5-12-2012

Student Perceptions of the Alternative School

Tina Sabrina Herrington

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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

By

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Education Administration
in the Department of Leadership and Foundations

Mississippi State, Mississippi

May 2012

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

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Title of Study: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

Pages in Study: 120

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Some students find it difficult to reach graduation in a regular secondary school setting, but may be successful in an alternative setting. Causes of not graduating could include high absenteeism and behavior problems, which may result in dropping out.

This study sought student perceptions of an alternative program in a public school district in the state of Mississippi. The participants were 10 students and their parents, 10 teachers, and the administrator. Data included interviews and school documents, and were analyzed using the constant comparative method.

This research found that some of the students were enthused upon receiving alternative placement. Students liked the curriculum tailored to their individual needs, more one-on-one time with the teacher, and the opportunity to focus on the changes that they needed to make to improve their educational opportunities. Some parents expressed their disappointment in their child's placement; however, there were some parents who prefer the alternative school over regular school. The parents who were disappointed thought it to be a place where they put bad kids and where the teachers were not good teachers. The parents who preferred it liked the smaller teacher-student ratio and believed

that alternative teachers were more supportive and kind. The teachers expressed the alternative school does not get the same attention as other district schools and is seen as a dumping ground for both teachers and students.

Recommendations to the district include: evaluate the criteria for placing students in the alternative school, increase communication between the alternative and the regular school, provide a specialist to help focus on student learning styles, provide a full-time counselor to help students deal with the issues contributing to their lack of success in the regular school, and improve the physical setting for the alternative school.

Further research is needed in the district: to determine what could be improved in the alternative academic program; to determine whether the alternative school curriculum is meeting state standards; and to examine the acceptance of students and faculty in the alternative program by district students and personnel.

Key words: alternative schools

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Sheldon Herrington, and to my children, Tevin, Timmy, and Kayla. Thank you for your patience, support, and understanding. This dissertation is also dedicated to my family and friends for your encouragement. Lastly, but most importantly, I thank God for giving me the mental strength to endure and complete this journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of a dissertation is a challenging process. Throughout this process there has been a multitude of people who have shared, supported, and encouraged me along the way. I am so grateful for the relationships that have been formed as a result of this process. I am eternally indebted to each of you and without this would not have come been possible.

Great appreciation goes to my advisor and major professor, Dr. Dwight Hare, for his support, patience, guidance, and great sense of humor which was greatly needed to endure this process. I am also grateful to the other members of my committee: Clyde Lindley, Ed Davis, and Beth Sewell

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, the need for alternative schools began to grow in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. The alternative schools emphasized the development of self-concept, problem-solving, and humanistic approaches (Conley, 2002). The development of alternative education was based on the idea that some students may learn better in an environment structured differently than that of traditional academic public schools (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Students are referred to alternative schools and programs if they are at risk of failure, as indicated by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, suspension, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with early withdrawal from school.

Some 10 years ago, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2002a) stated that 11,000 public alternative schools and programs for at-risk students served approximately 61,000 students in the United States during the 2000-2001 school years. The study reported that alternative schools were located disproportionately in urban districts, districts with high minority student populations, and districts with high-poverty concentrations, making them susceptible to social, political, economic, and educational inequalities. Raywid (1999) noted that despite the multiplicity of forms of alternative education, two characteristics were present from the start. Raywid stated, "They have been designed to respond to a group that appears not to be optimally served by the regular from standard school organization, programs, and environments" (p. 48).

School districts struggle with negative stigmas of alternative schools as dumping grounds or warehouses for at-risk students who are falling behind, have behavioral problems, or are juvenile delinquents. These stigmas have long been some of the biggest obstacles barring the success of alternative education (Arnove & Strout, 1980). Students and their families are blamed for their failures because of poverty, low socio-economic status, and minority status. But, according to Valencia (1997), school tracking, inequalities in school financing, curriculum differentiation, and low teacher quality – all of which help maintain the status quo – are not held accountable in explaining why some students fail in school.

There should be identifiable student perceptions and characteristics that lead to higher academic achievement and success in alternative schools. The identification and investigation of such characteristics is valuable due to the rapid growth of alternative learning programs (Lehr & Lang, 2003). However, the isolation of such characteristics and their link to achievement is complicated due to the variation among programs, the variation in definitions of alternative learning programs, and the variation in students who are considered at-risk (Foley & Pang, 2006). Lange and Sletten (2002) stated that much of the existing alternative school research was focused on the program rather than student descriptions and academic outcomes. Although the research tends to focus on alternative school characteristics rather than student characteristics, the traits of student/peer and student/teacher relationships, family support, and motivation surface as consistent factors in supporting student success in the alternative school.

NCES (2009a) estimated that in 2007, 9% of 16- through 24-year-olds were defined as having dropout status. All educational personnel should be trained to be aware of certain traits or behaviors of potential dropouts. Dynaski and Gleason (1998) found

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that the beginning of helping a student at risk of dropping out of school is to form a relationship that revolves around trust between the student and a staff member of the school. As Epp and Epp (2001) noted, this type of relationship is encouraged when teaching is a sharing of thoughts and feelings between students, teachers, and a caring community in such a way that a relationship of mutual trust, respect, and friendship is built.

Stewart (2008) reported that school climate is vital to the learning process and is the heart and soul of a school's educational mission. Therefore, a student's perception of the educational climate is a general student trait that can impact student achievement.

Perceptions of school climate reflect how a student feels about the educational environment in terms of the school culture's social and structural aspects. Hernandez and Seem (2004) noted that the social aspects of a school culture consist of interpersonal relationships among all members of the school, communications in the school, cooperation among students and adults, the school's rituals and traditions, and expectations of a safe school. The structural aspects of a school culture include fairness and clarity of rules, high academic expectations, establishment of acceptable behavioral parameters, instructional leadership, involvement of parents/community in the school, and implemented instructional programs. Student perceptions of school climate contribute to their interest levels and their interactions with teachers and fellow students. If the climate is perceived as safe and caring, interactions between teachers and students and between students and students are enhanced through willing, voluntary participation in the various aspects of the school culture. Stewart (2008) found that school climate affects students' sense of belonging; this sense of belonging is the extent to which students feel accepted, respected, and supported in schools and has been shown to

influence academic achievement. Emmons and Baskerville (2005) found that school climate, and more specifically the students' perceptions of school climate, had a positive link to achievement.

Loy and Gregory (2002) stated that, in order for alternative schools to achieve their goals, it is crucial that students perceive themselves as important in their alternative settings. However, it is important to consider that alternative school students' perceptions of school may be negative, which could increase their problem behaviors or their chances of dropping out. Research has shown that there are often important differences in the perspectives of different school stakeholders (e.g., staff, students, administrators) and that considering the student perspective in addition to that of the adults might be critical to creating a positive learning environment (Souza, 1999).

Statement of Purpose

Many students are not finding it easy to succeed in the traditional school setting. Alternative schools provide an alternate route in helping those students succeed academically and graduate. Alternative schools are often assessed by school administrators, but rarely are they assessed by the students who attend them. The purpose of this study is to provide an opportunity for the perceptions of students who attend an alternative school to be expressed.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to help students, parents, teachers, and administrators understand students' perception of the alternative school. The placement of students in alternative schools to assist in reducing the dropout rates is available through a local public school, but awareness of how the alternative school meets

students' many needs should be broadcast to those affected in the community surrounding the school system. Public schools must obtain students' perceptions about the alternative school in the school system from students who attend the program. If the program works for students, school systems need to know why it works for them. Once what works and what does not work are identified, the school system can implement needed changes.

Institutional pathology is a dominant theory of at-riskness that suggested students may become at-risk due to institutional insufficiencies (Sagor & Cox, 2004). When individuals or groups consistently receive differential treatment by social institutions one should expect to see them behave differently. This theory suggests that a large number of children receive improper or inappropriate treatment by the institutions where they spend much of their time. School is one of the most significant institutions that have the most impact on youth. Institutional interventions are referred to as pacification programs. Pacification programs are programs such as alternative schools that do not cure the problem but changes the institution as well as the institutional practices.

Findings from this study could help school administrators (a) decrease school dropout rate and (b) help develop effective resources to improve alternative schools. In addition, school officials should be able to judge whether alternative school programs are achieving the goal of preparing students for a return to regular classrooms.

Limitations

Limitations of this study were as follows. The study was limited to a school district that had only one alternative education school. The design of this study only used

one group of students with no way of controlling other environmental influences on the participants during the period in which the interviews and observations occurred.

Research Question

This study addressed the following research question:

What are the perceptions of the alternative school for students who attend the alternative school?

Research Approach

As described in greater detail in chapter 2, the research approach of the study was the phenomenological approach of van Manen (1994, 1995, 1997), who viewed the necessity of pedagogy as rising out of the educator's reflective awareness of the student's lived experience. This study focused on the perceptions of disenfranchised students to better understand their lived experiences in alternative schools. Their lived experiences are shaped by the perceptions of their parents/guardians and by their teachers. This study can help researchers and educators understand student perceptions of what is happening in the alternative school versus what should be happening. According to van Manen (1997), each individual has a *life world*, or unique way of experiencing and participating in the world. In research informed by this view, the researcher attempts to identify and reflect upon the life world of participants as their life worlds are experienced and actively created by participants. The researcher then attempts to develop reflective action based on an understanding of participants' lived experience of the phenomenon of interest. As it applies to the present study, van Manen's approach was used to shape the inquiry with the goal of understanding the life world of participants in an alternative school and of using reflective action in developing of recommendations for the alternative school.

Terms and Definitions

Alternative school refers to a public elementary or secondary school that addresses the needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education (NCES, 2002b).

Regular schools refer to schools that embrace diversity and provide access to knowledge, skills and information to all its students. They tailor learning to meet the individual student needs, encourage co-teaching and collaboration amongst general and special educators, think outside of the box in terms of structure and school finance, and collaborate with family and community member (Raywid, 2003).

At-risk student refers to any student who is unlikely to graduate on schedule with both the skills and self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and inter/intra personal relationships (Sagor & Cox, 2004).

Individualized Education Programs (IEP) are special education programs that are tailored to each student's needs according to his/her learning disabilities (NCES, 2002a).

School Counselors are all designed to keep students in school and to help them be successful. Their primary objective is to promote and enhance student learning. Counselors play a valuable role in all "dropout prevention programs." They provide consultation in defining and identifying at-risk students. Counselors work as members of a team with other school personnel to provide essential services. The goal is to identify and intervene before students move through a continuum of self-destructive behavior (Mississippi Department of Education [MDE], 2011).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

School districts must deal with at-risk students who may struggle academically, present constant behavior problems, and have poor attendance. According to Donmoyer and Kos (1993), an at-risk student is usually academically challenged and is in danger of failing or dropping out of school. A student who is labeled at-risk may exhibit behavior that may prevent the student and others from being successful in school. According to Souza (1999), alternative schools affect more potential dropouts than any other program, and it is imperative to understand how students are making sense of their alternative school experiences. The meaning these students make of their roles as alternative school students is important because that meaning can affect their decision to stay in school.

According to Brewer (2004), alternative schools hold the power to encourage skills and interests, while giving new life and significance to the academics that students need to survive and become productive citizens. Kelley (1996) found over 15 years ago that in several school districts throughout the country, as many as 10% of district students were enrolled in a continuation or alternative school to complete their education. According to Epp and Epp (2001), alternative schooling policies enable schools to act on their commitment to mandatory education for all students.

There should be identifiable student perceptions and characteristics that lead to higher academic achievement and success in alternative schools. The identification and investigation of such characteristics is valuable due to the rapid growth of alternative

learning programs (Lehr & Lang, 2003). However, the isolation of such characteristics and their link to achievement is complicated due to the variation among programs, the variation in definitions of alternative learning programs, and the variation in students who are considered at-risk (Foley & Pang, 2006).

Much of the existing alternative school research is focused on the program rather than student descriptions and academic outcomes. The traits of student/peer and student/teacher relationships, family support, and motivation surface as consistent factors in supporting student success in the alternative school (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

History of Alternative Schools

Miller (2006) noted that our system of public schooling was organized in the 1830s to provide a common, culturally unifying educational experience for children. He also wrote that alternative schools originated to serve a growing population of students who were not experiencing success in the traditional school setting. Lange and Sletten (2002) stated that alternatives in public education have existed since the very birth of American education. Young (1990) explained that educational opportunities differ on race, gender, and social class which come from the roots in the civil rights movement.

Lange and Sletten (2002) reported that President Lyndon Johnson publicized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which put the public education system under public attack because the federal government was funding alternative education programs. It was understood that public education was offering equal and meaningful education to disadvantaged youth through alternative schools. Young (1990) noted that the alternative schools gained popularity in the later 1960s due to the drive to create more innovative schools with a progressive orientation.

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Lange and Sletten (2002) reported that alternative education programs continued to grow and were split between two basic categories: alternative schools outside public education and alternative schools inside public education. The researchers stated that the outside alternatives were known as Freedom Schools and were intended to give children freedom to learn and freedom from restrictions. Inside alternative schools were labeled as Open Schools. Lange and Sletten defined Open Schools as schools that were characterized by: parent, student, and teacher choice; and a child-centered approach.

Young (1990) suggested that alternative schools became more conservative and remedial in the 1980s to serve students who were disruptive or failing in the regular educational setting. By 1987, over 15 states had passed legislation to increase alternative education options, and alternative schools were serving a variety of students, including violent or chronically disruptive youth, students at risk of dropout, and low achieving students from varied socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds (Harrington, 1994).

By the beginning of 2002, there were over 20,000 alternative schools in operation throughout the United States (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Even as the programs continued to evolve, there was still little evidence of their effectiveness. Lange and Sletten reported, however, a consensus among educators that the programs were meeting the needs of the disenfranchised youth. Lehr and Lang (2003) noted that it is important to recognize the distinctions among alternative schools because of implications related to student motivation, outcomes, and overall effectiveness.

Types and Characteristics of Alternative Schools

According to the NCES (2002b), an alternative school is defined as a public elementary or secondary school that addresses the needs of students that typically cannot

be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a

regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational

education. Creating a caring, non-authoritarian learning environment and having

supervising adults who are sympathetic to the needs of the students are likely the keys to

the success of the students (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006).

It is beneficial to understand how alternative education programs have been

viewed and classified. Raywid (1994) created a three-level classification which resulted

from examining existing programs based on the characteristics of the student population

and the goals and intent of the programs. This classification is as follows:

1. Type I schools offer full-time, multiyear, education options for students of

all kinds, including those needing more individualization, those seeking an

innovative or challenging curriculum, or dropouts wishing to earn their

diplomas. A full instructional program offers students the credits needed

for graduation. Students choose to attend. Other characteristics include

divergence from standard school organization and practices (deregulation,

flexibility, autonomy, and teacher and student empowerment); an

especially caring, professional staff; small size and small classes; and a

personalized, whole-student approach that builds a sense of affiliation and

features individualized instruction, self-paced work, and career

counseling. Models range from schools-within-schools to magnet schools,

charter schools, schools without walls, experimental schools, career-

focused and job-based schools, dropout-recovery programs, after-hours

schools, and schools in atypical settings, like shopping malls and

museums.

2.	Type II programs have discipline as the distinguishing characteristic. Type II programs are designed to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students. Students typically do not choose to attend, but are sent to the school for specified time periods or until behavior requirements are met. Since placement is short-term, the curriculum is limited to a few basic, required courses or is a list of assignments determined by the school from which the student was sent. Familiar models include last-chance schools and in-school suspensions.

3.	Type III programs provide short-term, therapeutic settings for students with social and emotional problems that create academic and behavioral barriers to learning. Although Type III programs target specific populations, offering counseling, access to social services, and academic remediation, students can choose not to participate.

