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Distinctive Instructional Strategies for High Risk Students at Westside Alternative School: A Case Study

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DISTINCTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

FOR HIGH RISK STUDENTS

AT WESTSIDE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL:

A CASE STUDY

A Field Project

Presented to the

Department of Educational Administration

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Specialist in Education

by

David Allen Fitzekam

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FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

There have been alternatives in American secondary
schools for years. In many communities parents have had a
choice among several types of programs in addition to the
local comprehensive high school. For example there have
been the choices of: church related high schools, private
college preparatory schools, public vocational schools,
and various evening school programs.

The contemporary concept of the public alternative
school first came to the attention of educators in the late
sixties with opening of the Parkway Program in Philadelphia,
Metro in Chicago, and the St. Paul Open School (Duke, 1978).
These programs were the result of planning by innovators such
as Clifford Brenner of Philadelphia. John Bremer explains
Brenner's vision as a school that would utilize the cultural
and commercial resources of the city and for all practical
purposes exist out among those resources rather than in a
school building (Bremer, 1971). It was Brenner's contention
that students had different learning styles which required
various approaches to instruction and new types of schools
to appeal to a broader spectrum of students.

Since the Parkway Program in 1969, alternatives of many types have been identified. There are open schools, schools without walls, schools within schools, learning centers, continuation schools, fundamental schools, magnet schools, and schools for high risk students. Over half of the current secondary alternative schools were designed to meet the specific needs of students with truancy and discipline problems (Raywid, 1982).

The growth of alternative schools in the past fifteen years has been remarkable. This growth can be traced by reviewing several national studies.

The National Consortium of Options in Public Education (1972) reported there were 464 public school alternatives with seventy-five percent of the schools in eight states. In the spring of 1974 an additional 120 schools were listed in the NCOPE Directory.

A survey by the National Alternative Schools Program at the University of Massachusettes (1974) reported that there were 1250 such schools and programs. The NASP Directory in 1977 listed more than 1300 alternative schools and programs.

The National School Boards Association (1976) survey revealed that twenty-eight percent of the nations school systems had alternatives in operation. Even more strik-ing was the fact that over two thirds of the nations

larger school districts had alternatives.

The most recent comprehensive survey identified 2500 public secondary alternative programs (Raywid,1982). Perhaps the most striking figure is the estimate made by that National Association of Secondary Principals (Curriculum Report, 1978). It estimates that there were more than 10,000 alternative schools and programs in operation.

As can be seen from these reports, alternatives experienced tremendous growth over a relatively short period of time. And based on results from Raywid's (1982) study, they were not short lived. A seventh was established before 1970, a third established between 1971 and 1975, forty-five percent between 1976 and 1980, and seven percent were new programs starting in 1981 or early 1982. Seven percent of 2500 is 175 new secondary alternatives a year. Raywid further points out that approximately half of the programs were at least six years old, suggesting durability and continued growth for public secondary alternatives.

Among current alternatives the popular organizational types according to Raywid (1982) are: the school as a separate program, thirty-eight percent; the school within a school, twenty percent; and, satellite or annex programs, nine percent. Raywid also reports that thirteen percent were identified as corrective or remedial

programs. Eight percent offered programs within the parent
school and three percent were cooperatively maintained by
several school districts.

By their very nature alternative programs strive
to reach their student populations by means different
from the traditional program. The overall goals are most
likely the same but distinct features in the approach to
structure, organization, and instructional strategies
differentiate them from the traditional high school.

Research involving teaching and learning style,
and the recognition of individual differences has been the
theoretical base upon which contemporary alternatives have
been founded (Parrett, 1981). Some recent literature
suggests that teaching practices in public alternative
schools are substantially different from those in con-
ventional schools (Barr and Burke, 1973).

One such alternative program designed to offer
students a different approach is Westside Alternative
School. Located at 9845 West Center Road, Omaha, Nebraska;
it has been a successful program with a student completion
rate of over seventy-five percent over the past eight years.

This school and its instructional practices was the
subject of this research paper. The following background
information on the school is essential to understanding
the remaining discussion.

In the fall of 1977 the Westside Community Schools
began a separate high school program for students not ex-
periencing success at Westside High School. It was the
result of a two year study to find a program to meet the
needs of a target population estimated to number about
125 students. Students in the target population were
characterized as having one or more of the following:

1. Overall pattern of failure in the regular
    school.

2   Inability to cope with a large impersonal
    school.

3. Inability to adjust to and take advantage
    of Westside's flexible schedule.

4. Unmotivated, lacking in self discipline.

5. Poor self-concept.

6. Problems related to drug abuse.

7. Unstable home situations.

8. Pregnancy and related problems associated
    with teenage parenthood.

A secondary consideration was the need to replace
Project Recovery, an evening program for those students
who had dropped out of school. This program enrolled
students in two classes meeting once a week in the
evening. Project Recovery which began in 1965, was no
longer considered to be a viable option. It worked well
for a senior dropout who needed only one or two classes
to complete graduation requirements. It did not very well
meet the need of those sophomore or junior students needing
to accumulate significant numbers of credits.

