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A survey of curriculum methods in East and Middle Tennessee alternative education programs

Margaret Abbott-Weaver

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Margaret Abbott-Weaver entitled "A survey of curriculum methods in East and Middle Tennessee alternative education programs." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Education.

W. Jean Schindler, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Sherry Mee Bell, Robert A. O'Conner

Accepted for the Council:


Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

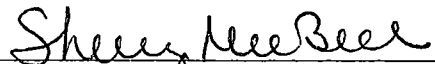
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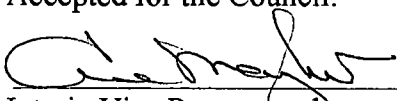

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A SURVEY OF CURRICULUM METHODS
IN EAST AND MIDDLE TENNESSEE
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Margaret Abbott-Weaver
May 2001

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my sister in law

Graciela Zapeta Abbott.

Her dedication to children will always inspire me;

and to my husband

Jerry Weaver.

Thank you for your support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation for the professors on my committee, Jean Schindler, Robert O'Connor, and Sherry Bell for their constructive criticism, help, and encouragement. Many thanks also to the people who took the time to fill out and return the surveys I sent them. Lastly I would also like to express my gratitude to my family and friends for their support and encouragement. It takes more than one person to write a thesis.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis alternative programs in East and Middle Tennessee were examined for the rate of student recidivism, and teachers' perceptions of these programs are discussed. Specifically, teachers' perceptions were examined in connection with student recidivism rates in these programs. Data were gathered from surveys sent to twenty-four schools in East and Middle Tennessee. Survey respondents were divided into two groups: those who responded that recidivism in their school was 0 to 20% and those who described it as higher. The two groups' answers to questions about curriculum and instruction were examined for differences and similarities and discussed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	4
III. METHODS.....	11
IV. RESULTS.....	13
V. DISCUSSION.....	24
REFERENCES.....	31
APPENDIX.....	34
VITA.....	37

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1. Class size in low and high recidivism groups.....	16
2. The curriculum offered allows students to move through work at a speed equal with their abilities.....	17
3. The curriculum offered allows students to progress upon a demonstration of mastery of the materials.....	17
4. Teaching independent living skills, social skills, and vocational skills is an important part of the curriculum.....	19
5. The program integrates academic and vocational instruction.....	19
6. Classroom environment is adapted to meet students' need.....	21
7. As part of the curriculum students have the opportunity to work through problems with others within a group setting.....	22
8. Community involvement is emphasized as part of the curriculum.....	22
9. As part of the curriculum we work on setting behavioral goals with the students, and help them monitor their own progress.....	23

Chapter I

Introduction

Violence in our schools has become more wide spread, and more drastic. In 1999 there were at least four well publicized incidents of murder and attempted murder in our nation's schools. But acts of unpublicized violence happen every day in our schools. The violence may be emotional, physical, and frequently both. No child is guaranteed safety from it. According to the Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide, published on The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) web page that eighty-two percent of school districts surveyed by the National School Boards Association reported increasing violence within their schools during the past five years (1996). In order for our schools to provide a safer environment for our children, legislation has been passed that demands the removal of dangerous and disruptive students. In the past removal had been handled through expulsions and suspensions. However, when students are expelled or suspended from school without any interventions, they usually do not return any less dangerous or disruptive. Generally they are also behind in their education. Research has linked suspension / expulsion and students later dropping out of school (Kronick, 1997). The results are costly to the students personally and to us as a society. Whalen (1985, p.107) notes "...alternative high school seems to be the most promising choice for educators attempting to reduce the dropout rate." In order to provide educational

and other services to students who need to be removed from their regular school setting, many school systems are setting up alternative schools and programs.

Definition of Terms

1. Alternative schools are defined as schools which are part of the public system, and that provide schooling for students who have been suspended or expelled from the regular school program.
2. Curriculum is defined as a preplanned series of educational goals and experiences that are academically, behaviorally, and socially oriented.
3. At-risk students are defined as those students who present discipline problems, are considered out of control, and may be behind academically. They are frequently a danger to themselves or others. At-risk students tend to come "from a low socioeconomic background which may include various forms of family stress or instability" (Whelage, Rutter,& Turnbaugh, 1987, p.70).
4. Co-teaching is defined as teachers working together cooperatively in the classroom at the same time; it is teaching jointly with another.
5. Recidivism is defined as repeated placement in the alternative school, when a student who returns to his or her home school must be placed back in the alternative school.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to 1) examine recidivism rates in Eastern and Middle Tennessee alternative schools and 2) investigate how teachers perceive the programs (i.e. their perception of what works, and what

doesn't).

Limitations of Study

Information for this study was limited to information received from surveys sent to alternative schools in East and Middle Tennessee. The survey questions were forced choice and Likert scale based, but information from the survey is limited to perceptions of the respondents. Since participation was voluntary, the responses may not truly reflect the range of the surveyed population. To further develop this theme students who are in the program and those who have left the program should be interviewed to assess their views of the program's impact on them.

Research Questions

1. What is the rate of recidivism in alternative schools in East and Middle Tennessee?
2. What are the perceived differences in curriculum and instruction characteristics in these alternative schools with high versus low recidivism rates?

Summary

Alternative schools may provide a solution to the problem of what to do with students who do not succeed in the typical school system. They may provide a way to educate these students to become productive members of society, not a drain on it. The focus of this study will examine how alternative schools in East and Middle Tennessee format and present their curriculum in hopes of furthering understanding of ways in which we can assist future at-risk students.

Chapter II

Literature Review

This review of literature examines 1) characteristics of successful alternative schools, 2) characteristics of students in alternative schools, and 3) issues pertaining to curriculum used in alternative schools.

Characteristics of successful alternative schools

“Raywid (1994) notes that “ two enduring consistencies have characterized alternative schools from the start: they have been designed to respond to a group that appears not to be optimally serviced by the regular program, and consequently they have represented varying degrees of departure from standard school organization, programs, and environments” ” (Lange & Sletten, 1995, p.3).

