, judging by the amount of recent literature
being produced, at-risk students are presently among the most interesting
to many educational researchers. It is expected that numerous theories
based on their findings, are likely to emerge in the near future.

The teachers in this study strongly implied that this is not the kind of
issue a school district can address through an in-service day or a
memorandum. As Teacher B pointed out, what works in one situation may
fail miserably in another, each child is an individual, and each incident is
different. Obviously the teacher must be very careful with regard to how
the at-risk student is approached. This is especially true of students who
are predisposed to violence, some of whom carry weapons which was of
special concern to Teacher C. Due to the large and increasing number of
students who arm themselves, teaching has, for many, become a dangerous
occupation.

When asked, all of the teachers agreed that regardless of one's
previous experience, when working with at-risk students, there is no fail-
safe way to deal with an unpredictable and hostile person in a classroom
setting. There is no way to adequately prepare any individual, whether
they be in the field of education, law enforcement or a layman, for the
violent or destructive action an outraged student is capable of committing.
Each day a teacher enters his or her classroom there is an element of
Summary and Recommendations

With an anticipated dramatic increase in the number of children at-risk, it is of the essence that educators locate or develop strategies to more adeptly serve this special population. The findings of studies suggest that there are numerous and sometimes complicated reasons for students to fall into the at-risk category. This is not strictly a problem of only the poverty-prone, nor is it more prevalent in certain minority populations, despite common beliefs to the contrary.

For the three art educators in this study it is true however, that the majority are children of color, in this case, Mexican-American. A high number of these students are also from lower income families which are, in many cases, single parent households. Although not all students truly fall into the category of at-risk (as defined earlier in this paper), because of their geographic location within the city and mitigating socio-economic factors, all students residing in this district could be considered at high-risk for future academic and other types of personal failure.

The experience of the three art educators interviewed and observed for this study provide significant insight for both the novice and veteran
Between them, six recommendations were developed for those experiencing difficulty with those labeled as an at risk, behaviorally problematic and/or mainstreamed student.

First, it is recommended that teachers, both present and future, employ common sense at every opportunity. Experienced teachers like Teacher B know that when trouble arises, as it often does in a class where considerable student movement is necessary, stepping back and assessing a situation, pausing and then acting on logic is far superior to the instinctual hasty reaction.

Second, as Teacher C observed, "keeping an open mind is the only possible way to be fair when dealing with at-risk students or any students." As humans we have many preconceived notions that are developed through our socialization, as teachers we must work hard to be objective. Being fair, according to Teacher C, is the reason she has gained the trust and respect of so many of her students.

Consistency was the third recommendation. "Remaining consistent, not just with your discipline plan but with all aspects of teaching, is of paramount importance" Teacher B observed. "It is necessary for these children to have at least some constants in their lives". With so many unknowns in the lives of some of his students, Teacher B concluded, his
role as a consistent, steady and strong adult is desperately needed.

The fourth recommendation was that the teacher possess vast knowledge about the subject area he or she intends to teach. Without a strong content base in their teaching, it was agreed among the three educators, even the those who excel at classroom management will not succeed. "Basically, you gotta know your stuff" commented Teacher B. "Outstanding classroom management skills can be rendered ineffective if you don't feel confident about teaching in your content area" he concluded.

All three teachers strongly recommended that class sizes be reduced. Knowing this was not feasible given the projected growth and budget of the district Teacher C suggested additional classroom aides for non-English speaking students and/or handicapped students. When a student needs constant one-on-one assistance, the teacher is forced to ignore the remainder of the class. Issues concerning equity and fairness arise when the teacher is pulled in too many directions.

The sixth recommendation, made by Teacher C, is that further research be done on the at-risk student and what educational approaches and ideologies may serve this population best. Case studies of the students themselves may provide the information that educators seem to, at this time, lack. Further study of successful teachers who possess experience
with those at-risk will undoubtedly provide additional information with regard to the determination of which methods yield the most positive responses. For the child experiencing difficulty assimilating into the mainstream, or is at-risk for other reasons, such a discovery may have a tremendous impact, and in some cases may be the difference between life and death.

In summary, it is suggested that the reader pay heed to those who, by intention or not, are among the best versed in the field of experts on teaching the at-risk learner. It is encouraged too, that the reader consider or reconsider his or her own personal theories and educational philosophies pertaining to real life at-risk, mainstreamed, and problematic students.

Often the information given in college preparatory classes through texts and lectures is well intentioned but not always practical to the real life situation of the typical classroom of today and tomorrow. It is not only the voices of theorists which need to be heard. The voices of those experiencing the realities of the contemporary classroom are those which may provide the most insightful views.
EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS INTENDED FOR CASE STUDIES

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

How large is the actual physical building/campus?

How large is the classroom itself?

Are there adequate windows or natural light?

In general, what is the condition of the classroom?

Are there fences and walls around the school?

What kinds of security are provided for students and staff?

In what section of the community is the school located?

What is the nature of the graffiti (if any)?

How long is the regular school day?

How much time is given for recess, passing periods, and lunch?