Westside Alternative School is modeled after exist-
ing programs in operation around the country at the time.
This model included the following features:

1. A separate facility.

2. A student teacher ratio of one to ten.

3. Individualized instruction in the basic
    academic areas of math, English, science,
    and social studies.

4. A half day in length.

5. Various Affective activities.

The school is staffed by five certified teachers, one
of whom serves as the teacher-leader and three aides. Support
is available from Westside High School counselors, deans, and
psychologists.

The Alternative School semester is divided into five
eighteen day grading periods. Courses are designed so that
each student is expected to earn one credit in each class
during a grading period. Progress reports are mailed home
each eighteen day period.

The school holds two separate sessions each day. The
morning session is from eight to eleven thirty and the
afternoon session is from twelve fifteen to three fifteen.
There is a maximum of forty-five students enrolled each
session. In addition to attending classes for a half day,
each student is expected to use the rest of the day for
vocational coursework, employment, or classes at Westside
High School.

The academic half day is divided into four forty minute classes. Between the second and third class there is a twenty minute supervised break.

Students at the school must meet the same graduation requirements as students at Westside High School. In addition to earning 120 credits, grades ten through twelve students must also pass the districts minimum competency examinations.

Most students are scheduled into four basic courses; English, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Some students may substitute one class for Work Experience, Crafts or Physical Education. All students are involved in a weekly development class.

PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to identify the instructional strategies used for high risk students at Westside Alternative School. These strategies were analyzed to determine the distinctive features so that the staff and other interested parties would have this knowledge also.

This case study was investigative in nature. The principles of ethnographic research were employed to observe, collect data, analyze, and make conclusions in regards to the purpose stated above.

The major objectives were to:

1. Identify routinely used instructional strategies employed by the Alternative School staff.

2. Analyze the various strategies used by the staff.

3. Describe those strategies focusing attention on distinctive features.

4. Provide the staff and others with a summary of the distinctive instructional strategies used at the Alternative School.

PROCEDURES

This case study called for the following steps:

1. A review of the literature to acquire a knowledge of what instructional strategies have been employed by others for high risk students.

2. Obtaining permission from the building administrator to observe and interview staff and students.

3. Develop a system of participant observation.

4. Develop a system to record observations.

5. Observe each teacher and the informal student break period.

6. Conduct student and teacher interviews.

7. Administer formal written teacher and student interviews.

8. Obtain and examine school documents pertaining to goals, course descriptions, and evaluation data such as summaries of school enrollment, credits earned, and attendance.

DEFINITIONS

Instructional Strategies: The variety of plans and/or methods employed by teachers to help students

achieve the learning outcomes of the course.

High Risk Students: A student who is a potential
dropout due to the presence of one or more com-
monly associated characteristics such as: Poor
attendance, failing grades, unmotivated, lacking
self-discipline, and disruptive or anti-social
behavior.

Alternative School: A school that offers students
an optional way to attain an education. Such a
school would recognize individual learning styles
and needs.

Traditional School: The customary approach used to
educate large numbers of students who are usually age
grouped into classes. Instruction is teacher centered
and block scheduled.

ASSUMPTIONS

The following basic assumptions were made:

1. The teaching staff at Westside Alternative
   School used specific instructional techniques
   designed for high risk students that could be
   observed and described.

2. The staff and students would respond to formal
   and informal interviews about teaching methods
   employed at the school.

3. A distinction could be made as to which features
   were unique to the alternative program.

LIMITATIONS

This research is limited to a study of the in-
structional strategies as one of many distinct features
of alternative schools. It is further limited to the
study of one suburban secondary alternative for high risk
students, Westside Alternative School, Omaha, Nebraska.

SIGNIFICANCE

The findings of this study will be beneficial to the staff at Westside Alternative School in analyzing and evaluating their instructional methods. Further, this study will aid any alternative school teacher in the development or refinement of instructional strategies.

It is also anticipated that the findings of this study will be useful to other school districts con-sidering the establishment of such programs for high risk students.

ORGANIZATION

Chapter I: Introduction.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature.

Chapter III: Procedures.

Chapter IV: Findings.

Chapter V: Summary and Conculsions.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A review of the literature revealed a wealth of information written on contemporary alternative education. This body of literature can be divided into two categories: 1. Sources that are conceptual or philosophical in nature. 2. Those that are descriptive of specific programs and practices.

Each of these categories relates to the topic of this research, namely, distinctive instructional strategies. The following review is a sampling of the literature in each category.