Tennessee Law defines an alternative school as a short term intervention program designed to develop academic and behavioral skills for students who have been suspended or expelled from the regular school program. (Statutory Authority T.C.A. 49-6-3402) Listed in Creating Safe and Drug free Schools: An Action Guide (Alternative Education Programs for Expelled Students) are nine components that describe effective alternative education programs (here after called AEP) :

1. Lower student to staff ratio.
2. Strong and stable leadership.
3. Highly trained and carefully selected staff.

4. A vision and set of objectives for the program that are shared by all staff and integrated into how staff and administrators interact with the program.
5. District wide support of program.
6. Innovative presentation of instructional materials with an emphasis on real-life learning.
7. Working relations with all parts of the school system and with other collaborating agencies that provide critical services to youth.
8. Linkages between schools and workplaces.
9. Intensive counseling and monitoring.

All descriptions of AEPs agree that the classes are smaller of necessity, and student / teacher relationships are more developed. "Small size is crucial for several reasons. Face-to-face relationships on a continuing basis are necessary if teachers are to communicate the sense of caring that students perceive as absent in the regular high school....Small numbers allow teachers to both personalize, and individualize their instructional efforts." (Whelage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1987)

Teachers have both the time and the personal knowledge of their students to recognize when they are having academic or personal problems. This helps them to work problems out before students lose control and feel their only alternative is aggression.

Instruction varies from school to school, and indeed from class to class, depending on the teachers and the students. "In addition to academics, these schools often offer individual and group counseling by a clinical psychologist, drug

counseling and treatment if needed, and family therapy. Some also provide job training, employment assistance, and job counseling” (CEC Today, 1998,p.5).

Ten predominant areas relevant to successful programs are identified by Barton (1998, p.52). These are then organized into three major categories. The categories, and areas in each, are as follows:

1. Culture related characteristics: Distinctive, nontraditional environment, positive community relationships and small school size.
2. Administrative related characteristics: Student centered curriculum, strong instructional leadership with consistent management, regular and predictable funding.
3. Student related characteristics: Absence of competition, mindset of students, choice to attend, and student to teacher relationships.

Characteristics of students in alternative schools

Students in AEPs are, or have been, at risk in one way or another. As quoted earlier, many of these students run the risk of becoming drop-outs. A student may be placed in an AEP because of excessive disruptive behavior, bringing weapons to school, or for using or selling drugs. In the literature it was found that there are varying definitions of the types of students in AEPs. “ The picture we have of the at-risk student is that of a young person who comes from a low socioeconomic background which may include various forms of family stress or instability” (Whelage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1987,p71). Many of these students have been identifiably at-risk since first entering the school system as very young

children. Each year they are passed on until their behavior becomes too disruptive to be ignored. They often fall behind academically, drop out, or are expelled or suspended from conventional high schools. The percentage of students with disabilities in alternative schools is fairly small, about 15 to 20%. Of students identified as disabled, most either have learning disabilities or are emotionally disturbed (ED). Frequently, however, many students have emotional problems but have not been labeled as ED. Conversely, many students who have been placed in AEPs have gifts and talents that are overshadowed by their behavior. (CEC Today, 1998)

One common thread runs through the descriptions of the students found in AEPs. They all fall into the category of children who in one way or another do not fit into the regular, or conventional school setting. Research does not indicate factors which do justice to the complexity of troubled students. Many of the traits that we view negatively are often strengths that have enabled them to survive in difficult situations. Too often we describe troubled children by discussing what they are doing wrong rather than appreciating all they have done right, given a difficult situation. The job of an alternative school, its teachers and its curriculum is to help these students find a way to use their strengths to become positive contributors to their community, and in doing so find their place in that community.

Curriculum

The term curriculum can be defined in many ways. It can be defined as “a plan of action or a written document that includes strategies for achieving desired goals

or ends or it can be defined as a plan for providing sets of learning opportunities for persons to be educated. It can also be said to be dealing with the experiences of the learner” (Ornstien & Hunkins, 1993 , p.9). Simmons and Kameenui (1996, p5) describe curriculum design as “the blueprint for instruction that carries significant potential for students with diverse learning needs”. For the purpose of this study curriculum is defined as a preplanned series of educational goals and experiences that are academically, socially, and behaviorally oriented.

There appears to be consensus in the research that curriculum and teaching in an AEP need to be substantially different from that in the regular school.

“Individualization, clear objectives, prompt feedback, concrete evidence of progress, and an active role for students are some of the dominant features” (Wehlange, Rutter, and Turnbaugh, 1987, p72). “The typical school curriculum isolates students. They are placed in isolated, competitive relationships by the lock-step order and grading practices” (Kronick & Hargis, 1990 , p54). AEPs should embrace teaching methods and curriculum that are not found in traditional school settings. They should offer a wider range of educational opportunities, and include the student as an active participant in plans for his education. As defined by the U.S. Department of Justice alternative schools should include the use of program methods and materials that are relevant to students’ needs and interests and that lead to students’ success. (Young , 1990)

The most important aspect of an AEP’s curriculum is that it should be student centered. “ The teacher must become a facilitator of student success. Consequently,

the student not the teacher is the central character in the classroom” (Kronick & Hargis, 1990, p.38). “We must focus on those elements of structure and curriculum that provide the greatest opportunities for the success of at-risk students....clear academic and behavioral standards should be set and adhered to” (DeBlois, 1989, p.7). DeBlois advocates “...the academic foundation on which an alternative school should be based is mastery learning in a continuous progress curriculum that allows students to move ahead in grade level as quickly as they are able” (1989, p.10). This would be especially important for those students who are behind one or more grade levels.

If the curriculum is to be student centered, it needs to address the emotional issues and other conflicts in the students’ lives because these issues frequently bar the way to academic progress. “Characteristics of potential dropouts and issues in students’ lives need to be seriously considered within the structure of an alternative program, and curriculum offering should be geared towards meeting these needs for the students” (Barton, 1998, p.7). Cambone (1995) urges educators to look to the positive characteristics of troubled and at-risk students. DeBlois argues “The purpose of the curriculum should be to draw out these multiple intelligences rather than concentrate on repetitive remediation through methods the students have already rejected” (1989, p.9).

Summary

In summary, an alternative school curriculum should be three things: nontraditional, student centered, and focusing on the students’ strengths. It should

work toward making the students feel as if they can contribute to the community in which they live.

