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Identifying and motivating at-risk students

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IDENTIFYING AND MOTIVATING
AT-RISK STUDENTS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education: Middle School Option

by
Thomas Anthony Desiano
Douglas Ellis Dill
Matthew John Raith
September 1998
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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

President John F. Kennedy once stated, "The course of civilization is a race between catastrophe and education. In a democracy like ours, we must make sure that education wins the race." Today, this statement can be heard echoing throughout classrooms in America. Unfortunately, a large population of students have been losing this race: students at-risk of dropping out of school due to academic, social, emotional or economic reasons. Generally, such students are identified during their intermediate years (sixth through eighth grade). However, due to inadequate retention policies at the intermediate level, students usually drop out during their high school years (ninth through twelfth grade).

An at-risk student is identified as a low achiever who has difficulty with reading and writing and is, therefore, at-risk of experiencing failure, frustration and alienation further down in their academic path.

It is the goal of this program to identify these at-risk students, track their grades, and incorporate a tutorial program to motivate and build their self-esteem and ultimately, their academic performance. This program can succeed with the proper administrative support, teacher involvement and parent and community assistance.
Heartfelt words of thanks are expressed to Dr. Alva Lefevre for her endless help in regards to this project. To our parents, a great source of comfort and support throughout our lives. To Dr. Howard for his endeavor to transfer his knowledge and techniques to others. To Jennie Arellano for her love, wisdom and strength which have inspired the best in us. Finally, to the students who have allowed us to be a positive influential factor in the development of their minds and beliefs. We hope that this will serve as a catalyst for all students to explore further the interesting and important activity of education and possibly even serve as a stimulus to be creative with ideas that can influence their future education and life.
DIVISION OF WORK

In writing this project, we all decided on certain responsibilities to adhere to. The literature review section was researched by all three of us. Once we all collaborated with our literature, we narrowed the selections to the appropriate choices. As a result of this collaboration, all of chapter two was a combination of our efforts.

Matt Raith wrote the abstract and chapter one; Doug Dill was responsible for chapter three, while Tom Desiano completed chapter four. All three of us offered suggestions for each chapter, but the final draft was the result of the individual.
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CHAPTER ONE Introduction

Every year there are a large number of students who drop out of school. Although the numbers are staggering, even more perplexing are the reasons why. How can one of the world’s strongest economic nations afford to have so many causalities in its educational system? The institution of education must be able to identify “at-risk” students and formulate a universal program to reconcile this problem. While it is understood that each student is unique in their academic, social, emotional and economic status, it is not unfathomable to harvest a program that can reach each individual student. It is through the process of initiating the proposed S.T.A.R.T. program (Success Through Academic Responsibility and Togetherness) at the middle school level that the current dilemma at hand may be reconciled.

While the acronym, S.T.A.R.T. identifies the individual components of the program, the word “start” is actually the essence of the program’s execution. For instance, educators, must “start” taking a more personal role in identifying at-risk students. The education system cannot proceed with the current standard of “Johnny cannot succeed since he has always performed poorly.” The system must shed itself of superficial doctrines and identify the reason(s) for the “Johnny” dilemma. This identifying stage begins in the student’s elementary years of education. Elementary school teachers must be educated in recognizing at-risk students so as to prevent them from getting lost in the mainstream cycle.
It is only when educators “start” to recognize a problem that this reconciliation will begin.

**Togetherness** is the foundation of the START program and it encompasses the entire educational system: teachers, administrators, parents, students and the community. It is essential that each separate, but universal components, work as one in order for this program to succeed. By formulating an incorporation, the program is also developing a family of sorts. A strong family has always been the nucleus for success. However, it is through this family that everyone is also held accountable. Each member is required to work in unison and perform their duties. Similarly, administrators must support teachers, teachers must be held accountable for students, parents must adhere to every aspect of their children’s needs (academically, socially and financially) and the community must address concerns and provide support as needed.

**Academic Responsibility** builds upon the theme of togetherness. Once again, the family is involved, however, it is the child (student) who is the focal point. The elders (i.e. teachers, administrators, parents, and the community), need to insure all student academic responsibilities are being met. For instance, teachers must make certain their students are on task: taking notes, asking questions, and turning in assignments. Administrators need to support the teachers basic needs: release time, extra prep, and financial assistance for all necessary material.

Parents must take a hands-on approach for their child’s
education. As a responsible parent, they must set appropriate curfews, provide adequate meals, supervise all homework, communicate with all teachers and monitor who their child associates with. Successful parenting need not necessarily be defined by the traditional family structure of a biological mother and a father in the same household. Needless to say, there are many single parents who are successful with their children's development. It is merely a matter of personal responsibility and reinforcements in the child's daily activities.