PHILOSOPHY

The nature or concept of alternative programs has been defined with consistency over the past fifteen years. This is evidenced by the writings of the most notable thinkers and advocates of the movement. One of the early contemporary writers on the topic is John Bremer. Bremer, first administrator of the Parkway Program in Philadelphia, asked the question, "Can the social organization of the nineteenth century factory provide for modern students the social learning that is prerequisite for and concomitant of academic learning?" (Bremer, 1971 p.5). His fundamental contention was that no

changes will be of significance unless the social organi-
zation of education was totally changed. His statements
express the opinion that by changing the social organiza-
tion of total school systems the schools would be changed and
the relations that students and teachers learn will become
human and hence educational once again. Bremer saw schools
trapped by the need to use force and coercion but yet
realizing that education cannot take place with it present.
He hoped to change the preception of teachers that you first
control students, then teach them. A more active role for
the learner was sought in the Parkway Program.

Bremer's contention that the then present educational
system and not the student's needs determined the organi-
zation of learning, was also held by Mario Fantini. Fantini
advocated taking inventory of the different teaching styles,
enabling teachers to work in a structure compatible with
their approach, and then describing the different learning
options for parents and students so they could make a
decision about their school experience (Fantini, 1973). He
strongly argued that there were different teaching-learning
styles and that there was very little match of styles. If
there was a match between teaching and learning styles it was
more the result of chance than choice. His plan would facili-
tate education based on student interest, need, and learning
style.

Fantini's concept is described by Barr (1981) as a simple idea. Barr notes that the concept of alternatives is based on a simple, straight forward set of assumptions:

1. Different people learn in different ways.

2. Different teachers teach in different ways.

He stated that it was important not only to match learners with teachers but "to develop an educational system in which parents, students, and teachers can choose the type of program they believe to be in their best interests." (Barr, 1981, p. 571).

Daniel Duke in his book The Transformation of the School (1978), expressed the opinion that much of educational change has derived from the influence of professors of education, administrators, government agencies, and large foundations. For him contemporary alternatives are no exception.

Similar thought on the orgins of alternatives was offered by Vernon Smith (1973). He identified six impetuses for alternatives:

1. Educators and administrators such as Mario Fantini, Dwight Allen, Dick Foster, and Forbes Bottomly, who have been innovators for years saw alternatives as the next step in educational reform.

2. National studies on the status of education.

3. Governmental and private agencies concerned with social and educational improvements.

4, Community groups interested in upgrading the quality of local schools.

5. Advocates of other reforms who saw alternatives as a contribution to the cause.

6. Students, teachers, and administrators who create their own schools as the need arises.

Duke (1978) saw much growth in alternatives as an outgrowth of the criticism of public schools. He traced its roots to the Progressives and John Dewey. For whatever reason, the public school had been perceived to be inadequate by a growing segment of the American people. Because of the critical climate of the sixties and early seventies, contemporary alternatives emerged due to the encouragement for reform from universities, public school administrators, foundations, and government, according to Duke.

Support for the assertion that alternatives grew out of a need to find solutions for contemporary problems was also evidenced by the comments of Gousha (1977). He reports that in meeting with large city school superintendents, it was obvious that they valued having alternative programs to deal with problems that could not be met in traditional ways.

A most perceptive analysis of what accounts for the movements success was given by Levine (1975). He points out that the underlying philosophy of alternatives was a humanistic concern for the individual as a unique person. This philosophy and a commitment to it is a basic value held by those attempting to solve modern day problems.

In summary it can be said that alternatives for the most part grew out of the need to find solutions for the criticisms leveled against the schools. This need found support among reformers who called for a more humanistic approach to education. The reformers sought a better match between teaching styles and student needs. They also sought a greater recognition of the uniqueness of each individual. Perhaps an underlying belief of those stating rationals for alternatives was that educators could relate in a more humane manner to students than they had in the past. There was a call to recognize individual differences by changing the school rather than the student.

PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES

The largest number of references in the literature dealt with descriptions of specific programs and teaching methods. The first area of discussion in this section deals with the literature that describes specific programs. By their very nature alternatives are of many varities. While it was impossible in this review to describe all, a fairly representative sampling of programs gives the reader a common background and understanding of alternative programs. The second area of discussion lists some of the more common practices found in alternatives.

The Fresh Start Mini-School is one example that grew out of an E.S.E.A. Title IVc Grant. This information on this District of Columbia school is from the "Final Report" (1980) of the district's research and evaluation department. This program for one hundred twenty-five students found to have few areas of skill mastery is characterized by individualized instruction in four academic areas: Social Studies, English, Mathematics, and Science. Students proceed at their own pace and teachers emphasize a no fail philosophy. Teachers also focus on student self-esteem and motivation.

A second type is DEEP, located in Wichita, Kansas. DEEP (Diversified Educational Experiences Program) is a student centered and project oriented program (1979). The students identify needs, formulate objectives and develop tasks based on fulfillment of objectives and participate in their own evaluations.