Research about curriculum in AEPs has not been abundant; however in recent years more has been published. In his book Teaching Troubled Children , Cambone notes “ although the research literature provides numerous descriptions of individual student cases, it lacks thorough description of actual classroom practices used to educate them” (1994, p.5.) DeBloise indicates “ ...less has been written on the specific curricula employed by alternative programs for at-risk students, despite the fact that it is with the curriculum that the students ultimately succeed or fail” (1989, p.6).

This study’s main focus was to determine what kind of curriculum is being used in AEPs in East and Middle Tennessee, what educators believe is good about what they are doing, and what they believe needs to be done to improve it. The more we know about how teachers in AEPs are making positive strides in their students’ lives, the better equipped we will be to work with future at-risk students.

Chapter II

Methods

The intent of this study was to survey selected alternative education programs in Middle and Eastern Tennessee and gather quantitative and qualitative data about the characteristics of their curricula and their rates of recidivism. A census survey was used to gather data, at one point in time, from volunteer respondents (teachers and administrators) in East and Middle Tennessee. The survey contained questions about demographics and teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the curricula used in their programs and the way it is formatted and implemented.

The survey specifically addressed two research questions:

- 1) What is the rate of recidivism in alternative schools in Middle and East Tennessee?
- 2) What are the perceived differences in curriculum and instruction characteristics in these alternative schools with low versus high recidivism?

The surveys were mailed to principals of Alternative Schools with a letter asking them to distribute them to teachers in their schools. With the surveys were included stamped envelopes, addressed with the home address of the primary researcher.

The survey instrument was broken into two parts: 1) Demographics, and 2) Curriculum Issues. Survey questions were based on questions brought up from the Literature Review. The questions were reviewed by a panel of experts. The survey consisted of forced choice and 5 point Likert-type scale questions. The

responses were then divided into two groups. This was done by averaging the answers received on perceived recidivism and finding the mean. Those who answered that they perceived their recidivism rate as below 20% were put in the low recidivism group. Those who answered that they perceived their recidivism rate as higher than 20% were put in the high recidivism group. The answers each group gave were then averaged and discussed.

In this chapter the methodology of the study was presented. In chapter four the analysis of data will be presented.

Chapter IV

Results

In the previous chapter methodology was discussed. In this chapter results of the data will be presented and described. Data were presented from the surveys returned from the alternative schools to which they were sent. Of the twenty four schools surveyed, nineteen responded at a return rate of 83%. From the nineteen schools which responded 33 of the 58 surveys were complete. Data were received from teachers and administrators. Only data from teachers were analyzed since so few administrators responded they would have been under represented in the total. Of the 33 complete surveys thirty were completed by teachers. Demographics on those 30 analyzed surveys were as follows:

Experience

Of the thirty responding teachers, twenty-four (80%) had taught in their positions for five or less years. Five (17%) had taught in their positions for six to ten years. One (3%) had taught in their positions for sixteen to twenty years.

Training

Of the thirty respondents, six (20%) had degrees in special education. Three (10%) had special education training. Three (10%) had special education certification, and eleven (37%) had training for working with at-risk students. Five (17%) had degrees in education but no training relating to special education or at-risk students.

Analysis of Data

For the purposes of this study only responses from the survey on class size and responses concerning curriculum issues were analyzed to examine differences based on the rate recidivism in alternative schools in East and Middle Tennessee.

Responses were divided into high and low groups, based on reported rates of recidivism: those who answered that recidivism in their programs fell at or below twenty percent (the low group) and those who answered that recidivism in their programs was above twenty percent (the high group). The answers from these groups were then compared to look at differences in the way the curriculum was perceived to be used in these programs. The range of recidivism available for the respondents to select was 0 to 20%, 20% to 40%, 40% to 60%, 60% to 80%, and 80% to 100%.

Of the thirty respondents, seventeen (57%) answered that the rate of recidivism in their school fell between 0 and 20%. Seven (23%) answered that it fell between 20 and 40 %. Six (20%) answered that it fell between 40 and 60%. None answered that it fell between 60 and 100%. The seventeen respondents who answered that recidivism was between 0 and 20% were put in the low recidivism group. Those who responded that recidivism was above 20% were put in the high recidivism group.

The last question under the demographics heading pertained to class size. Of the respondents in the low group none had one to five students in the class. Five (29%) had six to ten students in the class. Twelve had ten to fifteen (71%) in the class. No one answered that they had more than fifteen students in their class. Of the respondents in the high group none had one to five students in the class. Four (31%)

had six to ten students, eight (61%) had ten to fifteen students, and one (8%) had above twenty students. (See Figure 1.) The mean for the low recidivism group was 13.5 students per class. The mean for the high recidivism group was slightly more at 14.2 students per class.

Questions 2 through 9 were answered on a Likert based 1 to 5 scale, 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree.

Question 2: The curriculum offered allows students to move through work at a speed equal with their abilities.

Of the seventeen respondents in the low recidivism group one (5.8%) answered strongly disagree, one (5.8%) answered disagree, eleven (64.7%) agreed, and four (23.5%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.9, which was in the range of agree. Of the thirteen respondents in the high recidivism group one (7.6%) answered disagree, one (7.6%) marked neutral, nine (69.2%) agreed, and two (15.3%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.9, which was in the range of agree. (See Figure 2.)

Question 3: The curriculum offered allows students to progress upon a demonstration of mastery of the materials.

Of the seventeen respondents in the low recidivism group, one (5.8%) strongly disagreed, three (17.6%) answered neutral, eleven (64.7%) agreed, and 2 (11.7%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.8, which was in the range of agree.

Of the thirteen respondents in the high recidivism group, one (7.6%) disagreed, three (23%) answered neutral, six (46.1%) agreed, and three (23%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.8, which was in the range of agree. (See Figure 3.)