In reviewing the above classifications, Laudan (2003) found the Type I programs to be most useful, while Type II programs based solely on discipline were much less likely to lead to substantial student gains.

Raywid (1999) commented that when the focus of alternative schools is changing schools to offer novel curricula, innovative instructional approaches, and atypically positive climates, schools have a more far reaching positive impact on students than those which are more punitive and provide only short term assignments. Students enrolled in Type III programs regress when returned to traditional schools. Laudan (2003) stated, "It may be that therapeutic programs have limited long term impact on academic gains because they are often short term" (p. 21).

Raywid (1998) stated that academic success for students stemming from changing their school environment is often temporary, if any success occurs at all. This is due to the program's or school's focus being misdirected; since the students have academic or personal issues, changing the environment does not address the remediation of these. Of Type I, Type II, and Type III programs, only alternative learning programs and schools that are built around the concept of change in the educational system create a successful alternative learning experience.

According to Franklin, Kim, and Tripodi (2006), academic alternative schools that focus on education instead of discipline or correction are effective for youths who are at risk of dropping out. Academic alternative schools resemble elite college prep programs instead of correctional facilities (Rumberger, 2004). Academic alternative schools are student centered and caring, and contain environments that emphasize strengths, resources, and interpersonal relationships (Barr & Parrett, 2001). Academic alternative schools that focus on education often improve students' behavior and achievement levels compared with schools with a disciplinary focus (Dupper, 2006). In addition, academic alternative schools have been shown to have low student-to-teacher ratios, which enable teachers to work individually with students, increasing the students' desire to graduate (Murray, 2002). Smaller alternative schools have fewer incidents of violence, higher attendance, lower dropout rates, increased participation in extracurricular activities, and a higher sense of belonging (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). It is easier for teachers to develop close, mentoring relationships with their students in smaller schools with low student-to-teacher ratios (Dupper, 2006).

Fitzsimons et al. (2006) identified six core characteristics that distinguish alternative schools from more traditional educational programs. These are: (a)

comprehensive student evaluation; (b) an educational program that is aligned with student real-world expectations and reflects various nontraditional teaching and learning options; (c) programming that promotes social, emotional, and behavior change within a safe, positive, and non-punitive environment; (d) ongoing staff training and development; (e) policies and practices that support student transition from a more to a less restrictive environment; and (f) ongoing program evaluation and data based decision making.

The phrase "alternative school" has often held a negative implication. McGee (2001), however, noted that the phrase has suggested the opportunity for a second chance. To Lange (1998), this second chance option has combined the philosophies of alternative schools and school choice, and has offered another opportunity to students failing in the traditional system.

Raywid (1983) long ago noted that these schools which focused on academics and high school completion have been referred to as Academic Alternative Education Campuses. These campuses comprise instructional settings created to foster a positive learning climate featuring small class sizes, individual assignments, self-paced timelines, competency-based rather than competition-driven performance assessments, and informal classroom interaction.

Reasons for Alternative Schools

According to Brewer (2004), each year tens of thousands of students, feeling disconnected from the learning environment, drop out of school. The increase in testing and other mandates for attendance are keeping students away from the learning environment. Brewer noted that if students do not come to school, teachers cannot teach

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them. If the students are unsuccessful in regular high schools, alternative schools should be put into place so that students stay in school.

Fashola and Slavin (1998) found over 10 years ago that for most states, high school graduation rates had been steadily increasing. The authors indicated that several alternative schools designed to deter dropping out as an option for students had been implemented in middle and high schools that have at-risk students. Alternative programs provide a learning environment where students can successfully reach graduation. However, these researchers argued that even with the best alternative schools, many students will still be at risk for dropping out, and many will fail to achieve their full potential. They also believe that secondary schools need interventions for at-risk students to increase the chances that the students will attend school regularly, will receive their high school diploma, and will either continue their studies further or become members of the workforce.

According to Wolk (2003), research has suggested that dropping out of school is a process. Students do not just suddenly leave after turning 16. Wolk stated that they begin to become uninterested much earlier than 16, usually resulting in academic trouble. They leave school for various reasons, including problems at home, persistent poor performance, boredom, and personal crises such as pregnancy and unstable school conditions.

Lehr (2004) citied findings from research conducted by the Alternative Schools Research Project at the University of Minnesota describing alternative schools across the United States. Lehr stated that alternative schools:

- Are designed to meet a variety of needs including preventing students from dropping out of school, providing another educational option,

serving as a disciplinary consequence, or providing academic/behavioral remediation.

- Are primarily designed for high school age students, although many states have schools that are serving younger students.

- Are accessed by students in a variety of ways ranging from student choice (usually with some specified parameters) to mandatory placement.

- Often have criteria for enrollment (e.g. students may be admitted as a result of suspension or expulsion or they must meet some form of at-risk criteria).

- Serve students for varying amounts of time (e.g., short term placement and transition back to traditional school; long-term commitment through graduation).

- Offer education programs that typically include one or more of the following: and emphasis on individual; instruction, a focus on basic academic skills instruction), and/or community or work-based learning. (p. 2)

Clabaugh (2004) summarized an array of causes of dropping out under personal, social, and school conditions that place students at risk of school failure. Personal conditions were described as "developmental disabilities, emotional or physical illness, malnutrition, unmet psychosocial needs, inadequate self-esteem, debilitating anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and indifference or hostility" (p. 181). Social conditions included "poverty, unaffordable health care, juvenile gang activity, broken homes, unhelpful mass media messages, and abusive, neglect, or inept parenting" (p. 181). School and instructional conditions were identified as "school mismanagement, a badly

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crafted curriculum, overcrowding, dilapidated classrooms, inadequate or unsuitable

instructional material, rampant bullying, or other disruptive behavior" (p. 181).

According to Loy and Gregory (2002), prevention, not only reaction, is necessary

if schools are to assist troubled youth. In order to do the best job possible, school staff

must connect not only with students, but with the students' families and the community at

large. Alternative schools are seen as prevention for dropping out of school.

The Separation of Alternative Schools from Traditional Schools

Soleil (1999) stated that the separation of alternative schools from traditional

schools can also result in unintentional segregation of students who traditionally

experience greater risk (e.g., minority students, poor students, students with disabilities).

Additionally, in-school personnel often fail to address serious concerns with the existing

educational programs that result in student alienation. A common complaint against

traditional programs is that they are more concerned with process and product than with

the actual needs of their students (Kershaw & Blank, 1993).

Many students with behavioral problems or who are considered problem students

have been assigned to alternative schools. Van Acker (2007) noted that the placement of

children with these problems within the alternative school settings is thought to (a)

protect the majority of the students from the dangerous behavior of the few and (b)

provide a more intensive and meaningful educational program to these at-risk and

targeted children and youth.

Sekayi (2001) stated that when students are separated from their mainstream

schools and sent to or strongly encouraged to enroll in alternative schools, they may

develop resistance toward the new school. Therefore, it is important for the new school to

anticipate and intervene with this resistance to keep it from interfering with students'
achievement of their educational goals. Creating a caring, non-authoritarian learning
environment and having supervising adults who are sympathetic to the needs of the
students are likely the keys to the success of the students (Quinn et al., 2006).

Students with Disabilities

Special education plays a role as an at-risk characteristic, and confusion may
result if alternative schools do not have clear guidance for serving students with
disabilities. Interviews with state directors of special education indicated concerns with
the special education processes and procedures in place at alternative schools for students
with disabilities. Although alternative schools were generally viewed as another
educational option available to students with disabilities, there were questions about
enrollment procedures, provision of quality services, implementation of Individual
Educational Plans, and availability of special education (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

Foley and Pang (2006) wrote that the student population of alternative schools
"appears to be mostly high school students with a large portion of students identified as
disabled" (p. 10). According to Lehr (2004), about 12% of all students attending
alternative schools in the United States are students with disabilities. These special
education students have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and are typically students
with Learning Disabilities (LDs) or Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBDs). The IEPs
should continue to be followed and services should continue after placement in an
alternative school. However, many students have not been identified as disabled and are
being placed in alternative schools. The separation of the alternative school from the

traditional school does not separate the student with an IEP from the student without an IEP.

The original special education legislation law was known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). The law was amended in 1990 and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA was enacted to ensure that all students receive free appropriate education and to increase learning outcomes for all students. In 1997, this law was again reauthorized, and it mandated access to general education curriculum for children with disabilities. Fitzsimons et al. (2006) asserted that the acceptable and legitimate role of alternative schools is in part attributed to recent legislation, including both the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), as they have questioned the long standing practice of suspension and expulsion of students who are disruptive in the mainstream classroom. The language in both these acts places emphasis on expelling yet educating.

The Role of the Principal in Alternative Schools

A review of the literature did not yield direct studies on the role of leadership and alternative education. There are, however, studies related to the role of principals and special education. Since alternative schools serve students with special needs, findings can be applied to alternative programs.

DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, and Walter-Thomas (2004) argued that in creating the context for academic success for students with special needs, principals must develop, enhance, and monitor the professional skills and knowledge of their faculty. Additionally, principals must work with their communities to create a common cluster of expectations promoting implementation of those skills and knowledge. The authors continued by

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arguing that for programs to be effective, the school leader must promote an inclusive school culture, provide instructional leadership, model collaborative leadership, manage and administer organizational processes, and build and maintain positive relations with teachers, families, and the community.

Anastos (2003) argued that school leadership must be cognizant that students in alternative settings need the best teachers. Additionally, districts must provide every student with a core curriculum that is one of quality and that is standards based.

Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008), in their review of literature concerning successful school leadership, developed seven claims:

1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.

2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practice.

3. The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.

4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.

5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.

6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.

7. A small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness. (pp. 27-28)

Of particular interest is claim #3, wherein they argue that a successful leader is sensitive to the context and can apply leadership practices to the context in which they work. This could have implications for successful leadership in alternative settings. Leadership should be aware of the special needs of at-risk students and supports needed by teachers that are context specific and apply successful leadership practices. Principals should be able to recognize the potential of students and are committed to bringing out the best in each person (Leithwood et al., 2008).

The Role of the Teacher in Alternative Schools

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) require that teachers are highly qualified. Tissington and Grow (2007) indicated that the teacher shortage problem is more pronounced in educational settings that serve the special education and at-risk populations. In addition, there are few teacher education programs that prepare future teachers to work in alternative setting for students with or without disabilities. The researchers pointed out the challenge of training teachers who will want to remain in the fields of special education and at-risk students.

In a study conducted by Ashcroft, Price, and McNair (1992), most teachers in alternative settings reported that they were not adequately prepared for aspects of their work, such as special problems presented by students. The common response was that they had taught themselves during their ongoing work. The challenge presented is that teachers need adequate training based on the specific characteristics of their student populations and their particular settings. Since these characteristics are so diverse, the difficulty for teacher training is evident.

Aron (2006) stated that instructional strategies such as collaborative learning and experiential learning, as well as designing an accessible and relevant curriculum, have been shown to greatly increase student engagement in learning. Examples of instructional strategies that can support student engagement include group activities and assignments, long-term projects, and hands-on activities. However, these and other strategies are only engaging if they provide meaningful and challenging tasks that draw from students' backgrounds, experience and interests, and needs. This usually demands that teachers differentiate their instruction.

According to Aron (2006), students learn more and retain more information and ideas when they actively participate in the learning process. Students learn when they can relate to what is being taught. Aron's study examined the relationships among school context, student attitudes, and behavior and academic achievement. The focus of Aron's study research was to determine the characteristics that place students at high risk of failure. The two major research questions of Aron's research were (a) How does engagement in school and perceived competence affect student achievement? and (b) Which elements of the school context support higher levels of school engagement and perceived academic competence? The analysis was based on surveys and test scores of 449 students in a large urban school district during the 2001 and 2004 school years. Student surveys addressed three sets of variables: student engagement, perceived academic competence and school context. The study results suggested that perceived academic competence may be more influential than engagement in boosting achievement, and may subsequently influence engagement. The findings also made clear that supportive teachers and high expectations about behavior were key to the development of both student engagement and perceived competence. The implication of these finding for

practice in alternative education programs is that when teachers and schools create an atmosphere in which students feel in control and confident about their ability to succeed in educational endeavors, students will show increases in engagement, academic competence, and achievement.

Natriello, Pallas, and McDill (1986) developed a model that displayed how student characteristics and school processes interact to create a cumulative effect on students' development over the course of their school careers. Depending upon individual experiences, students respond differently to these experiences, and such responses result in consequences that determine students' educational failure. Dropping out occurs because of the cumulative effect of negative experiences, both in factors that mold students' character and the school's failed attempt to meet the needs of at-risk students. Natriello et al. stated that if educators used this framework to develop methods that lessened the effects of risk factors and increased the awareness of educational alternatives, students would better be able to achieve their long term educational goals.

The cause of student failure in traditional classrooms has been a long and enduring concern for educators, with some educators believing that the students themselves are the cause of the problem. However, though at-risk students possess different characteristics from those of traditional students, the cause, prevention, and treatment of the differences are the overriding factors. According to Quinn et al, (2006) the cause is linked to an ineffective traditional system of education. Quinn et al. further noted the needs of youth are as diverse as they are rapidly changing, and in order for the traditional system of education to be able to meet their needs, it too must be equally diverse and rapidly changing. The need for effective alternative education must be rooted in today's non-traditional youth who will continue to rebel against the norm and thus be

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removed from traditional classrooms. With removal, effective provisions must be made for the educational needs of at-risk students through the implementation of innovative alternative schools, as well as alternative teaching strategies (Quinn et al., 2006).

Parental Involvement

The level of parental involvement in a child's education is a general characteristic that impacts academic achievement (Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992). As parents' educational expectations of their children increase, the parents' educational involvement increases (Casanova, Garcia-Linares, Torre, & Carpio, 2005). Jeynes (2003) reported that parental involvement is comprised of four components: parental expectations, parental interest, parental involvement in school, and family community. Of the four, parental expectations were the most important in impacting student achievement.

Jeynes (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of the impact of parental involvement on minority children's academic's achievement by reviewing 20 studies collectively incorporating nearly 12,000 subjects. Parental involvement was coded so that it involved many aspects, such as the extent parents communicated with their children about school, whether parents checked their children's homework, parental expectations for the academic success of their children, whether parents encouraged their children to do outside reading, whether parents attended or participated in school functions, the extent to which there were household rules regarding school and leisure activities, parenting style and warmth, and other specific measures of parental involvement. The meta-analysis indicated that parental involvement impacts student achievement.

Ingram, Wolfe, and Lieberman (2007) examined parental involvement in high performing, at-risk population schools and found that how parents interact with children

at home has a greater effect on student achievement than how the parents interact with the child in the school. Parental involvement reunites the stakeholders in student academic success by fostering an engaging and motivating learning environment (Weaver, 2007).