Walbridge Academy in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is an example of a school for delinquents. Walbridge (1975) was one of the earliest alternative programs. Having begun in 1967, it was developed for wards of the court below the age of sixteen but later had a student population of about 250 in grades seven through twelve. By 1975 only fifty students were wards of the court. Located in an old down-town building, Walbridge students attended half days.

Courses consisted of individualized mini-courses. There
were no study halls nor homerooms. The staff of twenty-
three full time teachers used behavior modification
techniques extensively.

A humanistic approach to education is found in
Shawnee Mission, Kansas. Named the Skyline Alternative
Program, its director Charles Jackard reports (1978)that
the philosophy of the school is that schools need to teach
values. It was specifically designed for students with
problems. An integral key to success of the program is
daily counseling. The school mixes teenage mothers with
junior and senior high school students who are socially
or academically maladjusted. Classes include Social Studies,
Art, Shop, Language Arts, Home Economics, Physical Education,
Business, Reading, Science, and Counseling. Teachers
provide individualized programs with regular evaluations.
A behavior modification system allows students to earn
points daily in classwork, good behavior, and participation.
Points are converted into time for recreational or educa-
tional activities. Students are encouraged to "take time
out" when feeling stressed. Sixteen certified staff
work with a total student population of about 200.

A unique example of a school within a school is the
Secondary III Core Program at Pierrefonds Comprehensive
High School, Quebec, Canada(1984). The program serves

more than 200 students of average ability but who are

continually unsuccessful in their studies. These students

generally have poor self-concepts, lack basic study skills,

and an elementary record of barely getting by. In this

school one teacher is matched with twenty students for three

periods a day. They attend one period of English, one

of Geography, and a third period for study skill develop-

ment or outside resources. The program concentrates on

improving the students self-concepts and study skills with

the end result being improved academic performance and

motivation.

Those studying alternative education have been able

to identify common characteristics and practices. Smith

(1976) has identified three criteria that appear to be common

to all alternatives:

1. Students attend by choice.

2. The school or program is responsive to unmet
   needs.

3. The student body reflects the racial and social
   economic mix of the community.

Krahl (1977) notes that despite their differences

alternatives share a number of qualities:

1. Voluntarism.

2. Small size.

3. Egalitarianism.

4. Humaneness.

5. More comprehensive goals than conventional schools.

6. Participatory decision making.

7. Organizational flexibility.

8. Individualized learning.

9. School community commitment.

According to recent national survey by Raywid (1982), when asked to identify three ways in which their alternatives differed from typical schools, sixty-three percent identified student-teacher interactions; fifty-seven percent identified methods of instructions; and, forty percent identified curriculum and content.

Duke and Perry (1978) listed twelve characteristics present during their site visitation of California alternative schools:

1. Increased opportunity for students to exercise responsibility.

2. Informal teacher-student relationships.

3. Provisions for independent study.

4. Off campus learning opportunities.

5. Democratic decision making procedures.

6. Flexible scheduling.

7. Curriculum relevance.

8. Reduced class size.

9. Tutorials.

10. Mini courses.

11. Shortened school day.

12. Outside resource people used in instruction.

Smith (1975) lists three differences between alternative and conventional schools:

1. School size: Alternatives are usually less than 200 students large.

2. Overall learning community of the school includes outside resources.

3. Overall learning atmosphere of the school is non-threatening.

He goes on to identify the most striking difference to be the use of individualized instruction. The teacher assumes the role of helper more than the conveyor of knowledge.

Ellsberry (1979) would list similar aspects as being essential to alternatives but would add:

1. Establishing a teacher support team.

2. Transfer of ownership to the student.

3. Use of learning contracts.

A refreshing article by a classroom teacher (McCann, 1978) summarizes very well the instructional practices that make alternatives successful. He explains that the methods he uses are simply sound teaching practices that have been around for years. Basically, his approach is to diagnose needs, select relevant materials, motivate, sequence activities, give frequent feedback, and give praise at every opportunity.

Some have questioned whether instructional practices in alternative schools are different than in conventional

schools. This question was the basis for research done
by Baker (1978) and Parrett (1981). Both set about to
answer basically the same question. Baker asks, "Do
public alternative school teachers perceptions of their
own instructional practices differ significantly from
those of teachers in conventional schools in the
same district?" and, "Do public alternative school
students perceptions of teaching practices in their schools
differ significantly from those of students in conventional
public schools in the same district?" (1978, p. 4). Both
researchers designed investigations to answer the above
questions. Both found that alternative and conventional
school teachers reported significantly different teaching
styles from each other. The data from students corroborated
these results.

Results from the Statement About Schools Inventory
(Smith, Gregory, and Pugh, 1981) shows that alternatives come
closer to satisfying student needs than do conventional
schools. This instrument contained four scales corresponding
to the top four levels of the Maslow needs hierarchy. The
authors found that students in the lowest scoring alternatives
were much more satisfied with how well their schools were
meeting security, social esteem, and self-actualization needs
than the highest scoring conventional schools.