Is there a free breakfast/lunch program available?

Is there a stigma attached to this?

What are the rules and regulations of the cafeteria and how are they enforced?

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

What is the reputation of the school in the community (good, tough,
dangerous)?

What are some of the major problems the school has faced over the past five years?

How do various staff react to outside criticism of the school?

What is the racial composition of the students?

What is the racial composition of the instructors and staff, including administration?

Do classes tend to be balanced or do minority students wind up in the same class?

What is the nature of the relations between different ethnic groups in the school?

Do groups tend to stick together, or is there integration?

What are the words that members of different ethnic groups use to describe other ethnic groups? Themselves?

What is the socioeconomic composition of the school?

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

What do teachers complain about?

What do they praise?

How do teachers explain low achievement on the part of students?
How do teachers explain high achievement of the part of the students?

What do teachers define as professional behavior?

Are the teachers happy with the administration, school board and school district?

Who are the most popular students in the school, What makes them so popular?

Who are the most popular teachers in the school? What seems to make them popular?

Who are the most disliked students in the school? Why are they disliked?

Who are the most disliked staff members? Why are they so disliked?

How are the various specialists (counselor, school resource officer etc.) thought of by students, teachers, parents and administrators?

What rules and regulations do students ignore?

Which rules and regulations do staff ignore?

STAFF MEMBERS AND STUDENTS: COMMUNICATION

Do staff gossip about students? Each other?

If they do what is the nature of that gossip?

To what extent are students cursed? By staff? By each other? What about?

To what extent, if any, do students suffer other verbal indignities or put
downs?

How do staff members measure success in their school?

How do students measure success?

What are the goals staff members say they are working toward?

How do they see their activities as related to these goals?

Do you think it would be difficult to keep your sense of dignity if you were a student at the school?

How do the staff members view the students? As capable human beings? As babies? As dangerous?

To what extent does the staff stereotype students?

To what extent do students purposely try to give staff a hard time? How do they do this and what do they think about it?

What do students think of the staff?

What does the staff think of the students?

What types of extracurricular activities are available? Who participates in them? Staff? Students? Parents?

What type of achievements are most awarded in the school? Athletic? Academic? Other?

Is there much if any support for the arts?

How is art education thought of by students, valued or frivolous?
How is art, and art education thought of by staff?

What kind of art is being taught, by whom, and how often?
STUDENTS

What do students and staff wear?

Does dress tell you anything about status systems or informal groups or gangs?

What about hairstyles?

What do the children in the class fight about?

Are fights verbal, physical, and/or frequent?

When various children seem troubled, whom do they look to for support?

What is the number, if any, of the students on behavior-modifying drugs?

What is the number, if any, of teen pregnancies, gang incidents, criminal activities?

PARENTS

What communication occurs between the school and parents?

Are parents consulted in decisions affecting their child?

What rules pertain to visitors?

Is there a PTO?

How many people attend a typical meeting?

How are parents' complaints handled?

What is the nature and extent of the volunteer program?
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

What decorations adorn the classroom?

Are students interacting with each other? Will they be praised or penalized for such interaction?

What is the ability range for the class as measured by objective tests and past grades?

What are children complimented for?

Are the classrooms spacious or crowded? In good physical condition or run down? Somber or cheerful? Barren or busy?

What is the average class size?

Are all students engaged in the same task at the same time?

Does the classroom procedure optimize cooperation or competition? How often do students work on group projects?

How do students perceive they will be rewarded for effort?

Are all students responsive to the reward system?

Is the class heterogeneously or homogeneously grouped? If the latter, what is the criterion for such grouping?

TEACHER- STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS
Do students have free time when their work is finished?

Has the teacher prepared materials for use during free time?

Where is the teacher's desk located in the room?

What are the teacher's movements during the day in relation to his or her disk?

What kinds of curriculum materials are used (i.e. texts, other readings, games, etc.)?

How are classroom chores (clean-up) handled?

How is the class paced?

What individualized teaching-learning occurs? For whom?

Which students have most contact with the teacher?

Which students have least contact with the teacher?

Which students are touched most and least by the teacher?

DISCIPLINE AND CONTROL

Can students choose where they sit?

How prominent is control in the day-to-day operation of the school? Of different classrooms?

What restrictions are placed on students' mobility in the school?

Classroom?

What methods of control are used by staff?
What is the nature of punishment in the school?

How and when are punishments given?

What tone of voice do staff use when addressing students?

What kinds of things do administrators purposely turn their backs on?

What do teachers turn their backs on?

Is the physical integrity of the students and staff guaranteed in the school?

Is there danger of assault?

Is there an independent complaint system through which students can bring grievances against the staff for problems?

Are threats made to students?

What are typical threats?

How many students express hostility?

What students behaviors elicit punishment?

Which staff members have the authority to discipline students?

To what extent do the punishments and rewards of the school approximate punishment and reward systems in the larger world?
References


Clarke, James (1992). "Where have we been and where are we going?" (Summary) In *Keynote Addresses: 32nd Annual NAEA Convention*, 7-20.