Finally, the community must also be held accountable for their own actions and development. They need to be involved in school site management. Businesses should be responsible for funding programs such as after school tutorials, extracurricular activities (flag football, roller hockey, and clubs). The community must also participate in Career-Day to demonstrate and discuss the importance of a good education. However, the most important contributable attribute is volunteering in the tutorial program. For example, having professionals from the Sunrise Rotary Club donate their time in tutoring and counseling students would be key for the success of this program. This is a very important function of the START program. It is only through community involvement that students may learn to appreciate the importance of their education.

There is a need to address the issue of student drop-out ratios in the context of the START program. The fact that there is a decline in the motivation to learn perhaps may be
linked to the viewpoint that school subject are a constant struggle. Reading is not fun because it is a chore, especially for at-risk students. Literacy activities have stiff competition, such as television, computers, videos and compact disks (CDs). Once more, the educational system is discovering children are not intrinsically motivated to read, write or learn. Instead, they choose to use their minds passively. Watching television, playing videos, and the like, are contributing to the widespread illiteracy problem in the United States. Thus, society can read and write, but simply is not inclined to do so.

Currently, the Orange County school drop out rate continues to fall. The low dropout rate, which has been halved in the past decade, was the result of a variety of creative programs ranging from early intervention to single gender last-chance-schools. While it is encouraging to see figures in dropout rates decline 3.3% statewide and 2.5% in Orange County, the total numbers of dropouts in this county for the years 1996-1997 was 3,174 (Colvin, 1998). Although an improvement is evident, these figures are unacceptable.

It is important to identify how educators decided who is a dropout. The California Department of Education defines a high school dropout as a person who meets these criteria:

* Was formerly enrolled in grades 7,8,9,10,11, or 12 in a program leading to a high school diploma
* Has left school for 45 consecutive school days and not enrolled in another educational institution
* Has not re-enrolled in a school
* Has not received a high school diploma or its equivalent
* Is under the age of 21 (Colvin, 1998).

START attributes the total dropout number of 3,174 to the student's lack of motivation to learn. For example, the students' interest in reading, writing, math, science and social studies may remain low if the classroom does not represent a positive learning environment. Efforts need to be taken to design instructional learning environments that will ignite students' interest and create a sense of desire to engage in literacy tasks. It is START's goal to have its program do just that. Rewards such as stickers, certificates, pizza parties, skateboards, field trips, and the like, will help improve the student's motivational level. Through these engaging tasks, students will develop intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and positive attitudes towards learning at an early age that can be sustained throughout their lifetime.

In the START Program it is understood that middle school is a very crucial time for students. Dramatic physical and mental changes take place within these students, and, as a result, they are "caught in the middle." Many students react in a positive way with this change and can adjust. However, it is the student who is unable to adjust that concerns this program.

Discipline problems usually occur in regards to "lost identity" and many students become delinquent. These students are looking for someone or something to identify with. This usually leads to trouble: truancies, drug and
alcohol abuse, gang membership and in drastic cases, even suicide. Students can develop hopelessness and learned failure; school is merely another downfall to encounter.

However, a positive program such as START may reach at-risk students before this decline. By identifying an at-risk student early in elementary school, a plan may be implemented in assisting them with a head start in life. It will benefit both student and teacher to conduct the START program during the assigned last period class. In doing so, START can monitor all previous class assignments, homework, and questions in respect to all other subjects and courses.

On Mondays and Wednesday the classroom work will concentrate on organizational, time management, and test taking skills, as well as self-esteem and motivational building techniques. The teachers will review the student's binder reminders, making sure that all homework, assignments, and projects are noted in the calendar. Students will begin writing daily journals in class on what they are learning, thus constantly encouraging writing skills. This method will not only help them internalize what they are learning each day, but comprehend it in a manner which is fun and less conventional.

Another role played by teachers is that of assisting students in their time management skills. Most students are coming from an elementary school system consisting of a two teacher curriculum. However, at the middle school level, they will now be adjusting to six instructors, if not seven. Time management skills play a vital part in academic survival
as well. By reviewing the amount of time spent on each subject, students can learn to balance their work load rather than experiencing as sense of work-overload and helplessness.

Test taking skills are also reviewed. Helpful hints such as reading questions in their entirety before responding, informing students that inquiring about difficult words or terms is permissible, and crucial time saving techniques such as leaving unknown questions for last are passed on to students. Illustrating how to properly formulate exam essays is also reviewed. Proving how proper study skills and test taking skills are essential during exams is the intended goal.

Certificates, stickers, positive phone calls home, field trips or early lunch passes all contribute to student self-esteem and motivation. It is in this phase where students will identify with what they are doing: building self-confidence. The development of support groups within their own peers also takes place during this period. It is an extremely crucial point in their development.