To summarize, it can be said that many types of programs have been extablished to offer students options to the conventional school. These programs have been successful in meeting student needs. And, the programs have certain characteristics that distinguish them from conventional programs with the most outstanding features being student-teacher relationships and instructional activities.

Chapter 3

PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe
the instructional strategies employed by the Westside
Alternative School staff for high risk students.

Research and Literature

The review of related literature for this study sug-
gests that distinct instructional strategies are used
by alternative school teachers. These strategies include
individualized learning, student contracts, behavior
modification, student-teacher relationships, and a more
active role for students in planning the learning experi-
ence.

Assessment Instruments

To identify the teaching strategies used by the school's
staff the following instruments were used. Baker's (1978)
"Inventory of Teacher Functions," was used to determine the
staffs perceptions of their teaching strategies. (See
Appendix A). This instrument is an expansion of Ehman and
Van Sickles model found in their catalogue of teaching
skills (Baker, 1978). The instrument contains a variety
of traditional and nontraditional teaching functions.
The instrument has twenty-one items which would be
considered as the nontraditional, eight that would be

traditional, and seven that combine elements of both
traditional and nontraditional teaching.

Teachers were asked first to rate each of the thirty-
six items on a scale of one to five in relation to the
degree of emphasis it received in their classroom. The
teachers were then asked to rank order each of those
items receiving a five rating.

A second instrument, also designed by Baker (1978)
was used to measure students perceptions of teaching
methods. This twenty-seven item inventory (See Appendix
B) was derived from the thirty-six item teacher instru-
ment. Students were asked to rate on a scale of one to
five how often each of the twenty-seven functions occur-
red in their classrooms.

INTERVIEWS

One fourth of the students, randomly selected, were
orally interviewed to ascertain how they would describe
the essential features of their teachers instructional
methods. (See Appendix C). The student interview con-
sisted of three questions.

All five of the certified staff were orally inter-
viewed to determine what teaching methods they employed
in teaching high risk students. (See Appendix D). This
interview consisted of four questions related to course
organization, content/materials, methods and most

essential features of their teaching styles.

Observation

In addition to the above instruments and interviews each teacher was observed three times for one forty minute class period each. A clinical supervision model, as practiced by the Millard Public Schools administrative staff, was the method used to observe. This system involved making transcriptions, analyzing the transcriptions, and summarizing what was observed.

Documents

Finally, documents from the school were collected and examined. These documents were:

1. Year End Reports

2. Student-Parent Handbook

3. Teacher Handbook

4. Course Guide Sheets

Chapter 4

Findings

An analysis of the classroom observations revealed
that instruction was individualized with immediate rein-
forcement and feedback. Many student-teacher interac-
tions were also observed. Three of the four teachers used
individualized instruction. Students either chose or were
assigned various materials to work out of. In these
classes the teacher assumed the role of learning facili-
tator. During classtime students worked independently
while the teacher offered individual instruction. The
teacher also administered tests and gave new packets or
materials to students during class.

Students were given immediate feedback on classwork
and tests. Students would stay at the teacher's desk
and wait for the test or assignments to be corrected.
They thus had immediate knowledge of their progress.
Occasionally students had to wait quite awhile for
attention from the teacher when another student was being
helped. However students did not hesitate to ask for
help at any time. Teacher-student interactions were also
observed several times during the observations. At times
these interactions pertained to school related activities.
Other times they appeared to be informal conversations
about casual topics. The classroom climate was relaxed

and conducive to friendly interaction. Teachers did not hesitate though to correct off task behavior when not acceptable or to remind students of their status towards completion of the assigned work.

One class, Social Studies, was a more traditionally taught class. The teacher utilized lecture, group discussion, and a variety of materials and worksheets. The materials included textbooks, reprinted articles, and audio-visuals. Class discussions were not lengthy. Worksheets and written discussion questions were used extensively in class. The teacher's plan involved first introducing the lesson to motivate and arouse interest in the topic. He would then present the material by lecturing or using other sources. This was followed by discussion or independent worktime to complete worksheets. Answers to questions were given in class by students with corrections made by the teacher when necessary, thus providing for more immediate feedback.

Student Interview Responses

Students were asked to answer three questions about what the teacher does to help them learn, the type of work done in class, and the most important teaching method used. Ten students, one fourth of the student population randomly selected, were interviewed. In response to the first question about "What the teacher does to help you learn," all

but one stated that teachers help them one on one.
Teachers continued to explain the lesson until the student understood it.   Students felt they received more individual help when needed.