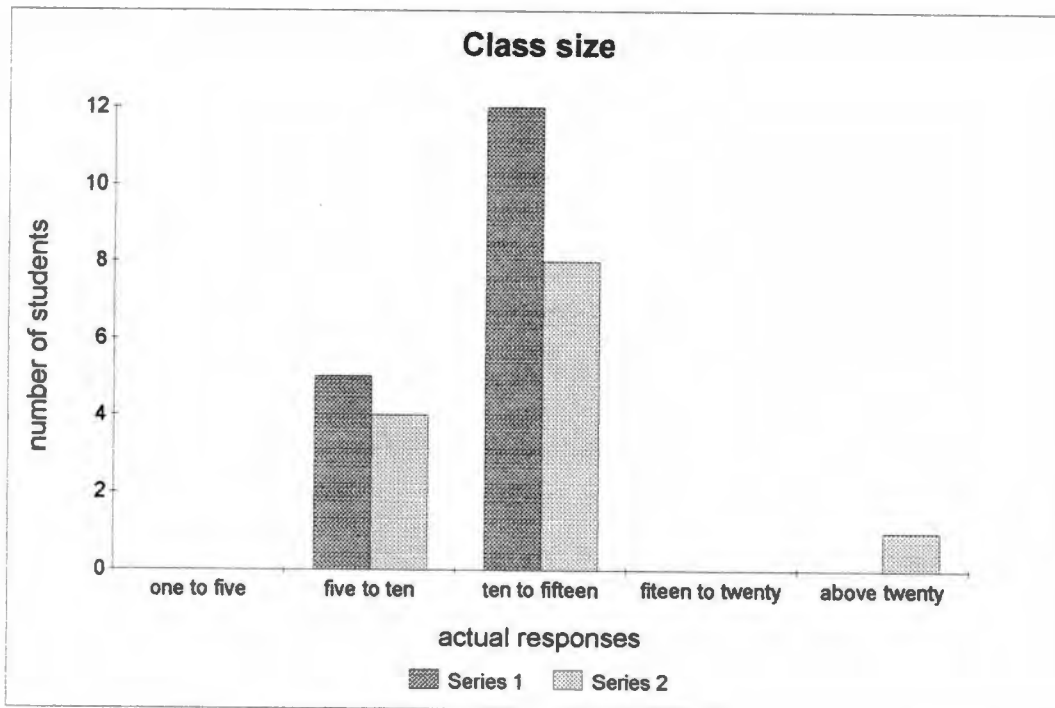


Figure 1. Class size
 series 1 = responses from the low recidivism group (seventeen respondents)
 series 2 = responses from the high recidivism group (thirteen respondents)

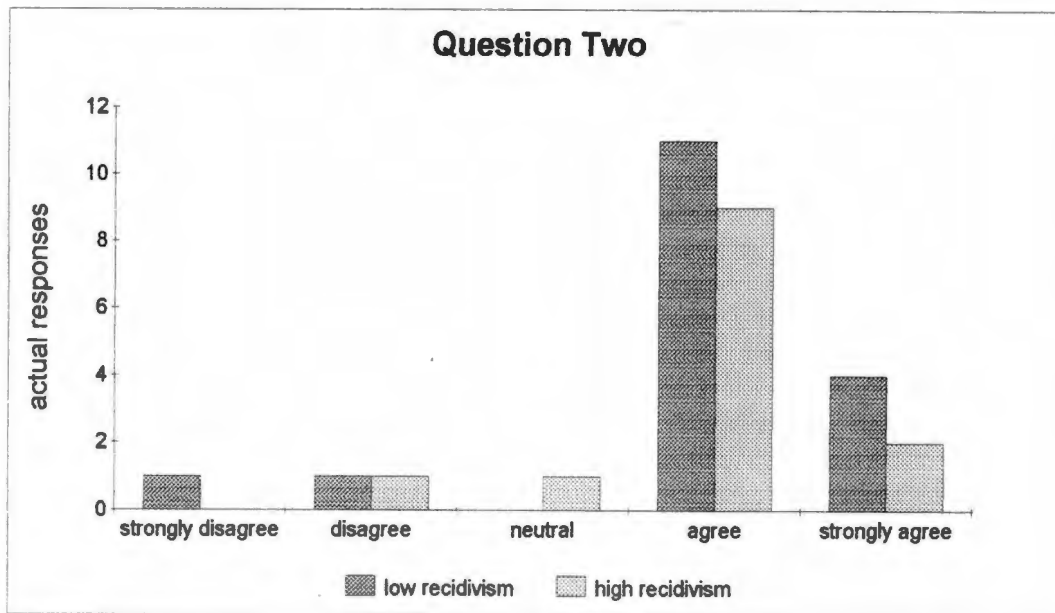


Figure 2. The curriculum offered allows students to move through work at a speed equal with their abilities.

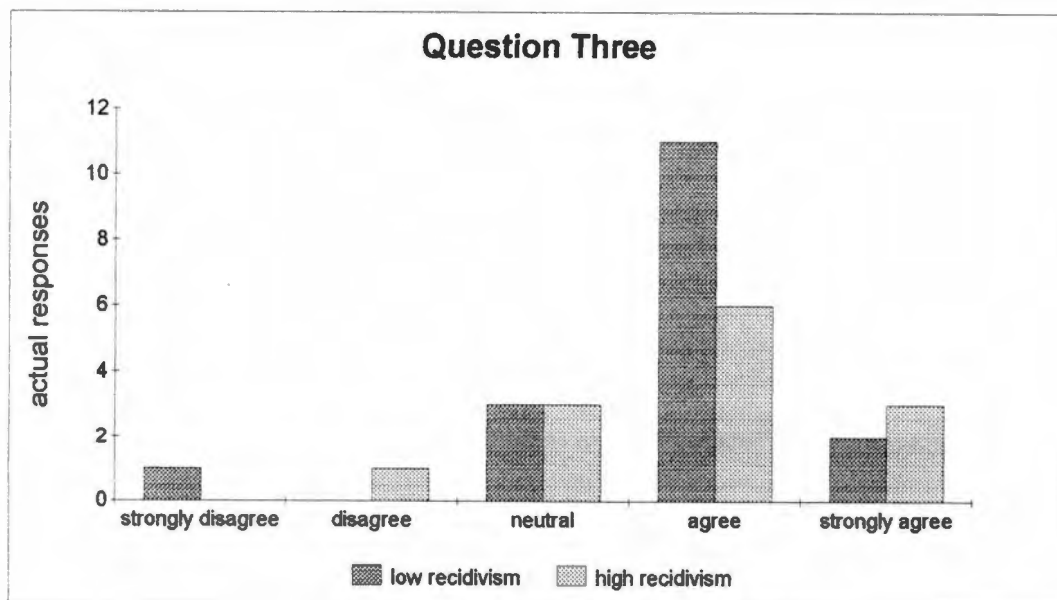


Figure 3. The curriculum offered allows students to progress upon a demonstration of mastery of the materials.