Tuesdays and Thursday encompass tutorial days. It is during this time that the "Togetherness" theme is employed. Teachers volunteer time, material, or lesson plans. Ideally, community leaders from the Rotatory Club, Kiwanis Club, Elks Club, and other professional fraternities volunteer in tutoring. However, if these professionals of the community cannot be physically present to donate their time, then they may donate essential material to the program such as computer hardware or software, paper, pens, pencils or even financial
assistance towards the support of START. This combined effort also serves to prove to students that others sincerely are interested in their success, thus, creating a sense of inclusion and feelings of being part of a "family."

Finally, the last weekday would be reserved to alternate between classwork, tutorial, or free-time. Games, computer work, or any type of reward that seems necessary for the motivation and self-esteem development of students is in order every Friday. After all, rewards and recognition is a crucial component of the START program.

The implementation goal for START is in the school year 1999-2000. In starting then, START will have allocated one full school year to establishing goals, objectives, titles, strategies and measures. The following is a synopsis of the START program plan:

Goal 1: To communicate and assist elementary teachers in identifying at-risk students

Objective 1: To establish guidelines for identifying at-risk students

Title: Who is At-Risk?

Strategy: Use the established guidelines for recruitment

Measure: A report will be made for all students who fall under the appropriate guidelines
Goal 2: To increase self-esteem and motivation to succeed

Objective 2: To establish academic awareness rewards via certifications, lunch parties, group field trips and similar activities

Title: Honorarium Enhancement

Strategy: To have teachers, administrators, and community leaders acknowledge START students through assemblies for scholarly achievements and community accolades

Measure: The achievement will be measured by quarterly grades, behavior and attendance reports

Goal 3: To increase community funding and involvement

Objective 3: To hold the community accountable for funding of projects and tutorial involvement

Title: Community Support

Strategy: To invite professionals from around the community to donate time, funding, and/or materials

Measure: To demonstrate time log, general ledger and miscellaneous reports
It should be understood that each goal, objective, title, strategy and measure is only tentative. As with any program plan, each section will be reviewed, revised, or terminated depending on program necessity. Each member of the START program is responsible for supervising this process. If there should be additions or deletions, they will be administered by the appropriate members.

Limitations

Implementing the START program is not without its difficulties. The first major obstacle will be obtaining approval from the Capistrano Unified School Board. They must be sold on the fact that START is beneficial to everyone. The difficulties of this task need not be emphasized to those already familiar with School Board requests.

Requests for additional funding from an already conservative, if not thrifty district, provides for another hurdle. Release time, substitute pay, and reimbursement funding are just a microcosm of the problems posed. Other such questions to surely arise are: “Where will additional funding come from?” “What district employee is supervising this?” “Who is the acting liaison?” These are examples of similar problems anticipated to hinder the implementation of START.

Community support may be difficult to achieve. Remember, the key function of this program is to build motivation and self-esteem. START believes the major ingredient needed for success in promoting and building
student self-esteem is human contact. Sincere words such as “I will help you” or “You are doing great” are more effective means towards attaining START’s goal than a single monetary funding project ever could be. However, getting individuals to take time out of their busy schedule to support a positive program can be arduous at best. The energy and patience that is required in tutoring at-risk students is great. It can be extremely difficult and time consuming to say the least.

Finally, selling START to parents will be a challenge. Admittedly, the “At-Risk” label does not have many positive connotations. It is possible that some parents may be in denial in regards to their child’s academic state. Still, others may simply not want their child labeled something that society associates or stereotypes as a “problem child.”

Delimitations

The major delimitation for our plan is identifying who is at-risk. The “at-risk” term is very broad. For example, an at-risk student may be labeled many other things as well: Resource Specialist Programs (R.S.P.), English Language Development (E.L.D), or special education, etc... In narrowing qualifications for this program and identifying students, there are certain basic steps that need to be followed. First, communication directly with elementary school teachers is required. This communication will center on qualifications for the program, as well as, whether or not students in consideration fit the profile of START’s “at-risk” students.
START program candidates will not be at-risk kids whose challenges included physical disabilities, but, rather the low academic achievers who have difficulty with reading and writing and are, therefore, "at risk" of experiencing failure, frustration and alienation. START needs to make important distinctions between physically and mentally disabled students. While the former are at-risk as well, there are other programs and personnel better qualified to suit their special needs. Distinction not discrimination against either group of children is desired in order to attain the best outcome.

Definition of Terms

For this project, the following acronyms may be used. English Language Development (E.L.D) are students with limited or non-English proficiency. They are identified as at-risk due to their difficulty to read or write in English. They are paced in Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) core curriculum classes to ensure equal access to the curriculum.