Responses to the last question concerning the most important method used by their teachers found the following:

1. Individual work at the students own pace.

2. Lecturing.

3. More willingness to help when needed.

4. Held me accountable to complete work.

5. They challenged me.

6. Being there to help me.

7. About the same as any teacher except the class is smaller and I got more help.

8. Explained things individually.

<div align="center">Teacher Interview Responses</div>

An analysis of the teacher interviews revealed that teachers at Westside Alternative School were consistant in identifying common strategies.   In response to question number one, "Please describe how your course is organized," the following comments were given:

Teacher 1:   The course is organized into eighteen day units with individualized packets or mini courses.

Teacher 2:   Eighteen day units of individualized work in packets or textbooks.

Teacher 3:   Eighteen day units of teacher centered

group instruction.

Teacher 4:   Students earn 72 points by selecting
             novels, individual conferencing, and
             written assignments. About one fourth
             of the points are for written work. In
             addition to individual work, students
             have three days of group writing in-
             struction each unit.

In response to the question, "Please describe the
teaching methods that have been effective for you,"
teachers gave the following methods:

1.   One on one help.

2.   Positive motivation.

3.   Positive reinforcement.

4.   Having concern for students welfare.

5.   Lecturing with discussion.

6.   Simulation games.

7.   Films and guest speakers.

8.   Being flexible.

9.   Having a variety of techniques to use.

In response to how content or materials affects their
teaching the staff reported that:

1.   It did not have any affect.

2.   It required a variety of options.

3.   The content and material served as a road map.

4.   It was more difficult to motivate at times.

The last teacher interview question revealed what
the staff identified as the most essential features of
their teaching style. Responses included:

1.   Empathy.

2.   Background knowledge of the student.

3.   Flexibility.

4.   Concern for students.

5.   Praise.

6.   Positive reinforcement.

7.   Acceptance of students.

8.   Recognizing individual needs.

Responses of Student Items on Teaching Functions

The results of the student survey to determine how students perceived their teacher's methods shows a preference toward the use of more traditional methods. In the area of planning, students responded that teachers assumed the traditional function of determining what students would learn and do in class. There was less support for the nontraditional functions of allowing students to have a role in decision making. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Mean Scores of Student Items Related to Planning

Item	Mean Score
The teacher decides what should be used	3.5
The teacher decides what we will do in class	3.9
The teacher helps students decide what to learn	2.8
The teacher helps students decide what to do in class . . . :	3.3

On items related to instruction students confirmed that the traditional function of the teacher leading discussion (3.7) and lectures (3.3) were practiced at the school. A nontraditional function identified by the student was that students work individually (3.6). Other nontraditional functions not used extensively were: small group work, use of community, over night field trips, learning games or role playing, and student contracts. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Mean Scores of Nontraditional Methods
Related to Instruction

Item	Mean
Small group work	2.1
Over night field trips	1.0
Use of community	1.9
Use of learning games	2.0
Use of learning contracts	1.1

Students reported that only one of four nontraditional
forms of evaluation were used: written evaluation of
students work is sent to parents (4.0). Nontraditional
forms not supported were: pass-fail grading, students
express their feelings, and students express their ideas.
(See Table 3)

Table 3

Mean Scores of Nontraditional Methods
of Evaluation

Item	Mean
Pass-fail grading	2.4
Students express feelings	3.1
Students express ideas	3.1

Traditional forms of evaluation used were: teachers ask questions about material learned, teachers give test after unit completion, and teachers give numerical grades. (See Table 4)

Table 4

Mean Scores of Traditional
Form of Evaluation

Item	Mean
Questions material learned	3.4
Tests after unit completed	4.2
Use of numerical grades	4.4

The one item that dealt with the counseling function of teaching showed that teachers did not extensively help students with personal problems (2.8).

Teacher Functions Survey

Teachers were asked to rate thirty-six items according to the emphasis it received in their classrooms. The following table lists the top ten items. (See Table 5)

Table 5

Mean Scores of Top Ten
Rated Teacher Functions

Item	Mean Score
1. Select learning objectives appropriate for students	4.8
2. Ask questions that provide for student recall and integration	4.4
3. Ask questions that elicit student ideas	4.4
4. Evaluate work and assign numerical grades	4.4
5. Ask questions that elicit student's feelings	4.4
6. Assist students in clarifying and deciding on their learning objectives	4.2
7. Plan learning activities for the class	4.2
8. Invent and prepare learning materials	4.2
9. Provide remedial instruction	4.2
10. Select or prepare material for individualized learning	4.2

There were four other items not rated in the top ten

teacher functions that had a mean score of 4.0 which was

considered high. Those four items are:

1. Assists individual students in dealing with
   personal concerns.

2. Present subject matter orally and visually.

3. Elicit and use student reactions to modify instructional methods.

4. Administer post-test of student knowledge.

The ten items teachers consider to be least import-
ant are listed in the table below. (See Table 6)

Table 6

Mean Score of the Ten
Least Important Teacher Functions

Items	Mean Score
1. Provide extended out-of-school experiences	1.4
2. Grade on a pass-fail basis	1.6
3. Administer pretests of student attitudes	2.2
4. Provide on-going out of school knowledge	2.4
5. Administer pretests of student knowledge	2.4
6. Locate and select audio-visual materials	2.8
7. Locate and select materials to supplement textbooks	2.8
8. Provide learning activities for sub-groups within class	2.8
9. Administer post tests of students attitudes	3.0
10. Use simulations	3.0

Teachers were also asked to rank order those items receiving a five rating. No specifically significant facts were learned from this except that three teachers gave item number one the highest ranking. Item one dealt with selecting learning objectives appropriate for students. There was no such concensus on other items.