Question 4: Teaching independent living skills, social skills, and vocational skills is an important part of the curriculum.

Of the seventeen respondents in the low recidivism group two (11.7%) strongly disagreed, six (35.2%) disagreed, three (17.6%) answered neutral, three (17.6%) agreed, and three (17.6%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 2.9, which was in the range of neutral. Of the thirteen respondents in the high recidivism group, one (7.6%) strongly disagreed, two (15.3%) disagreed, three (23%) answered neutral, three (23%) agreed, and four (30.7%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.5, which was in the range of agree. (See Figure 4.)

Question 5: The program integrates academic and vocational instruction.

Of the seventeen respondents in the low recidivism group four (23.5%) strongly disagreed, three (17.6%) disagreed, five (29.4%) answered neutral, and five (29.4%) agreed. The mean answer was 2.6, which was in the range of neutral. Of the thirteen respondents in the high recidivism group four (30.7%) strongly disagreed, three (23%) disagreed, four (30.7%) answered neutral, one (7.6%) agreed, and one (7.6%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 2.4, which was in the range of neutral. (See Figure 5.)

Question 6: Classroom environment is adapted to meet students' needs.

Of the seventeen respondents in the low recidivism group two (11.7%) strongly disagreed, three (17.6%) answered neutral, nine (52.9%) agreed, and three (17.6%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.6, which was in the range of agree.

Of the thirteen respondents in the high recidivism group three (23%) answered

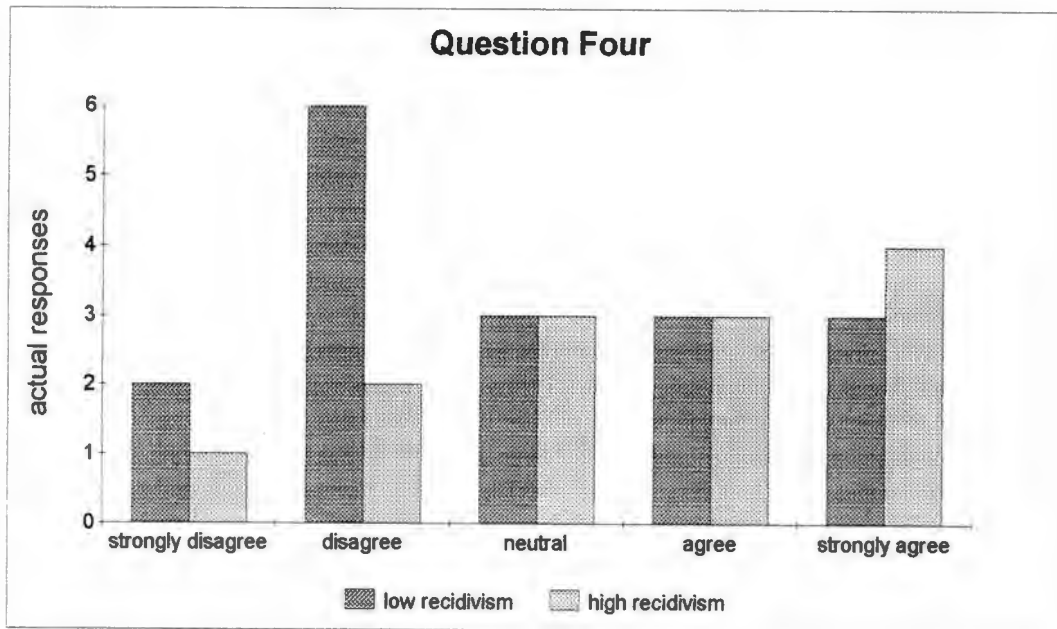


Figure 4. Teaching independent living skills, social skills, and vocational skills is an important part of the curriculum.

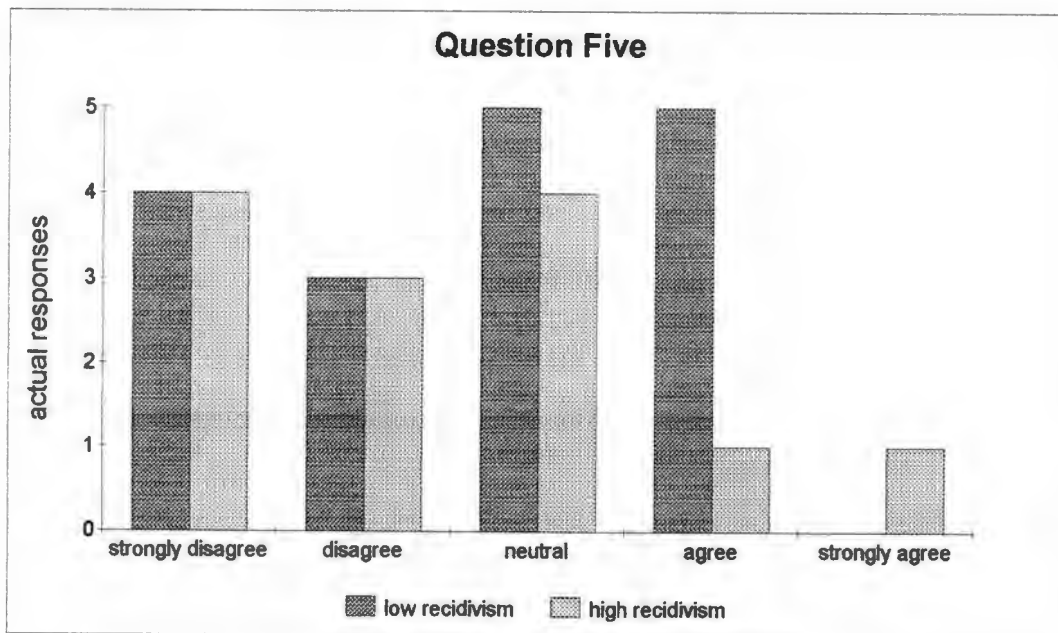


Figure 5. The program integrates academic and vocational instruction.

neutral, six (46.1%) agreed, and four (30.7%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 4.07, which was in the range of agree. (See Figure 6.)

Question 7: As part of the curriculum students have the opportunity to work through problems with others within a group setting.