Research Approach

The research approach of the proposed study is that of van Manen (1997), whose research methodology utilizes phenomenology for qualitative research, with focus on secondary education, teacher education, professional practice, and human science research. van Manen developed a systematic approach for obtaining rich experiential material from research participants. His starting point is everyday lived experience, which situates people in their world and provides a basis for understanding them. Each person has a *life world*, and the researcher attempts to identify and reflect upon the participants' life worlds as they are experienced and actively created by them.

van Manen's (1997) investigative process begins with discerning the nature of the phenomenon of interest (the lived experience) and orienting oneself to it. The next step is to pose a phenomenological question, and to examine the researcher's assumptions and pre-understandings of the phenomenon. The next stage is the investigatory investigation, in which the researcher explores the participants' personal experience of the phenomenon via language or other form of expression. Possible data sources include experiential descriptions, interviews, observation, literary or documentary analysis, biography, and art. In each case, the researcher looks closely at participants' unique phrases and expressions to discern patterns across the data. The reflection process is the chief means by which data are analyzed. Reflection consists of identifying themes and meanings,

which then lead to sharing results and recommendations for action, including new approaches to pedagogy.

van Manen (1997) is fundamentally concerned with action, with the understanding of lived experience leading to changes in practice. In this approach, research and reflection are undertaken to improve professional practice in a direct way. However, action must be preceded by reflection; it should be the result of a thoughtful engagement with the phenomenon, situation, or individuals. That is, the student-teacher relationship means that the teacher must deal reflectively with the students, rather than treating them automatically or based on prejudices or pre-understandings (van Manen, 1995). In other words, teaching is at bottom relational, because it involves two people with their unique life worlds trying to have meaningful interactions that enable growth and learning (van Manen, 1994).

Summary

According to the findings in this literature review concerning alternative schools, there should be identifiable student perceptions and characteristics that lead to higher academic achievement and success in alternative schools. The identification and investigation of such characteristics is valuable due to the rapid growth of alternative learning programs (Lehr & Lang, 2003). However, the isolation of such characteristics and their link to achievement is complicated due to the variation among programs, the variation in definitions of alternative learning programs, and the variation in students who are considered at-risk (Foley & Pang, 2006). Lange and Sletten (2002) stated that much of the existing alternative school research is focused on the program rather than student descriptions and academic outcomes. Although the research tends to focus on alternative

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school characteristics rather than student characteristics, the traits of student/peer and student/teacher relationships, family support, and motivation surface as consistent factors in supporting student success in the alternative school.

Loy and Gregory (2002) stated that, in order for alternative schools to achieve their goals, it is crucial that students perceive themselves as important in their alternative settings. However, it is important to consider that alternative school student' perceptions of school maybe negative, which could increase their problem behaviors or their chances of dropping out. Research has shown that there are often important differences in the perspectives of different school stakeholders (e.g., staff, students, administrators) and that considering the student perspective in addition to that of the adults might be critical to creating a positive learning environment (Souza, 1999).

According to the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002), alternative programs have their focus on physical and psychological safety, positive relations ships, and social norms with opportunities for skill building within family, school and community. This philosophy and mission is a pervasive one for alternative schools. Because the focus of alternative programs is towards managing students' behavioral and emotional needs that interfered with their school success in the traditional school setting, the academic success of students, while important, takes a secondary role to behavior and emotional needs.

Several researchers (Kraemer & Ruzzi, 2001; Lehr & Lange, 2003) have voiced concern for the academic preparedness and expectations of youth enrolled in alternative education programs, because the primary focus of such programs has been to address the behavioral, social and emotional needs of students. In addition, alternative education programs serve a population in very divers setting that have little resemblance to each

other; research has limited applicability to practice or for making generalizations about

alternative programs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The Bowman School District refers students to the alternative school as an option to continue their education outside of regular schools. Low attendance, low academic performance, and disruptive behavior are a few factors that contribute to students being placed in an alternative school. This study presents the perceptions of students attending the alternative school in the Bowman School District. Participants also discussed the challenges and experiences they encountered in the alternative school and suggested ways in which school administrators and teachers could improve the program. Additionally, the perspectives of alternative school teachers, the perspectives of parents of students in the alternative school, and the perspectives of the administrator of the alternative school were presented.

This chapter addresses the research design used for this study, the participants involved in the study, and the methods used to collect data. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the method of data analysis.

Research Design

According to Merriam (1998), the choice of research design should be based upon the nature of the research questions, the amount of control one has over the situation under examination, and the desired results. Merriam stated that qualitative research is appropriate when the researcher's interests are insight, discovery, and interpretation

rather than hypothesis testing. The present study explored the perceptions of students of the Bowman Alternative School and their parents.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that qualitative research is "an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subject's point of view" (p. 274). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research locates the researcher in natural settings, attempting to make sense of the meanings participants bring to their environment. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) also stated that this methodology allows the researcher the opportunity to get closer to a participant's perception and perspective through thorough and detailed research.

As the researcher in this study, I chose a qualitative research design to understand the personal experiences of students who are enrolled in the alternative school. I am an English teacher for the Bowman School District. I have eight years of teaching experience, four of which have been in an alternative school setting (see Appendix A). I was asked by the alternative school principal if I would consider teaching in the alternative school because of my good classroom management skills. Originally, I was skeptical about taking the position because of fear of being harmed by the students. Now I can say that teaching at the alternative school has been a joy for me.

My colleagues who teach in traditional schools often ask me, "How do you deal with those students?" I tell them that my students are no different from any other students; they just have a bad reputation. I have heard many of my students say that they like it better at the alternative school because the teachers are nicer. As a teacher, I do not want my students to continue returning to the alternative school. I want them to learn how to succeed in the school they will attend after the alternative school. This is the reason I

chose to conduct my research at the alternative school from the students' perception. It began to bother me when I noticed that many of my students were being placed at the alternative school two or more times in one school term.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), a case study is "a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or a particular event" (p. 271). The setting for this study was the Bowman Alternative School in Bowman, Mississippi. By using a phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1997), I was able to get a firsthand view of the students' perceptions by interviewing participants. The perceptions of parents and teachers and administrator added to the depth and understanding of students' perceptions.

Participants

This study was granted approval by the Mississippi State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix B). I met with the superintendent to explain the purpose of my research and gain written consent on district letterhead. The principal of the alternative school also granted permission for the present case study. The alternative school administrator and I selected 10 students who represented a variation in terms of gender and ethnicity, as well as both first-time students and those who have attended the alternative school on more than one occasion. These students and their parents were the participants of the present study. Parental consent forms were given to the student participants to take to their parents, along with a letter explaining the purpose of this study and a copy of the superintendent's written consent. Once I received the parental consent forms, the study was explained to students and they were asked to sign an assent form. I interviewed the 10 selected students and their parents separately.

I also asked teachers from the alternative school to participate in interviews discussing their perceptions of the alternative school. Before these interviews were conducted, all teacher participants were asked to sign consent forms and were given a letter explaining the purpose of this study and a copy of the superintendent's written consent.

Data Collection Procedures

As defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), "semi-structured interviews are interviews in which the same general questions or topics are brought up to each of the subjects involved" (p. 275). I conducted semi-structured interviews with a set of topics used as a guide while conducting the interview.

I made phone calls to schedule a convenient time and place for each interview. I believed that students and parents would feel more comfortable if interviews were conducted outside of the school. Parent and student interviews were conducted at the public library. Once the interview was scheduled, I called the parent and student participants the day before to remind them of the interview.

After introductions upon greeting the student, I gave the student a demographic form that requested first name, last name, gender, age, ethnicity, grade, school, and number of siblings (see Appendix C). After the interview, the audiotape was transcribed. In addition to the audiotapes, the last data source was notes made on the interviewee's appearance, conversations, disposition during the interview, and overall body language during the interview.

After introduction upon meeting the parent, I gave the parent a demographic form that requested first name, last name, gender, age, ethnicity, highest grade completed, and

number of children (see Appendix D). After the interview, the audiotape was transcribed. In addition to the audiotapes, the last data source consisted of notes made on the conversations, disposition during the interview, and overall body language during the interview.

Teacher participants were reminded of their scheduled interviews the day before. Teacher interviews took place in teachers' classrooms during their regularly scheduled conference and planning periods. I gave the teacher a demographic form that requested first name, last name, gender, years of teaching at alternative school, total years of teaching experience, grade and subject area teaching, and highest educational level completed (see Appendix E). After each interview, the audiotape was transcribed. In addition to the audiotapes, the last data source consisted of notes made on the conversations, disposition during the interview, tardiness, and overall body language during the interview.

The principal was reminded of his scheduled interview the day before. The principal's interview was conducted in his office after school was dismissed. I gave the principal a demographic form that requested first name, last name, gender, ethnicity, years of administrator of alternative school, total years of teaching/administrative experience, and highest educational level completed (see Appendix F). After the interview, the audiotape was transcribed. In addition to the audiotapes, the last data source consisted of notes made on conversations, disposition during the interview, and overall body language during the interview.

I began all interviews by introducing myself and providing background information on the purpose of this study. I wanted to make all participants feel comfortable and relaxed. All adult participants who were interviewed had already signed

a consent form and all student participants signed an assent form. Each transcript remained locked in a file cabinet and pseudonyms were used after the interviews were transcribed.

Data Analysis

The significance of this study is to help students, parents, teachers, and administrators understand students' perception of the alternative school. Due to state and federal requirements to decrease school dropout rates, reduce school disruption, and increase school completion rate (No Child Left Behind, 2002), results were critical to understand the alternative school program.

I used the constant comparative method for data analysis. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the constant comparative method is a data analysis technique for multi-data sources in which the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of the data collection. The constant comparative method was used for analyzing data from the triangulated sources. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1984a), the constant comparative method combines categorical coding, which creates emergent patterns and themes based on the data.

Using the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), I analyzed the transcribed interviews in search of common themes. After each interview was transcribed, it was coded into common themes discussed during the interviews. I analyzed notes recorded from in-school observations and conversations with students and teachers.

Transcripts of interviews, field notes of observations, and analysis of documents were compared to develop the individual cases for each student. The research question was addressed for each student.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, or validity, deals with whether the researcher reports what is supposed to be reported. Creswell (1998) calls this verification. Goetz and LeCompte (1984b) explained that validity concerns itself with the accuracy of the findings. Trustworthiness depends on the researcher's moral, ethical, and academic judgments about the research process and the report thereof (Creswell & Miller, 2000). While qualitative research is subject to some threats to validity, it is important to note that all participants volunteered to be part of the research and, as best I could determine, gave honest answers to the interview questions. The participants were told that everything they said would be confidential.

Participants knew the researcher as a teacher prior to the study and trust was already established. Participants showed no signs of hesitation when questioned about confidentiality or trustworthiness of researcher. Once interviews began and certain themes began to immerge, researcher continued to keep information confidential and placed great value upon the trust that the participants placed upon her.

The involvement of parents and teachers was intended to increase trustworthiness. Seidman (2006) indicated there can be "gatekeepers who control access" (p. 43) to participants. The inclusion of parents and teachers was to an attempt to gain the trust of these "legitimate gatekeepers" (p. 43). Additionally, the parents and teachers were "conversational partners" (Ruben & Ruben, 2005, p. 14) who helped emphasize the

"uniqueness" (p.14) of each student interviewed, consistent with the phenomenological

research approach of van Manen (1997).

CHAPTER IV

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The significance of this study is to help students, parents, teachers, and administrators understand students' perception of the alternative school. Understanding students' perceptions is critical in order to determine the program's effectiveness, decrease the school dropout rate, reduce school disruption, and increase school completion rate.

This chapter presents findings from this research on the perceptions of students, parents, teachers, and administrator of the alternative school located in the Bowman School District. Pseudonyms are used for all participants to keep their comments confidential. This chapter is divided into eight sections: (a) history of Bowman Alternative School, (b) participants, (c) students' perceptions of the alternative program, (d) parents' perceptions of the alternative program, (e) teachers' perceptions of the alternative program, (f) the administrator's perception of the alternative program, (g) positive aspects of the alternative program, and (h) negative aspects of the alternative program. There were four themes that were found. They were: (a) repeat offenders, (b) student alienation/bi-racial,(c) dumping ground, and (d) teacher preparation for alternative schools.

History of Bowman Alternative School

The Bowman Alternative School is located on the outskirts of the city of Bowman, in a small community called "Cross Tie." This community got its name from a

factory located in the center of the community. This factory makes cross ties for railroads. The original name of Bowman Alternative School was Cross Tie School, which was an elementary school that served Grades 1 through 6. Although segregation was illegal, many Black students were bused from the Cross Tie community and surrounding communities of Bowman to Cross Tie School until around the late 1970s. Only the White students who lived in rural areas of Bowman County, such as Deer Springs, attended Cross Tie School. According to city policies, some of the Black communities were not within city limits even though the students lived within walking distance of city schools, such as Della Williams and Barry Dean Elementary School, which served mostly White students. A law was later passed which made those communities a part of the city, and the Black students were able to attend the other elementary schools. Cross Tie School continued to operate, and kindergarten was added to the program. Around the mid-1990s, an elementary school was built on the far eastside of Bowman, which merged Cross Tie, Della Williams, and Barry Dean Schools.

After the merging of the elementary schools, Cross Tie School was renamed Bowman Alternative School. This was an effort to lower the dropout rates of students who were considered problem students. The idea was that Cross Tie School would serve as a measure to keep students from being expelled and as a second chance for at-risk students.

The community of Cross Tie is made up of mostly shot-gun houses that are occupied by low-income Black citizens. There are very few brick houses in this community. There are no obvious examples of funds used in this area of Bowman to improve housing conditions for low income families.

There are two roads that lead into the community. The main road is smooth until it comes to the Cross Tie community. Upon entering into the community, the road has multiple pot holes. There are no sidewalks for residents to use; there is tall grass and weeds everywhere. There have been multiple reports by citizens of snake in their homes. Mosquitoes are quite a problem. The other road is a dirt road that leads to the community of Elmore, Mississippi. In the case of an emergency, this would present a major problem for evacuating the citizens, as well as the alternative school students, out of this community.

The Bowman Alternative School building is old, the classrooms are in need of paint, and the equipment is outdated. The school is infested with termites, large water bugs, and rodents. In the winter, when the heat is turned on, termites fly out of the walls and ceilings; in the spring, ants come up through the floor tile and out of the walls. There is no hot water in the school because it is too costly to upgrade the plumbing. Many teachers bring their own supplies such as Germ-X, soap, and disinfectant spray in an attempt to help keep down illness among teachers and students. Food for the students is brought in from the local high school, rather than prepared at the alternative school. Teachers and students do not drink the water because the rumor is that it is not considered to be safe to drink due to pollution from the nearby factory located in the community. During the year of this study, the district removed floor tile because the school was reported to have asbestos in it. The district has tried to improve the school by having a new roof installed, but leaks still persisted. While having the roof installed, the teachers and students endured the scent of the tar being put on the roof. This led many of the students and teachers to report illnesses with breathing problems, headaches, and nausea.

When the alternative school does receive equipment and supplies, they always seem to disappear over the summer. Many of the printers that are given to the alternative school are second hand and are well worn. The curtains and blinds in the cafeteria and other rooms are old, torn, and ragged.

Participants

The study used face-to-face interviews with four different groups. The groups were (a) students who were enrolled in the alternative education program, (b) their parents/guardians, (c) teachers at the alternative program, and (d) the administrator of the alternative program. Each group is introduced below.

Students and Parents. Ten students and their parents participated in this research. Pseudonyms are used and they are listed in Table 1.

Table 4.1   Student Participants from the Alternative Program

Student	Age	Race	Parents
Jamie	14	White	Tracy Moore
Andrew	14	Biracial	Ann Mason
James Jr.	12	Biracial	James Tipton, Sr.
Mark	16	Black	Sherry Tillman
Devon	14	Black	Margie Goodman
Tiffany	16	Black	Tara Long
Michael	16	Black	Joyce Fuller
Keisha	17	Black	Jennifer Maxwell
Nicole	15	Black	Thomas and Sara Futrell
Valerie	16	Black	Jack Beale

Jamie

Jamie is a 14-year old White male who is a first time student of the alternative school. He was sent there for fighting another White male student while in band class. He is a student who takes pride in his school work, but believes he had no choice but to defend himself. He comes from a two-parent home. Jamie's parents were afraid of attending the alternative school because of fear of him being harassed by "gang bangers and drug dealers." After his first day at the alternative school, Jamie realized that many of the students were there because they did something wrong just as he did and there was no need to be afraid.