Of the top ten items teachers considered most important, four were traditional functions, two were both, and four were nontraditional.

Of the teacher functions receiving the lowest rating, eight were nontraditional functions and two were considered to be both traditional and nontraditional.

School Documents

A review and analysis of various school documents revealed the key strategies used by the staff. The documents reviewed were:

1. Westside Alternative School: A Report to the Board, of Education, District 66.

2. Westside Alternative High School: Student-Parent Handbook, 1985-86.

3. Westside Alternative School: Course Handbook.

The school's written documents stress that while the overall goals were the same as the regular high school, the methods used to achieve those goals were quite different. One of the school's "methods" was a curriculum designed to recognize various student ability and interest levels. This method of instruction was highly individualized.

Students had the privilege of selecting the material and in some cases the courses they took. Each of the four academic areas offer individualized courses and/or mini-courses for the student to choose from. One area, Social Studies, is not individualized but individualized courses are offered for those needing this type of instruction either because of learning style or the need to earn credits.

Another key feature of the school's program was the use of three and one half week units of instruction. Students should complete one-fifth of a course each three and one half weeks. This allows students to complete short range attainable goals. Frequent monitoring and progress reports shortens the amount of time a student may delay making progress.

Student's progress was monitored by a process in which at each one third of a unit (six days) teachers submit a list of students who are behind in their work to the director. The director then visits with the student individually. Students not earning credit in three of four courses are placed on academic probation. This student must make progress each one third unit or face possible suspension or other corrective actions. These corrective actions include daily progress checks, assigned study time before or after school, or a work area separate from the regular class.

The use of short units of isntruction has necessitated teachers using guide sheets that list daily assignments for

the eighteen day, three and one half week units. Students
thus are made aware of their status daily.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Discussion

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to identify the distinct instructional strategies used by teachers at Westside Alternative School, a program for high risk students. A summary of these strategies would be helpful to the school's staff in analyzing and evaluating their methods. Furthermore this case study would aid any alternative school teacher or parties interested in the development or refinement of programs for such students as those served by the Westside Alternative School.

This study was limited to instructional strategies as one of many distinct features of alternative schools. It was further limited to the study of one suburban secondary alternative for high risk students.

The procedures used to gather information involved on-site visitation and classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, student and teacher surveys, and examination of school documents. The data was gathered, analyzed, and the findings reported.

The findings indicate clearly that distinct instructional strategies for high risk students were used by teachers at Westside Alternative School.

The classroom observations revealed the main instruc-
tional mode to be an individualized approach with class-
time used for independent work. The teachers's time was
spent administering tests and giving individual help.
Student-teacher interactions were frequent in a relaxed
classroom environment. All classes had fewer than ten
students each. The classrooms were equipped with tables
and chairs rather than desks. One room was equipped with
study carrels. One teacher used a more traditional approach
using lectures and discussions. This teacher also used
worksheets and written assignments extensively. Immediate
feedback was present in all the classrooms observed.

Based on student interview responses, it was evident
that individualized instruction was the key feature at the
school. Students reported that being able to get help
when needed from teachers willing to be supportive was an
essential teaching method at the school.

Teacher's comments during the interviews revealed that
individualized instruction centered around eighteen day
units was the method that worked best for them. The staff
specifically listed the following key elements of successful
teaching at the school: Giving one on one help, positive
reinforcement and motivation, having concern for students
and their progress, being flexible, and having a variety of
materials available.

Findings from the student survey reveals that teachers use both traditional and nontraditional methods. Nontraditional methods were not as extensively used as others have indicated in previous alternative school studies. Using Baker's list of teaching functions the findings show that only two of twelve nontraditional functions were used widely. Conversely, six of ten traditional functions were used at the school.

Teachers were basically traditional in that they decided what to teach and do in class, the type of materials and resources used, and how grades were reported. Nontraditional methods used were individualized instruction and written evaluations sent to parents.

The survey of staff teacher functions shows that a equal mixture of traditional and nontraditional functions were considered to be most important.

Teachers listed functions not shared by their students. Teachers stated it was important to allow choice in selection of learning objectives and to elicit student's ideas and feelings. Students generally stated that teachers decided what to do in class and only sometimes elicited students ideas or feelings.