Of the seventeen respondents in the low recidivism group two (11.7%) strongly disagreed, one (5.8%) disagreed, two (11.7%) answered neutral, seven (41.1%) agreed, and five (29.4%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.7 which was in the range of agree. Of the thirteen respondents in the high recidivism group five (38.4%) disagreed, three(23%)answered neutral, three (23%) agreed, and two (15.3%)0 strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.1, which was in the range of neutral. (See Figure 7.)

Question 8: Community involvement is emphasized as part of the curriculum.

Of the seventeen respondents in the low recidivism group one (5.8%) strongly disagreed, five (29.4%) disagreed, four (23.5%) answered neutral, five (29.4%) agreed, and two (11.7%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.1, which was in the range of neutral. Of the thirteen respondents in the high recidivism group two (15.3%) strongly disagreed, five (38.4%) disagreed, two (15.3%) answered neutral, four (30.7) agreed. The mean answer was 2.6, which was in the range of neutral. (See Figure 8.)

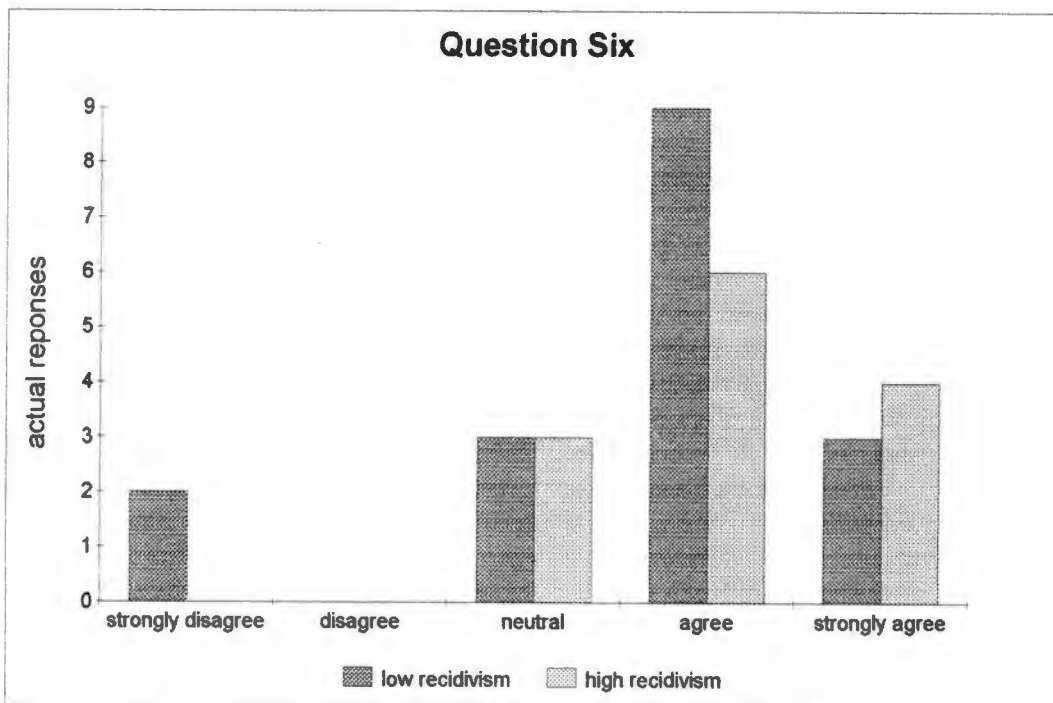


Figure 6. Classroom environment is adapted to meet students' needs.

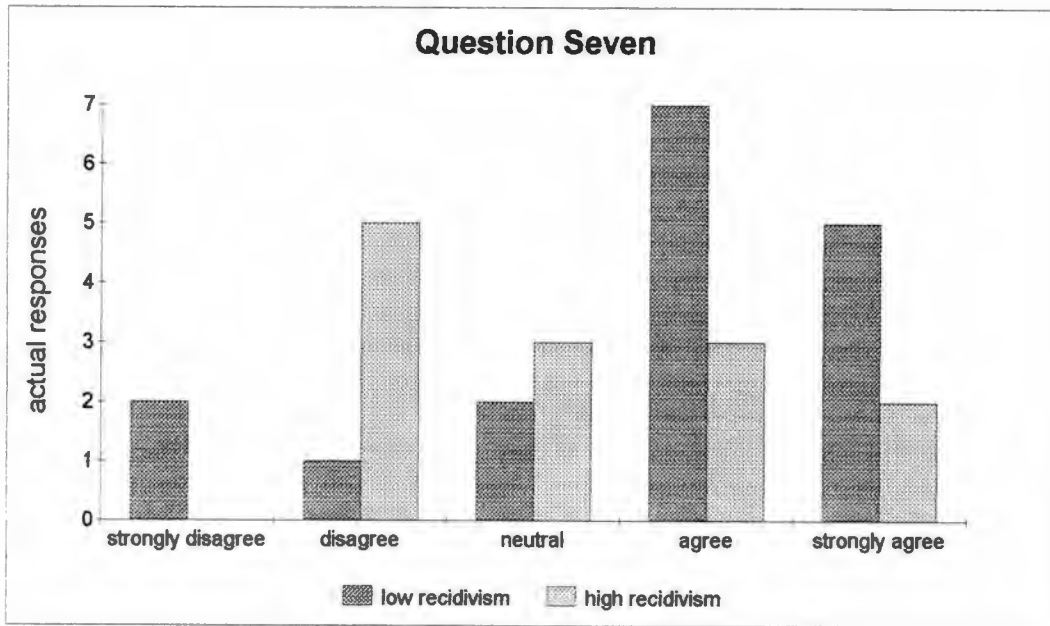


Figure 7. As part of the curriculum students have the opportunity to work through problems with others within a group setting.