Jamie's mother, Tracy Moore, is a White female assistant teacher with the Bowman School District. She became very concerned about her son being sent to the alternative program. Tracy and her husband protested against Jamie attending the alternative school because they believed that he should not be placed in the alternative program since their son had never gotten in any type of trouble at school before. She stated that the family was willing to place Jamie in a private school before they would allow him to attend the alternative school. Because of her persistence, the school board agreed to shorten his stay from the standard 15 days to 5 days. Although the number of days was shortened, Jamie's parents were still reluctant to allow him to attend the alternative program due to fear of him being harassed by "gang bangers and drug dealers." Both Tracy and her husband visited the alternative school and met the teachers and the principal, Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson assured Mr. and Mrs. Moore that no one would bother Jamie and that he would not be in danger. Tracy indicated that she felt a little better about her son's stay after meeting with Mr. Johnson and the teachers. She was still nervous until she talked with Jamie about his first day of class at the alternative

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school, and he reassured her that he would be fine. She stated that she was very impressed with the structure of the program and how teachers had their classes under control, but hoped her son had learned a lesson and would stay out of trouble. Tracy stated that she can rest assured that her son will not be returning to the alternative school for any reason.

Andrew

Andrew is a 14-year old biracial male who has been to the alternative school every year for the past three years since he was in the 6th grade, due to disruptive behavior. He lives with his White mother, who is very involved in his life. His Black father lives across the street from the alternative school, but is not active in Andrew's life. His mother requested that Andrew remain in the alternative program for the entire school year because she likes the smaller student-teacher ratio and Andrew does not get pick on as much there. Andrew and his mother expressed that both students and teachers at the middle school pick on him because he is biracial. Andrew likes the alternative school better because he believes that it is less stressful and the teachers are more understanding of his problems.

Andrew's mother, Ann Mason, is a White female. According to Ms. Mason, her son constantly exhibits disruptive behavior. Unlike other parents, she requested that her son remain in the alternative program for the remainder of the school year. She stated that her son has told her that he feels more comfortable and safer at the alternative school rather than at the regular school. She believes that students and teachers pick on Andrew because he is biracial. Ann stated that the teachers at the alternative school seem to be more patient with Andrew and in dealing with his problems.

James Jr.

James Jr. is a 12-year old biracial male who has been in the alternative school three times this school year (September, January, and March). He was adopted by his great-aunt and uncle when he was 18 months old because his White mother did not want to raise him. His Black father was unable to take care of him alone. His great-uncle provides a stable home for him, but James Jr.'s behavior has gotten worse since his great-aunt died last year from cancer. James Jr. indicated that she was the only person who really loved him. James Jr. takes minimal responsibility for his actions and believes that his middle school teachers are the main reason that he keeps getting alternative placement. The teachers keep making him mad and he cannot control what he does or says so he ends up getting written up for his rude and disrespectful behavior. Even though James Jr. stated that the middle school teachers are the reason he is in the alternative school, he has gotten several referrals during his stay at the alternative school. He has walked out of classes, cursed teachers, and has even thrown a chair at the principal. Yet, he still believes that everyone else is the problem. He was been diagnosed with bipolar behavior and it was evident on several occasions. He will snap one minute and come right up and hug you the next.

James Tipton, Sr., is a Black male. James Sr. believes that his nephew has always had a rough time not knowing his real parents. Mrs. Tipton died last year from cancer, and James Jr.'s behavior seems to have gotten worse since her death. James Sr. stated that he has tried to bond with James Jr. one-on-one, buys James Jr. things, talks and listens to James Jr., but nothing seems to help him with his anger issues. James Sr. admitted that his personal life may contribute to James Jr.'s behavior. He has moved his much younger girlfriend into the house within one year of his wife's death. He admits

that the situation maybe a little difficult for his great nephew to understand. James Sr. is thankful to Mr. Johnson (the Alternative School principal) for working with him on James Jr.'s problems and to the teachers at the alternative program for showing patience. James Sr. admitted that he was very upset, the first time, when he was made aware of the alternative school placement for James Jr. James Sr. has always been told that the alternative school was just a dumping ground for bad children. After spending time at the alternative school, James Sr. is now satisfied with the program.

Mark

Mark is a 16-year old Black male who has been in the alternative program for the past four years for fighting since the sixth grade. He is being raised in a single parent home by his mother, and his father is not involved in his life. Mark does not seem to care about his education, nor does he have future goals. It does not seem to matter to him whether he is at the high school or in the alternative program. His attitude is that "a school is a school." When Mark originally entered the alternative program he used to get picked on by the other students because of his small size; however, over the years the roles have seemed to change. He has gotten taller and now is starting a lot of the fights.

Mark's mother, Sherry Tillman, is a Black female who has had four children attend the alternative program. She is the mother of five children and only one has graduated from high school. Her oldest son dropped out of high school and her third child (daughter) has attempted to get her GED several times but has failed to pass the math exam. The two youngest children are both in high school and are currently attending the alternative school. She loves the program and does not understand why so many parents get upset because their children have to go to the alternative school. She said that parents

should be glad that their children have an alternate place to go instead of just home suspension. She does not get upset when she is told that one of her children has to attend the alternative program because she knows that they are still being taught and that alternative school is just the consequence to their action. If her children get in any trouble at the alternative school, she does not hesitate to visit the alternative school to help resolve the problem.

Devon

Devon is a 14-year old Black male who has been sent to the alternative program for the past four years, ever since the 6th grade for disruptive behavior and disrespectful attitude. Last year he attended the alternative school twice and has been in the program three times this year. His aunt is the primary guardian of him and his older sister and brother. His aunt is the assistant principal of a middle school in the district and she has personally had to send Devon to the alternative school on multiple occasions. Devon's mother has four other children, but has only had custody of her youngest child, who is 6 years old. Devon seems to be bothered by his mother's lifestyle and lack of interest in his life. Devon does not seem to mind attending the alternative program because it has become part of his normal routine. He has gotten use to attending year after year. In fact, the principal has asked teachers not to allow him to continue to run errands from class to class because he continues to get too comfortable. He assists teachers in grading papers, filing, assisting in passing out assignments sent from the high school. He can be quite helpful and dependable.

Devon's aunt, Margie Goodman, is a Black female and assistant principal of a middle school in the district. Mrs. Goodman states that she is not satisfied with the

alternative program. According to Mrs. Goodman, "Most of the teachers there are lazy and sit on their bottoms most of the day." As an administrator, she believes that the program is lacking in many areas and that it does not meet her nephew's needs educationally. Mrs. Goodman stated that the curriculum is not up to standards and the teachers are not trying to bring it up to the required standards. She believes that the teachers are only doing the bare minimum to get by. She has requested that the alternative school teachers be evaluated just as all other teachers in the district. She stated that they should be held accountable of what is being taught in their classrooms and should be monitored periodically. She often talks to her nephew about being sent to the alternative school, but he told her that he likes it because he does not have to do much there, and he gets to go to sleep in some classes once he completes his work. She was highly upset with his lack of concern and lack of desire to do better.

Michael

Michael is a 16-year old Black male who was sent to the alternative program for fighting another Black male student. This is his first time placed in the alternative program. He believes he let a lot of people down, including his parents and his coaches (basketball and football). He stated that if another student walks up to him trying to fight that next time he would handle it differently by walking away. He stated that he loves playing basketball and football too much to jeopardize getting kicked off either team. Michael promises never to return to the alternative school again.

Michael's mother, Joyce Fuller, is a Black female. She was very upset and said that she wanted to "beat him to death." She said that she and her husband have raised her son to know what he is expected to do, and going to the alternative school is not among

their expectations. She was very disappointed in him and reminded him that he is jeopardizing his chances of any kind of athletic scholarship if he continues to get in trouble. Joyce has known the alternative school principal, Mr. Johnson, for many years.

Tiffany

Tiffany is a 16-year old Black female who was sent to the alternative program for gang fighting. Some other girls were fighting and she jumped in to help her friends. She feels that many of the teachers at the alternative program are too lenient and that the program should be stricter. She stated that if given the opportunity to do things all over again she would mind her own business and encourage her friends not to fight at all. She hates the alternative school program, especially the food, and promises never to return.

Tara Long, Tiffany's mother, is a Black female. Although Tiffany was not her first child to attend the alternative school, she was very disappointed in her daughter because she rarely gets in trouble. Her son often got in trouble for fighting and has now dropped out of school. Mrs. Long was upset with her daughter and told her that she is making life hard on herself by being hard-headed and not listening. She believes that her daughter is running with the wrong crowd, which is going lead to more trouble. Tara said that she is very satisfied with the program and the staff, and only hopes that her daughter has learned from her stay at the alternative program.

Keisha

Keisha is a 17-year old Black female who was sent to the alternative program for fighting another Black female student in the high school auditorium. This was her first time attending the alternative program and she hates it. Her mother is a teacher at the middle school and they both believe that the situation was not handled correctly. They

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were upset because there were witnesses that the other student initiated the fight, and they questioned where the teacher was while the class was in the auditorium. Keisha hates the alternative school and promises never to return unless someone tries to hit her again. In that event, she is willing to fight and accept the consequences.

Keisha's mother, Jennifer Maxwell, is a Black female teacher at the middle school. She was very upset because she did not think the situation with Keisha was handled fairly. According to Jennifer, there were witnesses who supported her daughter's story, but Keisha was still required to attend the alternative program for 15 days. Jennifer was also upset because there was not a teacher present when the fight began. Jennifer is not satisfied with the program and believes it is just a daycare with minimum instruction. Mrs. Maxwell said, "It is not fair to other teachers in the district to have to work hard all day and the alternative teachers are just getting a free check."

Nicole

Nicole is a 15-year old Black female who was sent to the alternative program for being an accessory to calling in a bomb threat. This was her first time attending the alternative program, and she was very scared on the first day. However, she has grown to like the teachers and staff better than those at the middle school. She believes that the teachers at the alternative school are nicer and are easier to talk to. She stated that the teachers at the middle school "get all up in your face" and "try to push buttons" as though they are trying to get you upset. Her grandparents have custody of her because her mother has a tough time taking care of her other siblings and her father is in jail. Nicole began to cry as she thought about the pain and embarrassment she had brought upon her grandparents. She knows that she let her grandparents down because they have always

tried to teach her to do what is right. She loves the alternative program, but hates the building. She stated that the building is a dump and that it needs to be torn down.

Nicole's grandparents, Thomas and Sara Futrell, are Black. They were very upset about their granddaughter having to attend the alternative program. They visited the school and were very impressed with the principal and teachers. Everyone at the school was "very professional" and reassured them that their granddaughter would be just fine. As time went by, Nicole began to tell her grandparents that she liked the teachers better at the alternative school because they made her feel special.

Valerie

Valerie is a 16-year old Black female who has been in the alternative program for four years since the sixth grade. She keeps skipping school and leaving home for days at a time. She was sent to training school by youth court for failing to attend school, missing her court mandated curfew, and failing her drug test. Valerie's father is the active parent in her life. Due to suffering from mental illness, Valerie's mother is unable to make sound decisions. Valerie loves attending the alternative program and likes the teachers much better than those at the high school. She stated that the teachers at the alternative program are like family to her; however, she hates the building because it is old.

Valerie's father, Jack Beale, is a Black male who has had three children attend the alternative program. His son was the first one in the family to receive his GED. He graduated from the alternative school's GED program. This was the highest educational attainment by any member his immediate family. Mr. Beale was very proud. Mr. Beale's second child, Valerie, has already failed one grade and is hoping to pass this year. The

youngest child, who is in the eighth grade, is also currently enrolled in the alternative

program. She is also expecting her first child. Mr. Beale said that he does not get upset

when they are sent there because he is glad they are not on the street. He admits to

having a tough time keeping his daughters in school because they like to skip school. Mr.

Beale believes that the alternative program is meeting the needs of his children and likes

the staff. He said Mr. Johnson is always available to talk to him when his children get in

trouble.

Teachers

Ten teachers participated in this research. They are presented in detail below and

listed in Table 2. Many of the teachers were forced to teach at the alternative school after

several years of teaching in a traditional school. There is one certified teacher to teach

each content area and one assistant per teacher. Both middle school and high school

alternative special education teachers each have their own assistant which remains with

them all day. Special education students need more attention due to low performing skills

and behavior problems. More teacher assistants are placed at the alternative school to

help tutor students one on one, assist students with computer assignments, relieve

teachers for their conference and planning periods, and to teach both the middle and high

school alternative in-school detention classes.

Table 4.2   Teacher Participants from the Alternative Program

Teacher	Content Area	Race	Years at Alt School Teaching	Total Years
Ms. Trina Dorsey	High School ISD	Black	5	11
Mrs. Mary Parker	Special Education	White	6	20
Mrs. Leslie Riff	Math/Science	White	1	1
Ms. Alice Melton	Soc. Studies/PE	Black	8	27
Mrs. Melinda Lemon	Special Education	White	11	21
Mr. Alex Moore	Assistant Teacher	Black	1	1
Mr. Joseph Maxey	Assistant Teacher	Black	1	4
Mrs. Debra Holmes	Assistant Teacher	Black	3	10
Mr. Marcus Griffin	Math	Black	2	5
Mr. Michael Dobbs	Soc. Studies/PE	White	1	23

Trina Dorsey

Trina Dorsey is a Black female assistant teacher who has worked in the alternative program for 5 years (11 years total in the district). She has a bachelor's degree, but has not yet passed her PRAXIS II Exam. She supervises the high school in-school detention students at the alternative school. The high school sends students to the alternative school who have attended in-school detention on several occasions and who continue to find it difficult to follow school rules. The alternative in-school detention serves as a step before permanent alternative placement. She loves working at the alternative school, but thinks it needs to be modified to include community service for alternative students. Trina believes that through community service the students will be taught to give back to society instead of taking so many things for granted. She also believes that so many of the students act out because they are in need of attention and love. Trina says that a lot of the children are very talented in the fine arts area. Even though there is an art program in place at the alternative school, she believes that other programs such as music and drama should be considered so that the children will be able

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to express themselves through singing, dancing, and acting. She believes that many children who have the talent do not get to participate in such programs because of financial instability in their homes. Trina believes that the children who do not get to participate in such programs are left out for reasons beyond their control; therefore, they never get to have their talents discovered, while their peers from families with resources to participate get more recognition. Trina believes that if she can reach just one of her students by encouraging them to never give up and to keep moving forward, then she has done what God has called her to do.

Mary Parker

Mary Parker is a White female certified special education teacher. She has taught for 6 years at the alternative school and has 20 years total teaching experience. Mary was asked to transfer to the alternative school by the special education coordinator, but originally refused. After thinking about it, she decided to accept the position because she thought that "God must have a reason for me to go there." Several years later, she still enjoys working at the alternative school because she sees herself as a mother to many of the students. She believes that she is making a difference in her students' lives, but the toughest thing for her is reading in the newspaper that one of her former students is in jail. When she reads it, she wonders where she failed as a teacher. Mrs. Parker said, "I talk to my students about right and wrong and I try to be a positive influence in their lives." She believes that the district does not give supplies and books to the alternative teachers as quickly as it does to teachers at other schools. She stated that the alternative school is often treated like a "step-child." Many of her colleagues have asked her about working at the alternative school and how can she stand working with those bad students.

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She has responded that she loves her students just like they love their students. According to Mary, her students just need a little attention.