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a program founded by Mary Catherine Swanson in San Diego, California. It addresses the proper procedure for tutorials that will be implemented and refined.
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

The fact that START implemented a program to identify and motivate at-risk students, led to a large variety of different literature for review. Such vast array also posed a certain problem: Where to begin? In order to answer this, START’s goals needed to be reexamined. It was decided that START should concentrate on motivation and self-esteem building in collaboration with an improvement in reading and writing skills while also formulating a positive learning environment. After all, when such major components had not been properly addressed, they definitely served to handicap all students, especially the at-risk group.

Teachers often found it difficult to motivate the at-risk students in the field of basic skills, not to mention specifics such as reading and writing. To properly motivate students, teachers had been required to devise not only a creative lesson plan, but also a learning environment that was conducive to the student’s emotional needs. “Tapping into student’s effective and cognitive domains to engage them in tasks of all content areas, including science, math, English, and social science was also required (of the teacher)” (Levy, 1992).

Additionally, it was important to be aware of the personal factors involved with students which played a major role in the learning process or desire to read, write or learn. Davison states,”...in order to be successful with motivating at-risk students, teachers need to understand what
events are taking place in their life. Many times students are unmotivated due to personal problems that are plaguing them. Once we understand their world and their events, then we can begin the healing process” (Davison, 1994).

Therefore, these factors must also be identified and examined to help motivate at-risk students. The shared goal of every good teacher was to reach out to each individual student. However, the only way to accomplish this successfully was understanding their students' background (where they were coming from and whether they had a past history of success or failure).

In the 1980s, there was a resurgence of interest in motivational issues among researchers and teachers in the field of reading and writing. The role of the teacher was changing; not only were they expected to teach the subject matter, but also teach the desire to learn as well. Developing the motivation to read, write, or learn within the classroom and encouraging students to do the same outside the classroom, for both academic and personal reasons, became a concern for teachers and reading specialists and is still a concern today (Levy, 1992).

Many teachers felt they were being asked to do too much. In order to meet the needs of these at-risk students, teachers needed more support from the administration, community and the families involved. After all, to succeed at any level, there needs to be cooperation from all parties. This statement is especially true in the attempt to motivate students to read and write. Because at-risk students exhaust
more energy to even comprehend the material, they often lack enthusiasm by the time actual work is required.

In a recent poll conducted by the International Reading Association, its members (mostly teachers and reading specialist) elected "creating interest in reading" as the top priority for research. Other priorities on the top 10 list included studying intrinsic desire for reading and increasing students' amount and breadth of reading (Guthrie, 1994). This enforced the message to teachers that student engagement in reading is a must and teachers need to address factors that influenced a reader's intention to read as well as write, compute, and experiment in the classroom. If students were unmotivated to read and write in any content area, they would be missing out on an essential element in the learning process.

It appeared that a contributing factor to the low interest in reading and writing was the amount of time a student spent watching television. It was found that book reading occupied less than 1% of a child's free time in contrast to an average of 130 minutes of television viewing per day (Adams & Colbert, 1996). This really was not a difficult fact to grasp. In today's technologically advanced society, why would a child spend time reading and writing something when they could go to a video store and receive a different type of stimuli from games? Why should they read the book when they could easily rent the movie? After all, they would have gathered the same superficial material and facts without having to exert a lot of energy on
actual the book—with the exception of walking into the local video store and physically renting it.

What of the ever-so-popular “Cliffnotes?” When used properly, as a supplemental, they only served to enhance the reader’s experience. However, when used incorrectly they became a teacher’s nightmare. Some students did not understand the need to read a 300 page book such as, To Kill a Mockingbird, when they could rent the video version, or buy the synopsis in cliffnotes. The teachers had the laborious task of motivating at-risk students while trying to battle the literacy revolution of “quicker is better.”

A Los Angeles Times poll of California teachers found 45% of high school teachers admitted that only 50% of their students were able to read the assigned books. Still an even higher number of middle school teachers, 53%, said the same thing (Colvin, 1998).

The result, teachers claimed, was that they now had to choose between sapping the academic rigor of their lessons by “dumbing them down”, or writing-off those students—often the majority—who were far behind. It was a choice that enraged many high school and middle school teachers who were trained to deal with subtleties of motivation in Macbeth or the causes of the American Revolution, but not the intricacies of phonics and breaking words into syllables (Colvin 1998).

There existed many students in the Capistrano Unified School District whom, even if were able to read the actual words, had trouble picking up the main idea of what they had just read. It was as though they were entranced and read
They did not seem to understand the underlying themes and how these words should have formed a picture, but were satisfied with a feeble attempt of completing the book rather than having the satisfaction of actually understanding it.