Teachers and students were in agreement on the importance of functions dealing with evaluation and individualized instruction.

Teacher items receiving a "least important" rating were similar to student items not receiving importance in the classroom. These items were: providing out-of-school experiences, grading on a pass-fail basis, administering pre and post tests of students attitudes, and the use of learning games.

A review of documents from the school indicated that individualized instruction was the key instructional feature of the school. Closely related to this feature was the division of instructional units into eighteen day segments. The staff used this feature to shorten the length of time to teach more manageable short range objectives. It also facilitated student success by shortening the amount of time for reporting and evaluating student work. Regular monitoring of progress and appropriate corrective actions supports the entire instructional process.

Conclusions

On the basis of the findings of this study it was concluded that the following features distinguish instruction at Westside Alternative School:

1. Individualized instruction.

2. A caring staff concerned about the student and his progress.

3. One-on-one instruction on demand.

4. Immediate student feedback.

5.   Shorter more manageable units and objectives.

6.   Regular monitoring and corrective actions.

7.   Frequent constructive student-teacher
     interactions.

Discussion

This study has identified distinct features that were characteristic of the key instructional strategies for high risk students at Westside Alternative School. It is interesting to note that these distinguishing features were categorized more as instructional organization and affective related teaching skills than delivery skills which has been the recent focus of traditional instructional models such as Instructional Theory Into Practice.

Many of the distinguishing features identified at the school relate in practice to the theoretical basis upon which most contemporary alternatives have been founded. Namely, the recognition of individual differences and a humanistic concern for the student as a unique person.

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APPENDIX A

Teaching Functions

1. Select learning objectives appropriate for students.

2. Locate and select audio-visual materials.

3. Locate and select material to supplement textbooks.

4. Assist students in clarifying and deciding on their learning objectives.

5. Adapt material from several sources in lieu of a textbook.

6. Plan learning activities for the class.

7. Invent and prepare learning materials.

8. Plan varied learning activities for sub-groups within class.

9. Maintain an orderly classroom.

10. Assist individual students in dealing with personal concerns.

11. Assist students in planning their own learning activities.

12. Lead discussions.

13. Provide short-term out of school experiences (arrange and supervise one day field trips, picnics, etc.).

14. Provide extended out of school experiences (arrange and supervise overnight field trips, camping trips).

15. Provide on-going out of school experiences (arrange and supervise work-study experiences, community service, etc.).

16. Present subject matter orally and visually.

17. Use community resources in class (invite speakers,

19. Use simulation

20. Act as a resource for individual students or small groups.

21. Ask questions that elicit student ideas.

22. Provide remedial instruction.

23. Elicit and use student reactions to modify instruction methods.

24. Use programmed instructional material.

25. Administer pre-tests of student knowledge.

26. Administer pre-tests of student attitudes.

27. Administer post-tests of student knowledge.

28. Administer post-tests of student attitudes.

29. Facilitate group processes within class.

30. Use written evaluations of student achievement.

31. Evaluate student work and assign numerical or letter grades.

32. Use student learning contracts.

33. Grade on a pass-fail basis.

34. Select or prepare material for individualized learning.

35. Ask questions that elicit students' feelings.

36. Maintain resource centers or learning centers in the classroom.

APPENDIX B

Student Items

In the classes in my school:

1. the teacher decides what student should learn.

2. the teacher uses audio-visual materials.

3. we use textbooks.

4. the teacher helps students decide what they want to learn.

5. the teacher decides what we will do in class.

6. small groups work on different things during class.

7. the teacher keeps the class quiet and orderly.

8. the teacher helps students individually with their personal problems.

9. the teacher helps students decide what to do in class.

10. the teacher leads discussion.

11. we take one-day field trips.

12. we take over-night field trips.

13. we spend part of the school day working or studying the community.

14. the teacher lectures.

15. we have guest speakers.

16. we use learning games or role playing in class.

17. the teacher asks questions about information we have learned.

18. the teacher asks students' ideas.

19. the teacher asks students to express their feelings.

20. students work individually at their own pace.

21. the teacher asks students to evaluate his or her teaching.

22. the teacher gives students a pre-test before beginning a topic or unit.

23. the teacher gives students a test after a topic or unit is completed.

24. the teacher gives students numerical or letter grades on report cards.

25. written evaluation of students' work are sent to parents.

26. students sign learning contracts.

27. work is graded on a pass-fail basis.

APPENDIX C

Teacher Interview

1. Please describe how your course is organized.

2. Please describe the teaching methods that have been effective for you.

3. In what way does content or selection of materials affect your teaching of high risk students?

4. If you were asked to summarize the most essential features of your teaching style, what would they be?

APPENDIX D

Student Interview

1. Describe what the teacher does in class to help you learn.

2. Does your teaher leacture, give individual work, or give small group work? Describe the type of work you do in class.

3. If you were to tell the most important teaching methods your teacher uses, what would they be?