Leslie Riff

Leslie Riff is a White female, first year science and math teacher who is certified in both subject areas. She took the position because it was the only job available in the district, and she is just happy to have a job. Originally, she hated teaching in the alternative program because she found the high school alternative students too difficult to handle. She admitted going home crying to her husband every day wanting to quit. She believed that the students knew that she could not handle them and that they were getting the best of her. She did not quit, but decided to talk to veteran teachers and the principal about suggestions to improve her classroom management skills. She likes teaching at the alternative school a lot better now but would still prefer teaching in a traditional classroom setting if given the opportunity. She is going to apply for a position at the middle school next year, but if she does not get it, she will continue teaching at the alternative school. She stated that if she could change anything about the alternative school program, she would reform the method of receiving and returning the high school alternative students' work with the high school. There is a major problem with students returning their assignments in a timely manner, which causes their grades to drop while they are in alternative placement. There is one teacher assistant that has the sole responsibility of picking up all assignments from the middle and high school; however, there seems to be a problem with getting the assignments returned to the appropriate teachers in a timely manner. Many teachers complain that the students are not completing and return the assignments and give them zeros for missed assignments. Students are at

the alternative school for a minimum of two weeks which makes it difficult for them to bring up the zeros that they were given. Mrs. Riff stated that something she be done to improve this technique because it is not fair to those students that actually complete and return their assignments but do not receive credit for it.

Alice Melton

Alice Melton is a Black female social studies and physical education teacher who has taught for eight years in the alternative program and has 27 years of total teaching experience. She was fired as the high school girls' basketball coach and transferred to the alternative school. Her ex-principal thought placing her at the alternative school would make her leave the district because the alternative school was known as the dumping ground for teachers on their way out. What she originally thought to be a bad situation has now turned into a blessing for her. She loves teaching at the alternative school because she feels that she can influence her students to stay on the right path. It also gives her an opportunity to be able to spend more time with her son and to be able to attend his football games. She said that over the years she has noticed that the students do not seem to care anymore. They just come and want to do nothing all day. They lack self-motivation.

Melinda Lemon

Melinda Lemon is a White female special education teacher who has taught in the alternative program for 11 years and has more than 20 years of teaching experience. She said that she was given a choice to teach at the alternative school or the high school and she chose the alternative school because she wanted to try a new setting from the middle school. She loves teaching in the alternative program and hopes that she is a positive role

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model to her students, not only teaching them but also talking to them about morals and values. She believes that many of the students have no sense of morals and values. She stated that students have no guidance due to minimal parental involvement. Melinda also does not understand why the alternative school does not have a full time counselor. She believes that the program should incorporate weekly sessions to be taught on character traits and making the right choices. Melinda said that she has seen a positive change in the alternative program under the leadership of Mr. Johnson, the principal.

Alex Moore

Alex Moore is a Black male first year assistant teacher who was attending college up until this year. He is the assistant for the alternative special education classes. Alex has also worked at the county jail for several years. He loves working in the alternative program but thinks it is "too laid back." He admits to getting upset at times because he does not know what he is supposed to do from day- to-day. According to Alex, a regular schedule or routine would help him know exactly what is expected of him.

Joseph Maxey

Joseph Maxey is a Black male assistant teacher who has been working in the district for four years. Joseph is a veteran of the United States Army and has taken some college courses. This is his first year at the alternative school and admits that it is not what he thought it would be. He likes working there but believes that students get away with too much. Joseph believes the principal punishes students differently based on which teacher referred them for punishment. For instance, he stated that if Mrs. Herrington writes a referral, the student will automatically get suspended, but if he writes the referral, the student only gets counseling and gets to come right back to the room.

James stated that he has heard students say, "Man, if Mrs. Herrington writes you up you are going home." He believes that it is not fair to students and the students know it. He also believes that some of the teachers are lazy and are not earning their salaries. Joseph said that teachers and assistants need to be utilized in a way that benefits the students more than just "babysitting."

Debra Holmes

Debra Holmes is a Black female assistant teacher who supervises the middle school in-school detention room. Debra is a student at Holmes Community College where she is pursuing an associate's degree in education. She has worked in the alternative program for three years and has worked in the district for 10 years. She stated that she loves working in the alternative school because she believes that she is able to be a positive role model for the students. Debra also stated that the principal is too inconsistent with the rules and punishment, which makes it harder for her to discipline her students.

Marcus Griffin

Marcus Griffin is a Black male math teacher who has taught at the alternative school for two years. He has a total of five years of teaching experience but has found his greatest joy teaching at the alternative school. He requested to be transferred from the high school because the former math teacher at the alternative school had retired and the alternative school was in need of a math teacher and he was seeking a full-time teacher's position. Marcus was told that the alternative school was a dumping ground for teachers and that he would not like it. He stated that if he were given the opportunity to go back into the traditional setting he would not go back.

Michael Dobbs

Michael Dobbs is a White male social studies and physical education teacher with 23 years of teaching experience. This is his first year teaching at the alternative school and it was not what he expected. Originally, Michael was not happy about his transfer from the high school because he was always told that it was a dumping ground for teachers on their way out, and he has seen many of his colleagues leave the district after transferring to the alternative school. Michael did not have a choice in the transfer because last year's budget cuts eliminated his previous position as driver education teacher and the alternative school was the only position available. He admits to liking it now and reports that the students are not as bad as he thought they would be.

<div align="center">

Administrator

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Mr. Johnson is a Black male who has served as administrator of the alternative program for six years. He has over 33 total years of experience, all in the Bowman School District. He stated that he loves working at the alternative school and added that a lot of positive changes in the program have been made through his leadership. He believes students need positive role models who understand the students' perspectives and are willing to listen to them without judging. He said that if he could change anything about the alternative education program it would be to gain more community support and to get everyone involved in the success of the program. Mr. Johnson stated that the positive changes that he has helped to bring to this program would not have been possible without the strong, supportive staff at the alternative school. The staff, according to Johnson, has made change possible despite the lack of support in the community. He is now looking forward to retiring soon but is not ready to say exactly when.

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Students' Perceptions of the Alternative Program

This study addressed the following research question: What are the perceptions of the alternative school for students who attend the alternative school? Every student cannot be successful in the regular public school environment. Several reasons the alternative programs are put into place are poor attendance, behavior issues, and lack of ability to meet the needs in the regular school setting. A total of 10 student participants were involved in sharing their perceptions of the program. Each section includes effects on relationships, positive and negative experiences, challenges, and suggested changes.

Each student's interview began with the student telling me about how he or she was placed in the alternative program. During this time, the student would explain how he or she began in the regular school, because of poor attendance, fighting, poor behavior choices, or other school policy violations, he or she had to attend the alternative program.

In the interviews, words like "it is easier" and "I like the teachers better" were echoed many times by the students describing their perceptions of the alternative program. All of the student participants were asked to explain how it felt when they were told that they had to go to the alternative program. Some expressed relief, while others expressed anxiety and frustration. Keisha indicated that she was treated unfairly because she did not start the altercation and that her teacher was not present when the fight began. She also believed that the teaching at the alternative program was not as good as the teaching at the regular high school. Andrew was looking forward to not being as stressed by the teasing he received from students and teachers because he is biracial.

Mark, James, and Devon do not seem to care whether they stayed at the regular school or had to attend the alternative program. They all seemed to lack self-motivation and a desire to succeed in school. Jamie and Michael were very upset about having to

attend the alternative program because they had never gotten in any trouble before. They

were both anxious to return to the regular high school. Tiffany thought the program was

not strict enough and that many of the teachers were too laid back. Nicole and Valerie

like the teachers at the alternative program better than the teachers at their regular school;

however, they both stated that the building is a dump.

Each student discussed if attending the alternative program affected his or her

attitude toward the regular school. Five of ten students said that it gave them a greater

appreciation for their regular school and its environment. Nicole said it affected her

relationship with her friends because she does not get to see any of them, and she likes

her regular building much better.

Out of the 10 participants, 6 expressed that it affected their relationships at home

with parents. Nicole started crying when she stated, "My granddaddy was very

disappointed in me because he knew that he had taught me better." Keisha stated, "With

my mom being a teacher, I know that she is embarrassed that I am at the alternative

school." The other 4 said that there were no problems with their relationships at home.

Parents' Perceptions of the Alternative Program

Each parent interview began with the parents telling me about why their children

were placed in the alternative program. During this time, the parent would explain his or

her perception regarding his or her child being placed in the alternative program. Each

parent was asked his or her perception of the alternative program and its effectiveness.

All of the parent participants were asked how they felt when they were told their

children had to attend the alternative program. Of the 10 participants, 8 expressed that

they were disappointed in their children's placement. Mrs. Moore stated, "We had

planned on putting our son [Jamie] in a private school to keep him from attending the alternative program." Mr. Tipton stated, "I have always thought it was a place where they put bad kids and the teachers were not good teachers." The other 2 parents said that it does not bother them for their children to be in the alternative program. Ms. Mason stated, "I like the alternative program better because my son [Andrew] doesn't seem as stressed down there." Ms. Tillman believes that parents should be glad their children had somewhere to go instead of being in the streets during a suspension.

Regarding the effectiveness of the alternative program, only 3 out of 10 parents said it is not meeting the educational needs of students. Those 3 parents believed that the program's curriculum should be enhanced. Ms. Maxwell (a middle school teacher) stated, "The alternative program appears to be a big daycare with minimum instruction." Mrs. Goodman (an assistant principal) commented, "Those teachers need to get off their tails and teach just as they would at any other school."

<center>**Teachers' Perceptions of the Alternative Program**</center>

Each teacher interview began with the teachers telling me how they began teaching in the alternative school. Each teacher participant explained his or her perception of teaching at the alternative program and the effectiveness of the alternative program.

Out of the 10 participants, 2 were "dumped" into the alternative school. Alice stated that she was forced to teach in the alternative school because they wanted to replace her as lead basketball coach. Michael believed that he was forced to go to the alternative school because the district is trying to get rid of him. Both of these participants believed that the district is trying to force them to leave by sending them to

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the alternative school to teach. The other 8 participants either were asked to teach in the alternative school or applied to teach there. Mary and Melinda stated that they were given a choice and they chose to teach in the alternative program.

Only 1 out of 10 teacher participants said that she would leave the alternative program if given the opportunity. Leslie stated, "The alternative school was the only vacancy when I applied. If I am given the opportunity to go to a traditional classroom I am going to take it." Marcus happily stated, "I would not go back to a traditional classroom for anything." Mary believes that teaching in the alternative program is a blessing from God because she is able to influence so many children. Trina stated, "Many of these students just need a little attention and I am glad that I am here to help them."

All 10 of the teacher participants agreed that the alternative program is in need of improvement. Melinda questions, "Why isn't there a full-time counselor just for the alternative program? It seems as though this would be the most needed place." Debra, Joseph, and Alex all viewed the administrator as being too soft on the students and believe that he needs to be tougher. Mary stated, "It's as though we are the step-child because we are always the last to get supplies."

The Administrator's Perception of the Alternative Program

The interview began with the administrator describing how he became the administrator of the alternative program. During this time, he explained his perception of directing the alternative program and the effectiveness of the alternative program.

Mr. Johnson believes that the alternative program has shown much growth under his leadership. He stated, "The students are more under control and the teachers are more

on task." He also stated that he has garnered more support from the community to help improve the program. He commented, "I can finally say that I have a great staff that works well with me."

Mr. Johnson believes that the alternative program is meeting the needs of the students. He stated, "So many of the students have found a place where people really care about them." According to Mr. Johnson, "Many of these students come from dysfunctional homes and need stability and the alternative program gives them a more nurturing environment."

Positive Perceptions of the Alternative Program

According to Students. The students gave examples of what they thought were both positives and negatives about the alternative program. The three positive comments that emerged were less stress to complete assignments, less peer pressure, and nicer teachers. Devon said, "I have all day to do my work, instead of having to rush and finish it by the end of one period." Andrew stated, "The kids at the alternative program don't seem to tease me as much about being mixed." Andrew was referring to having one Black parent and one White parent. Valerie stated, "The teachers in the alternative program are like family to me, they keep me in check." Both James and Andrew stated, "I like the one on one attention that I receive from the teachers in the alternative program."

According to Parents. The parents seemed to have many positive comments regarding the alternative program. There were 8 out of 10 parent participants who were able to find some positives comments to make regarding the alternative program and its purpose. Both Ms. Tillman and Ms. Mason said that they like the teachers better at the

alternative school. Ms. Mason stated, "The teachers at the alternative school are more patient with my son regarding his emotional problems." According to Ms. Tillman, "The teachers of the alternative program communicate with me more." Even though they may not have fully supported the idea of their children attending the program, many of the parents believed that there children benefited from being in the alternative program.

Parents and students seem to have the same perception of the alternative program. Both believe that the smaller setting and more one on one times helps students to stay focused on getting their work completed. They both expressed that the teachers at the alternative school are more supportive and understanding of students' needs. Even in cases where parents and students were against attending the alternative school, they both agreed that it was a good learning experience for the student.

According to Teachers. All of the teachers agreed that teaching in the alternative program is much slower pace than teaching in a traditional setting. They all stated that they appreciate that more time is allowed to work with students one-on-one. Mrs. Lemon stated, "I sure do not miss game duty" referencing the requirement that teachers at the high school have to assist during athletic contests for students. The alternative program does not have any after school functions, so there is no need for teachers to stay after school for extra duties. All three participants who have taught in the alternative program for over six years agree that the program has shown improvement under the leadership of Mr. Johnson.

According to the Administrator. Mr. Johnson believes that he has a strong, supportive staff, which makes his job a little easier. Mr. Johnson stated that his teachers all seem to genuinely care about the students. He likes the smaller setting because it allows him more time to counsel his students when they get in trouble. Most of the

parents seem to be supportive of the alternative program while their child is in attendance, according to Mr. Johnson.

Negative Perceptions of the Alternative Program

According to Students. The 10 student participants discussed if there were any negatives about the alternative programs that they would change if they could. While there were many different negative issues, they all commented on the old building. They all stated that something needed to be done to improve the appearance of the building both inside and outside.

Devon and Tiffany both stated, "The food is awful because it is shipped from the high school". They continued to complain of how the food is cold by the time they get it. Jamie noted, "The library needs a real selection of books." He said that once he completed his assignments he would have loved to have a choice of books to read.

When reflecting on both the positives and negatives of the alternative program, the participants all gave examples and details. Although many of them spoke of negative attributes, the participants also expanded on positive factors of the alternative program. The majority of the students spoke of the ability to be more laid back and to receive more one on one attention from the teachers. Thus, the students seemed to be able to balance the positives with the negatives.

According to Parents. The majority of the parents focused on the negative aspects of the alternative school. They made many negative comments about topics including the old building and lazy teachers. There were three participants who were employed with the Bowman School District and all three disapproved of their children attending the program. Ms. Maxwell and Mrs. Goodman both stated, "Those teachers don't do

anything down there." Ms. Maxwell believed that it is unfair for those teachers to make the same salary as teachers in traditional classrooms. Out of the 10 participants, 7 of them stated that the teachers were "reject teachers" and that is why they are teaching in the alternative program.

Students and parents both perceived the alternative school as a place to dump students and teachers. They both expressed that it was apparent by the appearance of the building that the district has little value of the alternative school. Many students complained of the awful food that is served, which in turn, caused many parents to bring their children's lunch to the school.

According to Teachers. The alternative program often has a negative stigma. All 10 teachers stated that they believed they were not treated as equals by their teacher colleagues who teach at other schools in the district. Mary stated that one of them asked her, why she teaches at the alternative school with bad kids. She replied, "My students are just as sweet to me as yours are to you." Out of 10 participants, 9 stated that the alternative program is seen as a dumping ground for students because many teachers in the traditional program are referring their problem students to the alternative school in order to get them out of their classrooms.