Colvin states that experienced teachers say most children who are likely to have reading difficulties are identifiable in kindergarten. They come to school not knowing the alphabet, cannot associate the sound of "a" with apple and, crucially, lack what experts call "phonemic awareness." That is the understanding that, for example, changing the "c" in "cot" to "r" produces "rot" (1988).

Properly taught, most pupils could overcome said obstacles, but issues needed to be addressed early on. Children who did not read at least moderately well by the end of their third grade, in school, long term studies revealed, had a very poor chance of even graduating from high school (Colvin, 1998- emphasis added).

These findings demonstrated the importance of the development of motivation to learned and increased student engagement in literacy activities across the curriculum. Despite studies conducted for the National Assessment of Educational Progress 1992 Reading Report Card for the Nation and States (Mullis, Campbell, & Farstrup, 1993) which had shown that students who read most, read best, more and more students preferred to watch television than read a book or play a video game. The Reading Report Card indicated that while students were required to read more often as they
progressed through the grades, they engaged in less independent pleasure reading (Mullis & Jenkins, 1990).

Many students clearly lacked motivation or intention to read in any, or all, of the content areas. It was important to realize how much reading is required in science, math, social studies, and English. Thus, encouragement to read a variety of texts and engage in a variety of tasks was essential for students.

Teachers and parents alike had asked the same question time and time again: “Why were some students motivated and others not?” Motivation could be ambiguous and difficult to define; instead, it was easier to describe it according to behavior. For example, a student who was motivated to engage in literacy tasks would take the initiative and choose to read a book, write a story, practice mathematics, even manipulate or conduct a science experiment during their free time. A less motivated student would choose to play outdoors and shy away from the “academic” literacy tasks, which include reading, writing, or computing. This was normal behavior for students who previously had negative experiences and had become frustrated with their inability to read well, understand, or spell certain words (Stams, 1995).

Students are naturally very perceptive and competitive. Hence, at-risk students were aware of their friends, siblings, and classmates abilities in comparison to their own. As a result, these at-risk students were noticeably falling short. At-risk students typically chose activities they had previously been successful at an knew they would
not be frustrated with. The challenge for educators was knowing how to motivate them to engage in various literacy tasks such as reading and writing.

Motivation had been an area that often was taken for granted. Naturally, the assumption was that all students were motivated to learn and wanted to read and write and participate in all of the wonderful activities that teachers planned. However, this was not the case. Usually, there existed an underlying reason for a student not wanting to participate: there was no motivation to do so. Therefore, it was important for teachers to understand what it actually meant when a student was unmotivated or lacked the desire to participate.

Even though motivation was a difficult concept to define, it was a very important one to understand, since it was an essential element in the learning process. As Marty Covington (1992), a noted psychologist who had been extensively researching the area of motivation, says, "Motivation, like the concept of gravity, is easier to describe than it is to define." He explained the discrepancy of motivation by stating, "Knowing how to motivate is not the same as knowing what is motivation."

In the realm of reader motivation, Mathewson (1994) defined motivation as the development of conditions promoting intention to read. Furthermore, he defined intention as the mediator between attitude and reading. Intention was more than this, it was creating the desire or the decision to read.
This theory could be applied to any literacy activity across the content areas. If the intention or desire was not present, a student would decide not to participate in the activity or task or would not participate in a meaningful way.

When motivation was considered, educators dealt with the "why" of behavior. Also, teachers looked at what individuals were motivated to do. Motivation varied in two ways, direction and intensity. Motivation also could be defined as "the impact of needs and desires on the direction and intensity of an individual's behavior" (Slavin, 1991). This direction and intensity influenced a student's intent or decision to engage in reading and writing tasks similar to the way competence and control influenced a student's intention to learn. If a student felt competent to complete the task and also in control of the task, they would be motivated to engage in said task and follow through with it until completion. If the student did not feel competent or in control, their frustration levels rose, and they would not engage in the task.

Another theory that provided insight into the area of motivation and the learning process included Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, which ranged from physiological needs at the base, to self-actualizing needs at the pinnacle. Amongst the growth needs in this hierarchy was the need to know and understand, what naturally motivated students. All students expressed a desire to know and understand; it was just more profound with some. With assistance and careful planning,
learning could become easier for everyone.

The achievement motivation theory could also be applied to learning to read, write, or compute. Students who were high in achievement motivation were likely to strive for success by choosing challenging goals when reading and writing. They chose more challenging books and persisted in the efforts necessary to complete difficult assignments (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark & Lowell, 1953). When this theory is attempted on the at-risk students in the START program, they may experience low achievement motivation and thus not strive for challenges, but rather, stay within their comfort zone. START’s ultimate goal is to challenge and motivate students outside of this zone.