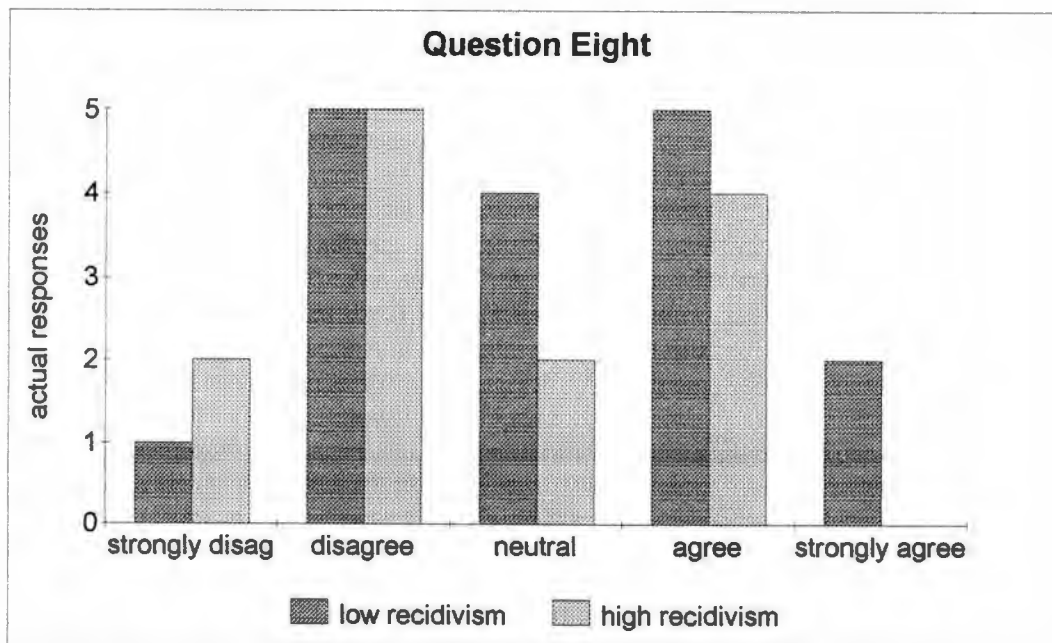


Figure 8. Community involvement is emphasized as part of the curriculum.

Question 9: As part of the curriculum we work on setting behavioral goals with the students, and help them to monitor their own progress.

Of the seventeen respondents in the low recidivism group one (5.8%) strongly disagreed, one (5.8%) disagreed, three (17.6%) answered neutral, seven (41.1%) agreed, and five (29.4%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.8, which was in the range of agree. Of the thirteen respondents in the high group six (46.1%) answered neutral, five (38.4%) agreed, and two (15.3%) strongly agreed. The mean answer was 3.6, which was in the range of agree. (See Figure 9.)

In this chapter the data gathered were broken down into two groups, those with low recidivism (0 to 20%) and those with high recidivism (above 20%) and described in relation to the questions on the survey. In chapter five findings and implications will be discussed.

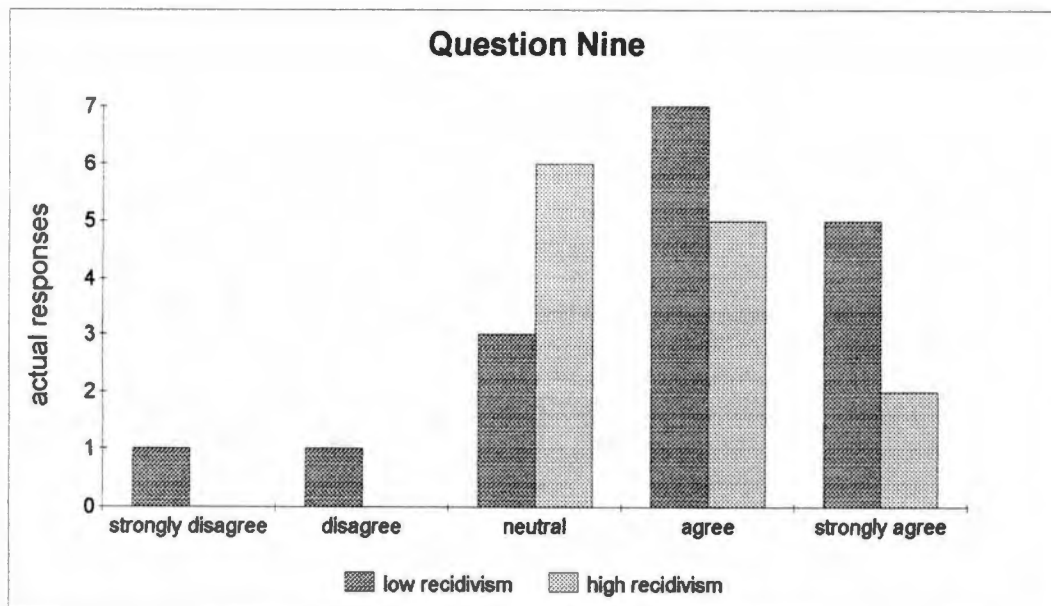


Figure 9. As part of the curriculum we work on setting behavioral goals with the students, and help them monitor their own progress.

Chapter VI

Discussion

In the previous chapter data were examined in relation to high and low recidivism as reported by surveyed teachers. Herein is a discussion of findings and implications concerning that data.

The issue of recidivism of students in alternative programs impacts both the alternative school and the regular school system. It is the job of the alternative school or program to prepare their students to re-enter society, be that their regular school system if at all possible, or mainstream society upon graduation. It is the job of the regular school within the system to make sure they are prepared to receive these students into their programs in a way that allows them to continue to succeed.

Fifty seven percent of the teachers and administrators who responded agreed that recidivism in their school was a low 0 to 20%. Forty-three percent believed that the recidivism level in their school was above 20%. The fifty-seven percent who responded that their recidivism rate was 0 to 20% were grouped as low recidivism. The forty-three percent who responded that the recidivism rate in their program was above 20% were grouped as high recidivism.

Some of the factors potentially effecting recidivism were class size, curriculum pace, adapting classroom environment to facilitate student success, working on behavioral goals and issues individually and within the group, community

involvement, and integrating academic, vocational, and social skills. The question of class size was under the heading of demographics. Teachers could choose from five answers: 1 to 5, 5 to 10, 10 to 15, 15 to 20, or over 20 students in the class. The mean number of students for all 30 respondents was 13.8. The mean for the low recidivism group was 13.5 students. The mean for the high recidivism group was 14.2 students.

Respondents from both groups closely corresponded on their agreement on question two: the curriculum offered allows students to move through their work at a speed equal with their abilities. Both groups also closely corresponded on their agreement on a related question, number three: the curriculum offered allows students to progress upon demonstration of mastery of the material. The research of literature supports this view. As quoted from DeBlois "the academic foundation on which an alternative school should be based is mastery learning in a continuous progress curriculum that allows students to move ahead in grade level as quickly as they are able." (1989, p.10.)