According to the Administrator. Mr. Johnson believes that the alternative program is not valued by the school district. According to Mr. Johnson, "For so many years no one has cared about the alternative program or the students who attend. The district did not want to put money into the program to help the student succeed." He stated that the students seem to be getting worse and worse. "When I first became the administrator we didn't have half the students that we have now. They seem to be coming by the truck loads," stated Mr. Johnson. He believes that something has to be done soon to help these

students learn how to remain in their traditional classroom because he admits that the alternative program cannot meet all of their educational needs.

Themes

To answer the research question regarding the students' perceptions of the alternative school, four emerging themes were found. These were: repeat offenders, student alienation/biracial, dumping ground, and teacher preparation for alternative schools.

Repeat Offenders

This study found that many of the student participants were repeat offenders, those students continued to return to the alternative program over and over again. Many of these students perceived the alternative program as a place where they felt comfortable and loved. The students expressed that the teachers at the alternative school are more attentive to their needs and are more willing to listen than the teachers at the regular schools. With the smaller setting, teachers are able to give these students the attention that so many of them long for. Many of the students believe that they get behind in their school work at their regular school because the teachers do not have time to help them or they make them "feel stupid" when they ask questions, so they just give up.

The alternative school houses many students, however many of the same friends end up attending together. Some students get in trouble so they can go to the alternative school with their friends. They have their "cliques" and they do not have to worry about the peer pressure they receive from their classmates at the regular schools. It is as though they get to run things at the alternative school.

Although these students perceive the alternative school as a place better than their regular school, they admit that the teachers do not teach to the same standards as teachers at their schools. They realize that they cannot get the best education possible by being in and out of the alternative school, but it is just where they want to be.

Student Alienation/Biracial

Students who do not confirm to the rules and regulations of the regular schools are often seen as outcasts. Students stated that once they returned to their regular schools, teachers would do whatever they could to get rid of them. They believed that they were forever labeled "an alternative school student".

Two participants were biracial male students. Both of these students seemed to experience a great of teasing and alienation while attending their regular school. Not only were they teased by students but also by teachers. One White parent of a biracial son told me that her son heard one of his White teachers talking about him and calling him names because he was mixed biracial. She said that her son would come home almost every day upset because of the teasing; however, things seemed to be less stressful when he was at the alternative school. Her son is also one of the repeat offenders because he stated that the students and teachers did not tease him at the alternative school. Since this was the case, he would continue to get in trouble just so he could receive an alternative placement. Once his mother realized what he was doing, she asked if he could receive a "permanent alternative" placement. This mother perceives the alternative program as a shelter for her son. She stated that she worries about him when he is at the regular school, but is actually at peace when he is at the alternative school.

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The second biracial student exhibited severe behavioral problems. When the interview was conducted with his adopted father, he confirmed that a lot of it is due to a feeling of not belonging. He stated that his son is acting out because of not really knowing who he is. His White mother never wanted him and his Black father could not afford to take care of him. He does not get teased as much as the first student because he looks to be more like the Black race: you cannot tell that he is bi-racial just by looking at him. Teachers and family have noticed that he is always detached from everyone else. He never seems to want anyone to show him genuine love. It has been noticed that when anyone starts getting close to him he does something to push them away.

Another Black female student believed that her teachers never tried to give her a chance. She believed that the alternative school was her "real family". It was the only school where she believed she was loved and teachers genuinely cared for her wellbeing. She stated that sometimes the teachers acted as though she was not good enough to be in their classes.

Institutional pathology is a dominant theory of at-riskness that suggested students may become at-risk due to institutional insufficiencies (Sagor & Cox, 2004). When individuals or groups consistently receive differential treatment by social institutions one should expect to see them behave differently. This theory suggests that a large number of children receive improper or inappropriate treatment by the institutions where they spend much of their time. School is one of the most significant institutions that have the most impact on youth.

Dumping Ground

The Bowman District Alternative School is seen as a "dumping ground" for both students and teachers. The students who are placed there are often students who cause the most problems in their regular school setting. Little, if any, effort is given to help improve behavioral problems. If they are interrupting teachers' efforts at teaching to meet the required test scores, then they must be removed.

The district is placing minimal funding into their alternative program which makes it appears as though it is a lost cause. Many districts are facing similar situations with reduced state funding and lagging local taxes.

The purpose of the program does not appear to be to reform those students but to get them away from the good students. This coincides with students feeling unwanted and labeled at their regular school.

Not only is the alternative school a dumping ground for students, but it is a graveyard for unwanted teachers. Those teachers who are not effective enough or are not capable of teaching the required curriculum are often forced to teach at the alternative school. Many times they are forced there it seems, as an effort to push them to retire or quit. To the teachers at the alternative school, teachers in the district do not value them as true teachers, but as babysitters not earning their checks.

The lack of cooperation between the regular school and the alternative school is not good for the alternative student. Alternative students suffer when there is not strong communication between the schools. In so many cases, their grades seem to fall while attending the alternative school because the regular teacher does not seem to have time or care enough to make sure that the student is getting the required assignments turned in instead of just giving them "zeros". When the teachers from the alternative school try to

make contact with the regular teachers regarding assignments, the regular teachers often exhibit an attitude as if they do not want to be bothered. The alternative schools must collaborate with the regular teachers on a regular basis and the regular teachers must be willing to cooperate. It will not benefit the alternative students if their teachers are not working together for their best interest. The regular teacher is so glad to have a break from that disruptive student that he/she fails to realize that the student's state test scores will still reflect the them and not the alternative teacher.

Teacher Preparation for Alternative School

Teachers at the alternative school are licensed certified teachers, but they have not received the proper training that should go along with teaching students with severe behavioral problems. Many of these teachers have admitted that most of the techniques and strategies they learned have come through experience. These teachers are not granted the opportunity to attend workshops because of a lack of funding. They are told that the funding that the alternative school receives branches off of the other schools. These teachers are expected to provide a quality education to these alternative students without proper workshops or professional developments. It is almost as if they are actually expected to be babysitters and not teachers.

Discussion

Raywid's (1991) Type I program might be better suited to meet the students' needs and to produce the district's desired results. Type I programs offer full-time, multiyear, education options for students of all kind, including those needing more individualization, those seeking an innovative or challenging curriculum, or dropouts wishing to earn diplomas. A personalized, whole-student approach that builds a sense of

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affiliation and features individualized instruction, self-paced work, and career counseling for those who chose to attend. The Type I program would be more effective in helping those students that are "repeat offenders" and have no desire to remain in the traditional school. Individual attention can be given to those students that do not care about the direction that their education is going. Counselors can help guide them one on one and show them positive ways they can still achieve their education in a short period of time.

According to Franklin, Kim, Tripodi (2006), academic alternative schools that focus on education instead of discipline or correction are effective for youth who are at risk of dropping out. Academic alternative schools are centered and caring, and contain environments that emphasize strengths, resources, and interpersonal relationships (Barr & Parrett, 2001). In addition, academic alternative schools have been shown to have low student-to-teacher ratios, which enable teachers to work individually with students, increasing the student's desire to graduate. The Bowman District's alternative program does possess some qualities of an academic alternative school. According to students, teachers in the alternative program seem to care about them and are more willing to listen. They receive more one-on-one attention from teachers in the alternative program.

According to Brewer (2004), alternative schools hold the power to encourage skills and interest, while giving new life and significance to the academics that students need to survive and become productive citizens. This study revealed that many students believe the alternative program gives them a better opportunity of obtaining their education than that in a traditional program. Those students who are constantly in and out of the alternative program eventually give up hope of obtaining a traditional high school diploma. Wolk's (2003) research suggested that dropping out of school is a process and that they become uninterested much earlier than age 16, usually resulting in academic

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trouble. Fashola and Slavin (1998) argue that even with the best alternative schools, many students will be at risk for dropping out, and many will fail to achieve their full potential.

Natriello et al. (1986) developed a model that displayed how student characteristics and school processes interact to create a cumulative effect on students' development over the course of their school careers. Depending upon individual experiences, students respond differently to these experiences, and such responses result in consequences that determine students' educational failure. Dropping out occurs because of the cumulative effect of negative experiences, both in factors that mold students' character and the school's failed attempt to meet the needs of at-risk students. NCES (2009a) estimated that in 2007, 9% of 16- through 24-year-olds were defined as having dropout status. All educational personnel should be trained to be aware of certain traits or behaviors of potential dropouts. Dynaski and Gleason (1998) found that the beginning of helping a student at risk of dropping out of school is to form a relationship that revolves around trust between the student and a staff member of the school. Natriello et al. stated that if educators used this framework to develop methods that lessened the effects of risk factors and increased the awareness of educational alternatives, students would better be able to achieve their long term educational goals.

The alternative school of this study is the result of the failure of traditional schools to address the needs of these alternative students. Students are alienated and teased by insensitive teachers that are not meeting their needs. Many of the alternative students have poor self-esteem, lack a sense of self-competence, and do not see any benefits out of committing themselves to their regular school. The alternative school

students in this study believed that the teachers of this alternative school encourage them and help to build their self-esteem.

Soleil (1999) stated that the separation of alternative schools from traditional schools can also result in unintentional segregation of students who traditionally experience greater risk (e.g., minority student, poor students, and students with disabilities). Bowman Alternative School is located in a small community called "Cross Tie." The community is made up of mostly shot-gun houses that are occupied by low - income Black citizens. The Bowman Alternative School building is old, the classrooms are in need of paint, and the equipment is outdated. The teachers interviewed stated that they are treated like a "step-child" because many of the supplies they receive are second hand and worn out. Teachers also stated that they did not receive the same respect as their colleagues that teach in the same district in the traditional schools. Students also expressed that they were not pleased that their food was brought in from the local high school, rather than prepared at the alternative school.

Special education plays a role as an at-risk characteristic, and confusion may result if alternative schools do not have clear guidance for serving students with disabilities. Interviews with state directors of special education indicated concerns with the special education processes and procedures in place at alternative schools for students with disabilities. Although alternative schools were generally viewed as another educational option available to students with disabilities, there were questions about enrollment procedures, provision of quality services, implementation of Individual Educational Plans, and availability of special education (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

Foley and Pang (2006) wrote that the student population of alternative schools "appears to be mostly high school students with a large portion of students identified as

disabled" (p. 10). According to Lehr (2004), about 12% of all students attending alternative schools in the United States are students with disabilities. These special education students have IEPs and are typically students with LDs or EBDs. The IEPs should continue to be followed and services should continue after placement in an alternative school. However, many students have not been identified as disabled and are being placed in alternative schools. The separation of the alternative school from the traditional school does not separate the student with an IEP from the student without an IEP.

At-risk students possess different characteristics from those of traditional students. The cause, prevention, and treatment of the differences are the overriding factors for their behavior. The needs of today's youth are as diverse as they are rapidly changing and in order for the traditional system to meet their needs, it too must be equally diverse and rapidly changing (Quinn et al., 2006). Patterns have emerged from the words of the participants. These themes and patterns suggest multiple answers to the research question, along with multiple potential solutions to improve the alternative program. The results point toward a need for new criteria for student placement, training teachers, hiring a full-time counselor, improving the appearance of the school's building, or providing a different location.

School districts struggle with negative stigmas of alternative schools as dumping grounds or warehouses for at-risk students who are falling behind, have behavioral problems, or are juvenile delinquents. These stigmas have long been some of the biggest obstacles barring the success of alternative education (Arnove & Strout, 1980). According to Valencia (1997), school tracking, inequalities in school financing,

curriculum differentiation, and low teacher quality – all of which help maintain the status quo – are not held accountable in explaining why some students fail in school. The district has failed to provide equal standards for their alternative program. The alternative school in this study is being used as a dumping ground to house those students that have become too much of a problem to remain in the regular schools. Not only is the program used as a dumping ground for students but it is used as a dumping ground for teachers. A majority of the teachers in this alternative program are seen as ineffective teachers that are not good enough to teach in the traditional schools. The curriculum of this alternative program is not held to the same standards as those in the regular schools. Over the past few years, the district has been working towards improving the alternative program by supplying new textbooks, computers, repairing the building, and making sure that alternative teachers are highly qualified to teach their content area.

The research approach of the study was the phenomenological approach of van Manen (1994, 1995, 1997), who viewed the necessity of pedagogy as rising out of the educator's reflective awareness of the student's lived experience. This study focused on the perceptions of disenfranchised students to better understand their lived experiences in alternative schools. Their lived experiences are shaped by the perceptions of their parents/guardians and by their teachers. This study can help researchers and educators understand student perceptions of what is happening in the alternative school versus what should be happening. According to van Manen (1997), each individual has a *life world*, or unique way of experiencing and participating in the world. In research informed by this view, the researcher attempts to identify and reflect upon the life world of participants as their lifeworlds are experienced and actively created by participants. The

researcher then attempts to develop reflective action based on an understanding of participants' lived experience of the phenomenon of interest. As it applied to the present study, van Manen's approach was used to shape the inquiry with the goal of understanding the life world of participants in an alternative school and of using reflective action in developing of recommendations for the alternative school.

This research approach was chosen to support this study to help the Bowman School District understand and evaluate its current alternative school. Interviewing students gave the opportunity for students to speak freely of their perception of the alternative school. The district may have had its own perception of the alternative school, but this study brings reality into the picture. In order to truly understand what is going on, administrators and teachers must view it through the eyes of the alternative students to determine what is working and work is not. The alternative school may not make students at risk, but it does not seem to effectively address the problems of those who attend. This district and districts across the nation need to evaluate the effectiveness of their alternative schools.

Summary

This research study discussed the perception of the alternative school for students who attend the alternative school. Student perceptions of the school's climate provided insight into the school's facilities, procedures, and instruction. The males and females in this study shared their thoughts and feelings about their time in the alternative program, and in their stories, they described their positive experiences as well as their negative. Although each participant told his/her story differently, many similarities emerged as they reflected upon their time in the alternative program.

This research found that the majority of the students were not enthused upon receiving alternative placement. Out of the 10 student participants, 7 of them were highly upset due as this was the first time they had attended the program or they just did not want to return again. Out of the other three students, two did not care one way or the other and the last one requested alternative placement because he felt safer in the alternative program. They all liked that the curriculum was tailored and adjusted to meet their individual needs and that there was more one on one time with the teachers. According to the students, the alternative program gave them the opportunity to focus on the changes that they needed to make to improve their education and to evaluate the path in which it was headed. They were able to work on ways to build their academic strengths/weaknesses, level of social skills/adaptability, and interests. Many of the students saw an improvement in their grades while attending the program. This study did not follow these students back to their regular school. Another study is needed to follow their behavior and academic success once they returned to their regular school.

All of the parent participants were asked how they felt when they were told their children had to attend the alternative program. Of the 10 participants, 8 expressed that they were disappointed in their child's placement. The other two parents said that it does not bother them for their children to be in the alternative program. Regarding the effectiveness of the alternative program, only 3 out of 10 parents said it is not meeting the educational needs of students. Those three parents believed that the program's curriculum should be enhanced.

Out of the 10 teacher participants, 2 were "dumped" into the alternative school. The other eight participants either were asked to teach in the alternative school or applied to teach there. Only 1 out of 10 teacher participants said that she would leave the

alternative program if given the opportunity. All 10 of the teacher participants agreed that the alternative program is in need of improvement. All of the teachers stated that the district does not treat them with the same respect as teacher in the other schools. They feel that they are treated like a "step-child".

The administrator believes that the alternative program has shown much growth under his leadership. He believes that he has gotten more support from the community to help improve the program and that he has a great staff that works well with him. He believes that the alternative program is meeting the needs of the students and that the alternative program gives students a more nurturing environment.