Covington’s “self-worth” theory (1992) was extremely relevant to at-risk students. It assumed that perceived self-worth strongly affected the degree to which students became effective learners in the classroom. An important aspect of motivating at-risk students was to provide activities that would boost their self-esteem and confidence. Typically, these students had low self-worth which was reflected in the quality of their school work. They were unwilling to take risks for the fear of failure and embarrassment. Therefore, it was important to give them credit for any work they accomplished. However, one of the main goals of the START program was to identify errors and correct them. Students understood that their work was not always error-free, but the at-risk student must be made to feel comfortable with any and all work they completed. Once these students were
comfortable and given additional activities to increase self-esteem, the motivation began to amplify.

The motivation to read, write and compute was closely connected to opportunities to experience a sense of enjoyment while engaged in the activity (Covington, 1992). To truly experience the intrinsic rewards of learning, students needed to achieve a balance between the difficulty of the task and their own ability. If the challenge of the task was too high, the student would experience anxiety, and conversely, if the challenge was too low, boredom would result. More likely, the former case was typical of the at-risk students.

Basically, two types of motivation existed: Extrinsic (external) and Intrinsic (internal); both types were formative parts of the learning process. External motivation was something that engaged students in an activity when it was clear that by participating in it, they were likely to have had a positive experience and accomplish their desired outcome. Internal motivation was characterized by the desire to engage in an activity because it brought personal satisfaction to the student, regardless of potential extrinsic outcomes (Spaulding, 1992).

The difficult part at the middle school level was having to identify at-risk students’ internal motivation. They had failed so often that they did not see the need, nor had the desire, to attain this motivation. START felt the obligation to incorporate the two motivational skills so as to work uniformly and not independently.

Levy (1992) gave the analogy of the carrot on the stick:
If we dangled the carrot, which represents the external motive, then maybe that carrot would drive them to their internal desires. For example, if teachers told students they would be going on a field trip (carrot/extrinsic) if they all performed well on a given project, students would then put greater of an effort into the project. However, once students understood the worth of their project (good grade/intrinsic), they applied themselves more often without being persuaded with extrinsic factors.

Essentially, intrinsic motivation was the by-product of two sets of self-perception, those of competence and self-determination (Deci, 1975). If students perceived themselves as being capable of completing an assignment and also felt a certain degree of control over the task or outcome, they were more likely to be intrinsically motivated to engage in that literacy event (an activity that included reading, writing, speaking, or listening). Conversely, if either of these perceptions was not present, intrinsic motivation was likely to be missing.

However, it seemed likely that when perception of both competence and self-determination were high, intrinsic motivation was high as well. Students required competence to engage in any kind of task, be it reading, writing, math, science, or social science. If the task appeared too difficult, they would not participate. Therefore, it was important to instill a sense of confidence, competence, and control in students when planning across the curriculum (Spaulding, 1992). It was this confidence and
competence that we planned on instilling through our daily tutorials and organizational and time management lessons.

Levy (1992) stated that both the extrinsic and intrinsic factors promoted motivation and intention to participate in any activity. The extrinsic factors included the setting, the difficulty of the material, peer pressure or peer interaction, the goal of the assignment, the teacher's instructional strategy, and the amount of time given to complete the activity and talk about it.

Within the concept of motivation, there were various personal, affective, cognitive, and social factors that needed to be identified and examined which influenced and motivated a student to engage in an activity or task (Spaulding, 1992). Individuals were predisposed by personal factors and their personality characteristics when approaching the reading and writing process. The personal factors were those which a student brought to the classroom, such as purpose, goals, self-worth, self-determination, and family values and beliefs. These factors originated from early experiences such as family traditions and cultural beliefs in the home environment or in the school environment.

The home environment was a determining factor in a student's motivation, attitude, and achievement. It was important to focus not only on the physical surroundings of the home environment, but also at the literacy surroundings. When examining this environment some questions should be addressed: "How did the family use literacy?" "What kinds of activities did the children participate in?" "Did the
parents include the children in their conversation or other literacy activities, such as writing the grocery list, reading the newspapers, and writing notes or messages?" There was a direct correlation between how much a child read, with how successful they were in their literacy achievement. It was a known fact that the more a parent reads to their child and the amount of independent reading done on the child's part, the more their literacy skills improved (Applebee, Langers & Mullis, 1988).

The combination of self-esteem and self-confidence a student possessed made up their self-worth. A student's perception of self-worth definitely affected the student's participation in an activity within the instructional environment. A high priority for the at-risk students was to protect their self-esteem and their sense of ability. They handicapped themselves by not even attempting to study. The reasoning being that in spite of exhausting efforts they would, nonetheless, fail. This feeble attempt at grandeur reflected poorly on their abilities, and they avoided the shame and embarrassment it entailed at all cost.