On question number four: teaching independent living skills, social skills, and vocational skills is an important part of the curriculum the two groups differed slightly. While the low recidivism group had a mean answer of neutral, the high recidivism group had a mean answer of agree. On question number five: the program integrates academic and vocational instruction, both groups' mean answer was neutral. Students may need to be evaluated individually to see if they would benefit from having independent living skills and vocational skills integrated into their curriculum plan, whether it would affect their success in their home school, and later

in their community.

On question six: classroom environment is adapted to meet students' needs both groups had a mean answer of agree. What makes alternative programs different from the regular school is the willingness of the teachers to be flexible and able to work with the many different needs of the students. To be able to feel that they fit in their classroom environment is one way that students can start to feel safe within the system. "The vast majority of effective alternative school teachers demonstrate real concern for the need of youth at risk, which helps to create and maintain the positive environment that these youth need to succeed." (Barr, 1995, p.128)

Mean answers differed on question seven: as part of the curriculum students have the opportunity to work through problems with others with in a group setting. The low recidivism group had a mean answer of agree and the high recidivism group had a mean answer of neutral. Working through problems with others in a group setting is a way to allow the students the opportunity to practice managing themselves. When students return to their home school, or mainstream society if they do not have the skills to control their behavior and resolve problems appropriately it is likely that they will be perceived as difficult at best and a threat to mainstream society at worst. Without the ability to manage their own behavior they may actually be that. It is not the responsibility of the alternative school to manage the students' behavior, but to teach them how to manage it themselves. To further understand if this is an important factor in succeeding in society research could be done with students who have returned to their home school and succeeded, and students who have been

reintegrated into their home school and then had to be placed back into the alternative program. Research could also be done with students who had graduated from the alternative school into mainstream society and were considered successful versus those who had graduated and were not considered successful. Definitions for success would have to be researched also.

For question eight: community involvement is emphasized as part of the curriculum, both groups mean answer was neutral. Depending on the community there can be many helpful resources for the alternative school. It would be helpful to research how much impact community involvement could have on an alternative program. Could students become more successful if they became more involved and familiar with their community?

The two groups answered similarly on question nine: as part of the curriculum we work on setting behavioral goals with the students, and help them monitor their own progress. This question is similar to question seven as it deals with teaching students to manage their own behavior. When students are able to have a begin to be successful in controlling themselves their self-esteem will increase. With the increase in self-esteem Barr indicates that "significant improvement in academics can occur" (1995, p.127).

Alternative schools frequently succeed with students who have had difficulty in the regular school system simply because they are different from that system. Classes in alternative schools are smaller and geared toward the individual's needs. Smaller classes enable teachers to interact more closely with the students. Individual

attention allows the student to progress at a rate that is more comfortable and less stressful. The area of teaching students how to reintegrate themselves into mainstream society should never be neglected. When the students have learned how to control their behavior in the alternative school it is time to start helping them to learn how to control their behavior in the more stressful environment of their regular school. Conversely it is the responsibility of the regular school system to figure out a way for these students to fit in in a positive and productive way. It is the responsibility of both the alternative school and the regular school to work together to insure the continued success of the newly reintegrated student. Communication between the two programs' administrators, teachers, and counselors is a must! These students frequently bring their bad reputation back to their home school with them and they need help getting the people around them to view them in a more positive light. It is easy to slip back into bad habits if that is what is seen to be expected.

The rates of recidivism as described by the respondents were much lower than expected when this study was begun. The majority of respondents answered that the rate of recidivism in their programs was between 0 and 20%. When the data were examined for possible differences, not many were found. Both groups' answers were either similar or close.

Implications for Teacher Education

Prospective teachers need to be taught alternative ways to present curriculum in order to meet the varying need of the students. Teaching in alternative programs can

challenge even the most experienced teacher. Research needs to be done on how exceptional teachers deal effectively with these students and this knowledge shared with other teachers who are being trained to work in alternative programs in East and Middle Tennessee.

Implications for Administration

Funding should be continued for alternative programs as they are an effective way of dealing positively with at-risk youth. In particular funding should be sought for more training in working with at-risk youth for the staff in alternative schools and programs in East and Middle Tennessee.

Implications for Further Research

As stated previously research should be done on how exceptional teachers deal effectively with the students in their classes. How do they work on teaching their students self esteem and self control? Research should also be done on communication between the alternative program and the schools to which their students return. Could effective communication have an impact on the returned students' success? Another area of research could be the interaction of alternative schools with the surrounding community. Does planned community interaction increase the chances for students' success in that community when they are mainstreamed back into it? Many of these questions could be addressed if research was done by following the students themselves when they reenter their home school and/ or graduate into mainstream society. What happens to these students? Do they return to the alternative program or are they able to succeed within their regular

school? What would be the definition of success? What about the students who graduate from the alternative school? How many of them are considered successful and what would be the definition of success for them? If the successful and non successful students could be interviewed their ideas about what worked and did not work for them could prove invaluable to the alternative classroom teacher.

Summary

In this chapter the finding from the surveys sent to alternative schools were discussed and, when differences were noted, analyzed for implications. That we have alternative schools and programs at all in East and Middle Tennessee may be considered a step in the right direction. The students in these programs “ challenge teachers with the unique problem of balancing the teaching of social, emotional, and behavioral goals with teaching academic goals” (Cambone, 1994, p.9). We need to continue looking at ways to help students become more productive members of society. Alternative schools are not a place for students to hide from the regular world, but neither are they a place for us to hide the students who are not fitting into the mainstream system. Rather alternative schools should be a safety net students can fall into when they lose their balance, a net they can walk away from when they have the skills and the confidence to try again.

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REFERENCES

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APPENDIX

Survey of curriculum methods in Alternative Schools/Programs

6. Classroom environment is adapted to meet students' needs.
1 2 3 4 5
7. As part of the curriculum students have the opportunity to work through problems with others within a group setting.
1 2 3 4 5
8. Community involvement is emphasized as part of the curriculum.
1 2 3 4 5
9. As part of the curriculum we work on setting behavioral goals with the students, and help them to monitor their own progress.
1 2 3 4 5

*Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your contribution is sincerely appreciated.*

- More questions were in the survey sent out to schools, but they did not meet the purpose of this study.

VITA

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