This study produced several themes in its process. Many of the students stated that they would never return to the alternative program once their time was up; however, it is important to note that several of these students were what are called "repeat offenders". Even though they stated that they would rather be in a traditional setting with their friends, they end up returning over and over again. The majority of the students that enter the alternative program are Black males and we are starting to see an increase in Black females. There are also a couple of biracial students who have attended the program on more than one occasion that seem to appear to like it better because of less teasing of their race. Students and teachers at the alternative school do not seem to focus on their race. The traditional alternative school student has problems following the rules in the traditional school setting. They seem to do somewhat better while attending the alternative school, but shortly after they return to their host schools they are placed in the alternative program again. Many of the students stated that they liked the smaller student-teacher ratio at the alternative school. Students fail to realize that the alternative program is designed to be a bridge between the regular school setting and alternative school; not a

place to remain. The alternative school is supposed to be a place where students do not want to come. The alternative school is seen as a "dumping ground" by many students and parents. They believe that the district uses the alternative school as a place to house students that the regular schools do not want to deal with. Students and parents believe alternative students are not really given a second chance. Once they return back to their host school, they are forever labeled. It is as, if they make one mistake "off they go."

Analysis from this study determined that this district's alternative program is a Type II, according to Raywid's (1994) three-level classification. Type II programs have discipline as the distinguishing characteristic and are designed to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students. Placement is short-term and the curriculum is limited to the basics. Students that attend this alternative program return after serving their required placement. Very few students have to stay longer because of poor behavior. Many are returned to their host schools with the same issues that caused them to be placed in the alternative program. It is only a quick fix solution. The curriculum of the alternative program is not designed to keep these students long-term. The program is not designed for students to receive their high school diplomas while attending the school. Generally, the participants of this study completed the required time to return to their host schools. Only a few had negative feelings about returning to the regular programs. The alternative school helped shape the nature of student-teacher relationships, which in turn, enhances the student's personal support. It is interesting to note that all of the participants complained of the old, neglected appearance of the alternative building.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARIES, DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The significance of this study is to help students, parents, teachers, and administrators understand students' perception of the alternative school. Although the conclusions and recommendations relate to only one alternative school, the study has implications for improving the quality of education in all alternative schools. This study provides important information to help teachers of alternative schools and regular schools help students deal with the transition to and from both schools. It is hoped that it will break down barriers and open communication between alternative school and regular school teachers. The study included interviews with 10 students, 10 parents of those students, 10 teachers, and 1 administrator, all of which were affiliated with the studied alternative school. The interviews helped address the research question, what are the perceptions of the alternative school for students who attend the alternative school? This chapter summarizes the first four chapters, discusses the findings with the literature and offers conclusions, and makes recommendations for the school district and for further research.

Summary

The research question for this study was what are the perceptions of the alternative school for students who attend the alternative school? The purpose of this study was to help students, parents, teachers, and administrators understand students' perception of the alternative school. The placement of students in alternative schools to

assist in reducing the dropout rates is available through a local public school, but awareness of how the alternative school meets students' many needs should be understood by those affected in the community surrounding the school system. Public schools must obtain students' perceptions about the alternative school in the school system from students who attend the program. If the program works for students, school systems need to know why it works for them. Once what works and what does not work are identified, the school system can implement the needed changes.

Institutional pathology is a dominant theory of at-riskness that suggested students may become at-risk due to institutional insufficiencies (Sagor & Cox, 2004). When individuals or groups consistently receive differential treatment by social institutions one should expect to see them behave differently. This theory suggests that a large number of children receive improper or inappropriate treatment by the institutions where they spend much of their time. School is one of the most significant institutions that have the most impact on youth. Institutional interventions are referred to as pacification programs. Pacification programs are programs such as alternative schools that do not cure the problem but changes the institution as well as the institutional practices.

Findings from this study could help school administrators (a) decrease school dropout rate and (b) help develop effective resources to improve alternative schools. In addition, school officials should be able to judge whether alternative school programs are achieving the goal of preparing students for a return to regular classrooms.

The review of literature for the alternative school revealed that across the United States, the need for alternative schools began to grow in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. The alternative schools emphasized the development of self-concept, problem-solving, and humanistic approaches (Conley, 2002). The development of alternative

education was based on the idea that some students may learn better in an environment structured differently than that of traditional academic public schools (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Students are referred to alternative schools and programs if they are at risk of failure, as indicated by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, suspension, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with early withdrawal from school.

Many students are not finding it easy to succeed in the traditional school setting. Alternative schools provide an alternate route in helping those students succeed academically and graduate. Alternative schools are often assessed by school administrators, but rarely are they assessed by the students who attend them. The problem addressed by this study was the lack of students' perceptions in studies of alternative schools.

School districts must deal with at-risk students who may struggle academically, present constant behavior problems, and have poor attendance. According to Donmoyer and Kos (1993), an at-risk student is usually academically challenged and is in danger of failing or dropping out of school. A student who is labeled at-risk may exhibit behavior that may prevent the student and others from being successful in school. According to Souza (1999), alternative schools affect more potential dropouts than any other program, and it is imperative to understand how students are making sense of their alternative school experiences. The meaning these students make of their roles as alternative school students is important because that meaning can affect their decision to stay in school.

According to Brewer (2004), alternative schools hold the power to encourage skills and interests, while giving new life and significance to the academics that students need to survive and become productive citizens. Kelley (1996) found nearly 15 years ago that in several school districts throughout the country, as many as 10% of district students

were enrolled in a continuation or alternative school to complete their education. According to Epp and Epp (2001), alternative schooling policies enable schools to act on their commitment to mandatory education for all students. By the beginning of 2002, there were over 20,000 alternative schools in operation throughout the United States (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Even as the programs continued to evolve, there was still little evidence of their effectiveness.

It is beneficial to understand how alternative education programs have been viewed and classified. Raywid (1994) created a three-level classification which resulted from examining existing programs based on the characteristics of the student population and the goals and intent of the programs. This classification is as follows: Type I schools offer full-time, multiyear, education options for students of all kinds; Type II programs have discipline as the distinguishing characteristic. Type II programs are designed to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students; Type III programs provide short-term, therapeutic settings for students with social and emotional problems that create academic and behavioral barriers to learning.

According to Brewer (2004), each year tens of thousands of students, feeling disconnected from the learning environment, drop out of school. The increase in testing and other mandates for attendance are keeping students away from the learning environment. Brewer noted that if students do not come to school, teachers cannot teach them. If the students are unsuccessful in regular high schools, alternative schools should be put into place so that students stay in school.

Discussions and Conclusions

As the researcher in this study, I chose a qualitative research design to understand the personal experiences of students who are enrolled in the alternative school. I am an English teacher for the Bowman School District. I have eight years of teaching experience, four of which have been in an alternative school setting. I was asked by the alternative school principal if I would consider teaching in the alternative school because of my good classroom management skills. Originally, I was skeptical about taking the position because of fear of being harmed by the students. Now I can say that teaching at the alternative school has been a joy for me.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with a set of topics used as a guide while conducting the interview. I made phone calls to schedule a convenient time and place for each interview. I believed that students and parents would feel more comfortable if interviews were conducted outside of the school. The constant comparative method was used for analyzing data from a number of sources. The participants were told that everything they said would be confidential.

There were a total of 31 interviews conducted: 10 students, 10 parents, 10 teachers, and 1 administrator. Each participant was given the opportunity to share their perception of the alternative program. In the interviews, words like "it is easier" and "I like the teachers better" were expressed by several students. Many parents were upset when they were told that their child had to attend the alternative program, however, two parents were happy with alternative placement. They believed the teachers at the alternative school treated their children better than the teachers in the regular school. One mother said that not only is her bi-racial son teased by students in his regular school, but also by the teachers. Students and parents believe that alternative students are not given a

second chance. They believe that after one trip to the alternative school, they will always be labeled as an "alternative student" and if they make one mistake "off they go" to the alternative school again. Students and teachers echoed that they believe the alternative program is used as a "dumping ground" for unwanted teachers and students. All but one of the teachers, were happy teaching in the alternative program. All teachers voiced great concern with the lack of a full-time counselor in the program. It seems this would be the most needed place to have a counselor to help students with emotional and behavioral needs while they attend the program. According to the administrator, the program has shown much growth over the past few years. The community is much more supportive and the staff is very supportive. He believes that many of the students in the program have found a place where people really care about them.

It is clear that the alternative program exists apart from the traditional school program. This includes the students and the teachers.

The emerging themes from this study were repeat offenders, student alienation/bi-racial, dumping ground, and teacher preparation for alternative schools. Many of the students were placed in the alternative program over and over again; no matter how many times they promised themselves they would not be back. Several of the participants felt a sense of belonging at the alternative school, as if they were a part of a family. They stated that the teachers were easier to talk to and seemed to have more time for them. Some students voiced that teachers in their regular schools labeled them as "alternative students" and were waiting for them to mess up so that they could send them right back. The two bi-racial students stated they had no sense of belonging in their regular school. Not only did students tease them because of their mixed race, but so did teachers. The alternative school was seen as a dumping ground for both unwanted students and

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teachers. It is used to house those students that are too much of a disruption in the regular classes. Many teachers that are not meeting the district's expectations are placed at the alternative school in hopes of them retiring or quitting. Alternative teachers do not attend needed workshops or professional development due to the lack of funding. Alternative teachers are in great need of training to help them deal with the special behavioral needs of so many alternative students.

Purpose of the Alternative School

The Bowman School District refers students to the alternative school as an option to continue their education outside of regular schools. Low attendance, low academic performance, and disruptive behavior are a few factors that contribute to students being placed in an alternative school. This study reflected the perceptions of students attending the alternative school in the Bowman School District. Participants also discussed the challenges and experiences they encountered in the alternative school and suggested ways in which school administrators and teachers can improve the program. Additionally, the perspectives of parents of students in the alternative school and the perspectives of alternative school teachers were presented. Students in this district do not receive several options to complete their education. If they do not follow school policies or rules for attendance, grades and behavior, they are offered only one option to reach graduation. The program is designed for students to be able to complete the basic requirements to obtain a high school diploma. Placement of children with these problems within the alternative school settings is thought to (a) protect the majority of the students from the dangerous behavior of the few and (b) provide a more intensive and meaningful educational program to these at-risk and targeted children and youth (Van Acker, 2007).

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Alternative schools are capable of meeting the needs of students who are not successful in a regular school setting. It is evident that this district needs to provide options for their students to reach graduation other than through regular schools and alternative schools. This district needs to consider job-training and career training-opportunities to help these students succeed.

Type of Alternative School

Raywid (1994) created a three-level classification which resulted from existing programs based on the characteristics of the student population and the goals and intent of the programs. The alternative program used in this study is that of a Type II alternative program. Type II programs have discipline as the distinguishing characteristic. Type II programs are designed to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students. Students typically do not choose to attend, but are sent to the school for specified time periods or until behavior requirements are met. All but one student participant was placed in the program due to inappropriate behavior which includes fighting and cursing. When questioned regarding their feelings about coming to the alternative school, many of them did not seem to mind because they had been there previously. The Bowman Alternative School has been found, through this research, to be that of a "Type II Program." Type II programs have discipline as the distinguishing characteristic. Type II programs are designed to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students. Students typically do not choose to attend, but are sent to the school for specified time periods or until behavior requirements are met.

This research concludes that the Type II program is not working. Students are not there long enough to really make a genuine change. Intense counseling services should be

provided for those students to help them deal with their behavioral problems and to also

help them transition back into the regular school setting. It cannot be determined if

students are actually meeting their behavior requirements to return or are they just

conforming to their environment. If they are just conforming to their environment, then

they will end up in trouble again once they are around their peers.

Reasons Students were Placed

Participants agree that students are not always placed into the program fairly.

Many students, parents, teachers and the administrator all believe that once students

become labeled as alternative students it is hard for them in the regular school setting.

Soleil (1999) stated that the separation of alternative schools from traditional schools can

also result in unintentional segregation of students who traditionally experience greater

risk (e.g., minority students, poor students, students with disabilities). Foley and Pang

(2006) wrote that the student population of alternative schools "appears to be mostly high

school students with a large portion of students identified as disabled" (p. 10). According

to Lehr (2004), about 12% of all students attending alternative schools in the United

States are students with disabilities. These special education students have IEPs and are

typically students with LDs or EBDs. The IEPs should continue to be followed and

services should continue after placement in an alternative school. However, many

students have not been identified as disabled and are being placed in alternative schools.

The separation of the alternative school from the traditional school does not separate the

student with an IEP from the student without an IEP. Additionally, in-school personnel

often fail to address serious concerns with the existing educational programs that result in

student alienation. Many students stated that many of their regular teachers would write

them up for anything just to get them sent back to the alternative school. Many parents believe that regular teachers have zero tolerance when it comes to their child. According to Loy and Gregory (2002), prevention, not only reaction, is necessary if school are to assist troubled youth, and in order to do the job possible, school staff must connect not only with students, but with the students'' families and the community at large.

Students are placed in the alternative program for various reasons but their needs are not being served. Just because you change the setting does not mean the problems are going to go away. This alternative school needs to provide intense counseling services focused on the individual needs of each alternative student. Alternative students often need support dealing with the alienation they received from the teachers and students in the regular schools.

Teacher Training to Meet the Special Needs of these Students

According to the findings in the literature review concerning alternative schools, there should be identifiable student perceptions and characteristics that lead to higher academic achievement and success in alternative schools. The identification and investigation of such characteristics is valuable due to the rapid growth of alternative learning programs (Lehr & Lang, 2003). However, the isolation of such characteristics and their link to achievement is complicated due to the variation among programs, the variation in definitions of alternative learning programs, and the variation in students who are considered at-risk (Foley & Pang, 2006). Lange and Sletten (2002) stated that much of the existing alternative school research is focused on the program rather than student descriptions and academic outcomes. Although the research tends to focus on alternative school characteristics rather than student characteristics, the traits of student/peer and

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student/teacher relationships, family support, and motivation surface as consistent factors in supporting student success in the alternative school.

Loy and Gregory (2002) stated that, in order for alternative schools to achieve their goals, it is crucial that students perceive themselves as important in their alternative settings. However, it is important to consider that the alternative school students' perceptions of school maybe negative, which could increase their problem behaviors or their chances of dropping out. Research has shown that there are often important differences in the perspectives of different school stakeholders (e.g., staff, students, administrators) and that considering the student perspective in addition to that of the adults might be critical to creating a positive learning environment (Souza, 1999).

According to the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2001), alternative programs have their focus on physical and psychological safety, positive relations ships and social norms with opportunities for skill building within family, school and community. This philosophy and mission is a pervasive one for alternative schools. Because the focus of alternative programs is towards managing and meeting students' behavioral and emotional needs that are interfered with their school success in traditional school setting, the academic success for students, while important, takes a secondary role.

Several researchers (Kraemer & Ruzzi, 2001; Lehr & Lange, 2003) have voiced concern for the academic preparedness and expectations of youth enrolled in alternative education programs, because the primary focus of such programs has been to address behavioral, social and emotional needs of students. In addition, alternative education programs serve a homogeneous population in very divers setting that have little

resemblance to each other; research has limited applicability to practice or for making generalizations about alternative programs.

It is obvious that the teachers are not prepared to meet the needs of these students. It is also obvious that the district does not value the teachers of the alternative program. These teachers need training just as regular teachers. It is important for them to be aware of the best techniques and strategies that have been proven to work on these types of students.

The expectations and accountability measures for academic achievement for now appear to be here to stay; it is therefore, crucial to discover how alternative education schools can manage the dual focus: of behavior and academic success for all students, no matter what type of program, for all students, and whether students have disabilities.