According to Lewis and Doorlag, at-risk students were especially aware of their level of ability and constantly attempted to protect themselves from humiliation and embarrassment (1991). During a literacy activity they did not devote 100% because if they did, and suddenly became frustrated, they felt it made them look "stupid" before their peers. They already were self-conscious in regards to their learning ability, or lack there of, so they tended to
play it safe rather than risk ridicule. Needless to say, this resulted in their falling still further behind in pace.

The process of learning has challenged every student, especially the at-risk student, whom previously experienced frustration and failure. Therefore, it was extremely important for the learning environment to be warm and inviting to all students. Opportunities to engage in various literacy activities that allow for comfortable experimentation with reading, writing, speaking, listening and computing must be ample and abundant. Group sharing and independent exploration of literacy are an essential part of a positive learning environment. Ultimately, every classroom must create an interest in learning, to the extent that every student felt motivated to read and write and participate in various activities.

According to Christon (1990) the classrooms needed to motivate students to use literacy to reach beyond the classroom, schools and communities into all aspects of their lives. The teachers, as well as the classroom learning environment, played a vital role in the literacy development of at-risk students by stimulating those internal motivations and creating the interest and desire to learn within the classroom. The external motivating factors within the classroom included the setting, engagement in literacy activities, the element of time, the teacher's instructional strategies, and language interaction. Combined with additional factors, a positive learning environment would be created for all learners, especially those at-risk.
All of these factors were integrated within the physical structure of the room to create the "classroom" learning environment which helped to provide the interest and motivation to learn. While these factors overlapped, interrelated, and interacted with one another; intention, desire, and interest were included in all of these areas and were the result of a combination of these various influences.

Historically, the importance of the physical environment in learning and literacy development had been emphasized by many theorists and philosophers. According to Piaget, children acquire knowledge by interacting with the world or environment around them (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). In the classroom learning environment, students assimilated new experiences into familiar settings. Learning took place as the students interacted with peers and adults in social settings and conducive environments (Vygotsky, 1978). Based on these theories, the classroom was designed to provide optimum literacy development through rich literacy activities across the curriculum which included reading, writing, speaking, listening, experimenting, and computing.

The setting, or social and physical surroundings, were important for many reasons, especially in a student's intention and desire to learn. "It must be compatible with the activity, or else the student will not feel very comfortable" (Christon, 1990). For instance, if a student was reading in the library corner while the rest of the class was singing along with a music compact disk, the student who was trying to read would feel uncomfortable or would not be
able to concentrate. On the other hand, if the classroom was dull and boring and a student wanted to talk about the results from a science experiment with peers, the setting again would not be compatible with that activity and would deter the student from initiating this discussion.

Often, an incompatible setting with an activity was the case for the at-risk student: there were too many distractions which served as interference. Their attention span was usually shorter, and the ability to focus required more effort on their behalf; however, if outside of a busy classroom and if at-risk students worked in a smaller, quieter room with a single activity in process, they would fare better than the average non-at-risk student. Unfortunately, this situation arose less frequently.

It was Christon’s (1992) belief that external influences in the classroom, such as peer interaction and teacher interaction, often provided students with a purpose and a goal for learning, which combined with the learning environment to influence the student. The classroom environment should promote autonomy, which, in turn, would have a positive effect on the student’s intrinsic motivation for learning. Thus, the social context and physical environment was crucial in the development of internal motivation and positive attitudes towards learning, especially for at-risk students.

The internalization process was essential for the classroom motivational process (Rosenblatt, 1994). It consisted of a series of transformations. First, a student
reconstructed an activity that initially was external, and then an interpersonal process was transformed into an intrapersonal one after a long series of developmental events. It was important that the classroom environment be conducive for internalization to take place.

A prime example of internalization would be in a model middle school English class in which students were reading *Twelve Angry Men*. The teacher designed the classroom as a courtroom and each student played a role during a certain time in the reading. As students alternated reading, the teacher asked them to visualize a mental picture of the setting during that particular event and time, per each chapter of the literary play. The teacher then asked each student to describe what they saw in detail. Later, they performed a "sketch-to-stretch" exercise. Specifically, they drew a scene from the play, per their own interpretation. This was done in consistence with the play's actual setting, or modernized to fit present day. By having read the novel, acted the novel, seen the novel, and sketched the novel, the teacher aided students with internalizing the literature and thus familiarized them with an essential external activity (an interpersonal process) which transformed into an intrapersonal one.