After conducting my research and comparing my research to the literature, my conclusions are that the Bowman Alternative School is attempting to meet the needs of students who are functioning minimally in their traditional program. This program attempts to provide students with the tools they need to deal with their anger, behavior, and academic demands and is helping students remain in school, at least for the short-term. Majority of the students were repent offenders. These students are serving their time but returning with the same problems that contributed to their alternative placement. A full-time counselor should be hired to help counsel these students regarding their behavioral problems and to help the adjustment back to their host school easier. Teachers should receive professional developments learning how to deal with these types of students. Teachers can learn new strategies and techniques to help students learn to improve their behavior. This in turn will help prevent students from returning so often. Teachers should not be left out of district professional developments regarding classroom

instruction. The curriculum and instruction that is required in the regular classrooms should be required in the alternative classes. It should be mandatory for alternative teachers to meet with department heads in both middle and high schools. Loy and Gregory (2002) stated that in order for alternative schools to achieve their goals, it is crucial that students perceive themselves as important in their alternative settings. However, it is important to consider that alternative school student' perceptions of school maybe negative, which could increase their problem behaviors or their chances of dropping out. The students are definitely aware of the alternative school being used as a "dumping ground". They have to enter a building every day that is poorly maintained. It cannot be expected for students to consider themselves important if the school they attend is not considered important and if their teachers at that school are not considered to be important.

Supportive relationships between students and teachers are important for helping students make progress or needed changes. Nearly all of the students in this study acknowledged alternative teachers for being caring and attentive. The teachers of the alternative program believe that they are not adequately trained to meet the needs of many of these students. In a study conducted by Ashcroft, Price, and McNair (1992), most teachers in alternative settings reported that they were not adequately prepared for aspects of their work, such as special problems presented by students. The common response was that they had taught themselves during their ongoing work. Teachers in this study were often discouraged from attending workshops that they believe can help train them to meet these students' needs.

There is a need for this alternative school and the traditional schools to collaborate together rather than in isolation and opposition. There is great tension among

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the district's teachers due to the lack of value of the alternative program and the quality of education provided by alternative program. Teachers of the alternative program believe in challenging their students, but with achievable expectations for each student rather than the traditional school expectations which students found it difficult to achieve. There is also a lack of communication between the alternative program teachers and traditional school teachers. In a study of alternative students, Kershaw and Blank (1993) noted that alternative school teachers feel that others do not perceive them as accomplishing much more that "holding" students for a designated time period and giving them easy grades. As a result of the lack of articulation and consensus, the two structures are not living up to the potential they might have as a collaborative approach.

It is evident that this alternative program exists separately from the traditional schools. This alternative program lacks a full-time counselor to help with the emotional and behavioral needs of these students; however, the other schools each have a full-time counselor on staff. The high school has two full-time counselors. The alternative program also lacks the needed materials, equipment, and technology needed to adequately challenge these students. This program receives minimal financial support from the district to help improve the program. It is evident by the appearance of the building that little money is put into the program.

While some parents credited the alternative program with helping their children, those where the parents of children who were "repent offenders". The parents of the first-time alternative students were upset when their children received placement. The parents of the first-time students almost guaranteed that their child would not return again. They admitted that they had a better understanding of the program once their child started attending, but it was still not a place they wanted their child be for long-term.

Alternative schools can provide an intervention other than expulsion for student with problems. Many of the students in this study exhibited behavior and academic problems. The district shows a lack of a genuine concern for the program and its students. It is time to question the techniques used and rethink the structure of the Bowman Alternative School. These students are unable to truly reform without the whole support of this district. This study emphasizes the importance of focusing on unmet needs in all alternative programs.

Recommendations

According to van Manen (1997), each individual has a *life world*, or unique way of experiencing and participating in the world. In research informed by this view, the researcher attempts to identify and reflect upon the life world of participants as their life worlds are experienced and actively created by participants. The researcher then attempts to develop reflective action based on an understanding of participants' lived experience of the phenomenon of interest. As it applies to the present study, van Manen's approach was used to shape the inquiry with the goal of understanding the life world of participants in an alternative school and of using reflective action in developing of recommendations for the alternative school.

The findings of this study indicate there are recommendations to help the district improve the alternative program:

- Evaluate the criteria for placing students in the alternative program. The program should address the needs of the students and not be a dumping ground to place students to get through the system. A few participants admitted that they benefited from the program, but more felt that it was

better for them to stay in their regular schools. The alternative program

should address the issues with the group of students there because of the

same issues. The program could also include lessons on how to achieve

goals of improving students' issues to help teach them responsibility for

when they return back to their regular schools.

- Increase the communication between the alternative school and the regular

    school regarding class work and behavioral needs. Alternative school

    teachers need to let regular teachers know when they do not understand

    assignments and are unable to teach the assignment as needed. Regular

    school teachers need to be willing to assist alternative school teachers with

    a positive attitude toward helping alternative school students. Alternative

    school teachers need to let regular school teachers know when methods

    have been discovered to deal with a student's behavioral problems.

    Regular teachers need to listen to those alternative school teachers and use

    those suggestions when alternative students return to their regular classes.

- Provide a specialist to help teachers and administrators focus on the needs

    of the alternative program to be more sensitive to the students' learning

    styles. More professional developments should be provided to help faculty

    and staff meet both academic and behavioral needs of these students.

- Place a full-time counselor in the alternative program to help students deal

    with the issues that may be contributing to their lack of success in the

    regular schools. The counselor should teach students strategies to deal

    with behavior problems, fighting, truancy, or what other issues facing the

program. The district needs to place an emphasis on helping to correct the problems from within first.

- Improve the building housing the alternative school. The district should allocate funds just for improving the appearance of the alternative school, just as they do for the other schools. The building should be renovated to show one of pride and to get rid of the feeling of being neglected or unwanted. Perceptions of school climate reflect how a student feels about the educational environment in terms of the school culture's social and structural aspects. Hernandez and Seem (2004) noted that the social aspects of a school culture consist of interpersonal relationships among all members of the school, communications in the school, cooperation among students and adults, the school's rituals and traditions, and expectations of a safe school.

The findings of this study indicate that the issues within this alternative school are current issues within the alternative programs of our nation. Too frequently educational systems do not seem to place a high value on alternative program nor a strong desire to improve the alternative program. It is evident by the appearance of the building; the distant location, which is separate from the other schools; and the lack of professional training of teachers to deal with students with behavior problems. The participants of this study shared their stories, but questions remain about how alternative programs can help students remain in school.

Therefore, the below listed areas for further research in alternative schools are recommended:

- A study to determine does the program meet the needs of the students. Several of the students interviewed believe that the alternative program is used as a dumping ground. These stigmas have long been some of the biggest obstacles barring the success of alternative education (Arnove & Strout, 1980). Van Acker (2007) noted that the placement of children with the alternative school is thought to protect the majority of the students from the dangerous behavior of the few. Student participants also believed that the program is not on the same educational level as that of their traditional school. According to Valencia (1997), school tracking, inequalities in school financing, curriculum differentiation, and teacher low quality – all of which help maintain the status quo – are not held accountable in explaining why some students fail in school. The needs of today's youth are as diverse as they are rapidly changing, and in order for the traditional system of education to be able to meet their needs, it too must be equally diverse and rapidly changing (Fizzell & Raywid, as citied in Quinn et al., 2006). The need for effective alternative education measures supersedes all blame and must be rooted in that today's non-traditional youth will continue to rebel against the norm and thus be removed from traditional classrooms. With removal, effective provisions must be made for the educational needs of at-risk students through the implementation of innovative alternative schools, as well as alternative teaching strategies (Quinn et al, 2006). The expectations and accountability measures for academic achievement for now appears to be here to stay. Is therefore, crucial to discover how alternative education

schools can manage the dual focus: of behavior and academic success for all students, no matter what type of program, for all students, and whether students have disabilities.

- A study to determine student placement - Institutional Pathology is a dominant theory of at-riskness that suggested students may become at-risk due to institutional insufficiencies (Sagor & Cox, 2004). When individuals or groups consistently receive differential treatment by social institutions one should expect to see them behave differently. This theory suggests that a large number of children receive improper or inappropriate treatment by the institutions where they spend much of their time. School is one of the most significant institutions that has the most impact on youth. Soleil (1999) stated that the separation of alternative schools from traditional schools can also result in unintentional segregation of students who traditionally experience greater risk (e.g., minority students, poor students, students with disabilities). Additionally, in-school personnel often fail to address serious concerns with the existing educational programs that result in student alienation.

Concluding Remark

This qualitative study examined the students' perceptions of the alternative school, allowing them to have a voice through the use of interviews, which ultimately gave them an opportunity to report their perceptions of school culture related rules, teachers, curriculum, and school membership. A successful alternative school can contribute to society by providing the necessary tools that will assist at-risk students in

becoming successful, productive citizens. Therefore it is anticipated that the finding from this study will contribute favorably to society, teachers, counselors, administrators and parents.

Creating a caring, non-authoritarian learning environment and having supervising adults who are sympathetic to the needs of the students are likely the keys to the success of the students (Quinn et al., 2006). The students who attend Bowman Alternative School disserve no less.

This research study has been of great interest to me. The implications and recommendations for additional research has peaked an even stronger desire to help improve the alternative program in the Bowman School District. Hopefully, some changes will be implemented to improve the current program to assist more students in learning and achieving their graduation.

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APPENDIX A

TINA SABRINA HERRINGTON'S RESUME

TINA SABRINA HERRINGTON

tsh107@msstate.edu

EDUCATION

B.A. Liberal Arts, Sociology, 2001, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS
M.A.T. Elementary Education, 2003, Mississippi Valley State, Itta Bena, MS,
ED.S, Educational Leadership, 2005, Jackson State University, Jackson, MS
Ph.D. Educational Leadership, enrolled at Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS
     anticipated date of completion, May 2012

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

BOWMAN SCHOOL DISTRICT, Bowman, MS   2011 – Present
Assistant Principal – Bowman Middle School
Assist principal with making sure teachers are implementing lessons pertaining to the Mississippi Curriculum Framework. Scope of position includes: conducting teacher evaluations, share in decision making, helping to control and minimize student behavior problems, attending workshops, collaborate with alternative school to make sure students are receiving required books and materials, conference with parents regarding student behavior problems, chair of BMS Health Committee, coordinate with tier instructors and teachers regarding setting students on appropriate behavioral plans before alt. placement, attending ballgames and other school functions, and other duties deemed necessary by superintendent or principal

MISSISSIPPI CENTER OF EDUCATION INNOVATION (MCEI),
Jackson, MS
Professional Workshop Developer   January 2010 - Present
Planning professional development including: content, activities, sequence of professional development, determining topics, and delivery of professional development to middle grade teachers in the Delta Promise District.

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BOWMAN SCHOOL DISTRICT, Bowman, MS   2006 - 2011
Teacher – Alternative School (7th - 12th English) (GED English)

Prepare and implement lessons pertaining to the Mississippi Curriculum Framework for those students that have problems in the traditional school setting. Scope of position includes: prepare lesson plans, teach lessons for mastery, exhibit great classroom discipline skills, share in decision making, promote school values by helping to maintain a safe, clean, respectful and fair learning environment, assist principal with disciplinary actions, acts as a lead teacher in assuring curriculum needs are met.

⇒ Modified curriculum for special needs students to have a fair, positive classroom experience.
⇒ Helped to increase seventh and eighth grade MCT English test scores by talking, teaching and implementing lessons pertaining to the Mississippi Curriculum.
⇒ Minimized disciplined by giving expectations and showing respect
⇒ Appointed by Principal to be a teacher's mentor.
⇒ Appointed by Principal to be an example for great classroom discipline skills.
⇒ Established a great relationship with the students, colleagues, administrators, and community.
⇒ Assisted the Principal in the office on several occasions to render all duties asked of me.

BOWMAN SCHOOL DISTRICT, Bowman, MS
2004-2006
Teacher – Middle (6 Math 2004-2005) - (6 Language Arts 2005-2006)
⇒ Modified curriculum for special needs students to have a fair, positive classroom experience.
⇒ Extended work hours to aid students that desired and needed extra help.
⇒ Increased reading skills of students by working with them through conference hours and introducing them to a variety of resources.
⇒ Established a great relationship with the students, colleagues, administrators, and community.

CLARKSDALE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DISTRICT, Clarksdale, MS
2002-2004
Teacher – Elementary (4th grade)
⇒ Modified curriculum for special needs students to have a fair, positive classroom experience.
⇒ Extended work hours to aid students that desired and needed extra help.
⇒ Increased reading skills of students by working with them through conference hours and introducing them to a variety of resources.
⇒ Students scored the highest on MCT Test in Language Arts out of 4th grade classes.
⇒ Established a great relationship with the students, colleagues, administrators, and community.

COAHOMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE, Clarksdale, MS
2002-2004
Adult GED Instructor

Increased reading and social skills of inmates to help them succeed
Taught female jail inmates to successfully pass the GED Test

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Classroom Management
Special Needs Education (Inclusion)
Leadership Skills
Student-Centered Learning
Participate of the University of Mississippi Summer Reading Institute (2009)
COMPUTER SKILLS

Microsoft Windows, Power Point, Word, Internet, Email

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Member, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., University of MS – 13 years
Member, Black Student Union Executive Board, University of Mississippi - 2 years
Member, Phi Delta Kappa National Educational Honor Fraternity, Jackson State University – 5 years
Member, Superintendent's Advisory Committee, Bowman School District – 2 years
Member, Partners in Education Coordinator, Bowman School District – 3 years
Member, HOPE Program, Bowman School District – 2 years
Member, Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Improvement Committee, Bowman School District – 1 year
Member, Youth Director for the Abundant Life Church (locally), Bowman, MS – 3 years
Member, Assistant Youth Director for the Abundant Life Church (nationally) – 1 year
Mentor, Youth in the Community, Bowman, MS – 8 years

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 19, 2010

Tina Herrington
136 Lincoln Road
Grenada, MS 38901

RE: IRB Study #09-289: Student Perception of the Alternative School

Dear Mrs. Herrington:

The above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 3/19/2010 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The IRB reserves the right, at any time during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Please note that the MSU IRB is in the process of seeking accreditation for our human subjects protection program. As a result of these efforts, you will likely notice many changes in the IRB's policies and procedures in the coming months. These changes will be posted online at http://www.orc.msstate.edu/human/aahrpp.php. The first of these changes is the implementation of an approval stamp for consent forms. The approval stamp will assist in ensuring the IRB approved version of the consent form is used in the actual conduct of research. You must use copies of the stamped consent form for obtaining consent from participants.

Please refer to your IRB number (#09-289) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at cwilliams@research.msstate.edu or call 662-325-5220.

Sincerely,

[For use with electronic submissions]

Christine Williams
IRB Compliance Administrator

cc: Dwight Hare (Advisor)

APPENDIX C

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Appendix C

Student Demographic Sheet

Name_____   Age_____

Gender_____   Ethnicity_____

School_____   Grade _____

Number of Siblings_____

APPENDIX D

PARENT DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Appendix D

Parent Demographic Sheet

Name_____ Age_____

Gender_____ Ethnicity_____

Highest Grade Completed _____

Number of Children_____

APPENDIX E

TEACHER DEMOGRAHIC SHEET

Appendix E

Teacher Demographic Sheet

Name_____   Age_____

Gender_____   Ethnicity_____

Total Years of Teaching at Alternative School _____

Total Years of Teaching Experience_____

Grade and Subject Area Teaching_____

Highest Educational Level Completed_____

APPENDIX F

ADMINISTRATOR DEMOGRAHIC SHEET

Appendix F

Administrator Demographic Sheet

Name_____   Age_____

Gender_____   Ethnicity_____

Total Years as Administrator of Alternative School _____

Total Years of Teaching/Administrative Experience_____

Highest Educational Level Completed_____