The notion of internalizing reading activities related to Rosenblatt's (1978) theory of transaction in which the student was continually in transaction with the environment. Within the surroundings of a social context, there were many transactions: peers, teacher, and text. At-risk students
must understand that learning occurred through different transactions, and not only between the student and the text.

Social learning in the proper environment was another aspect that required revision in order achieve a successful outcome with the at-risk student. This learning occurred within the social context when the student's experiences involved social activities in the sense that they participated in an interaction involving one or more persons. The processes or relationships that were involved in social interaction were eventually taken over and internalized by the student to form individual cognitive processes, a genetic law of cultural development (Vygotsky, 1978). Many at-risk students, may not have internalized the social interactional patterns and processes, which then caused confusion.

Along with having created a positive learning environment, motivational opportunities must have been plentiful. For example, a positive learning and reading environment required exposure to literature of all genres; this could be accomplished through a library corner or a classroom bookstore (Bruns, 1992). An example of this would be a "book-a-thon" sponsored by Shorecliffs Middle School. The students and teachers were to donate as many books as possible within a certain time period. By the end of the contest, an English teacher had over 500 different books donated to the school. These numerous books could be very helpful when dealing with at-risk students. If the literature was visibly present in an integral part of the classroom, it would be difficult for any student to ignore. Accessibility
to literature by all students was the intent of this contest. Previously, literature was in a "special" area reserved only for privileged students. This method of storage enabled at-risk students to shy away and distance themselves from literacy interaction. With this new knowledge, teachers had now stationed reading material completely around the classroom, so students were in constant view of various literary works. By configuring the classroom in such a manner, students engaged in some type of visual or physical contact with the literature at all times.

According to Bruns (1992), every classroom should have provided motivational opportunities and many activities at various levels of difficulty that were challenging and also fun. Opportunities to transact with the literature, including the classroom text, should also be included in many activities that span across the curriculum. A prime example of this activity was one used by many schools modeled from a U.C.I Writing Project: The Hot Seat. Select students dressed up as characters from a book. These students then sat before the class and fielded questions from their peers. However, the students, in costume, were required to answer all questions in accordance to the persona of the fictional character whom they were representing, not as themselves. Other such activities were applicable to different subjects. In a social science course, for instance, teachers had students re-enact famous events. In math and science courses manipulatives were used to demonstrate proven theories. Once again, this would aid at-risk students in the internalization
of information. Frequently, at-risk students preferred activities such as these rather than writing book reports or answering theoretical questions at a chapter’s end.

Ultimately, the bottom line was to make at-risk students feel confident about themselves and their abilities in order to boost their self-esteem and morale.

Peer interaction, as well as teacher–student interaction, was a consequential component of a healthy classroom learning environment. Such activities as peer editing or collaborative groups were vital for all student growth. Students learned a great deal from one another through structured activities such as reader response and free play groups. However, it was the teacher–student interaction that was the essence of the learning environment and the learning process. These interactions were not to be noisy and loud, but instead occurred during quiet sessions such as small groups or free reading periods. During this valuable time, the teacher would work one-on-one with at-risk students whom so desperately needed the additional help.

Student study groups such as the ones performed in an A.V.I.D (Advancement Via Individual Determination) class also increased the motivational and learning levels in students. While many post-AVID students maintained high grade point averages, this was not the case prior to their enrollment in the program. These students were once considered at-risk due to their English language limitations, lack of a stable residence, or low motivational skills. These, and many other
outside factors contributed to their plummeting grades and ultimately, to their AVID enrollment. However, by working in peer study groups with teachers and tutors, most AVID students overcame their limitations and were able to succeed. It must be noted that teacher and tutors acted to empower the students with self confidence. They served only as facilitators for the study groups, it was the responsibility of each individual student AVID group to perform. For example, they needed to find the correct answer, write the first rough draft, outline the chapter, or complete whatever coursework necessary. The teachers and tutors refrained from interjecting and if necessary only did so to stimulate the group's implementation of problem solving skills (AVID Summer Institute, 1997).

The AVID program's great success was attributed to the fundamental theories of START; that all at-risk students could succeed once exposed to the proper learning environment at home, as well as in school. However, it was the teachers, who played a pivotal role in the learning process for each at-risk AVID student. Adult teachers, have often looked back on their early educational careers, and recalled a teacher who influenced them positively. This was evident in cases where teachers were commonly asked the reason for choosing their profession. Many teachers responded that they, as students, were so strongly influenced by an instructor, that it dramatically changed the course of their lives, and in turn they could not avoid playing that same vital role in another person's young life.
Students had always looked to teachers for guidance, knowledge, and reassurance, and at times, love and compassion. Additionally, at-risk students looked to teachers for inspiration and motivation, encouragement and support. They required everyday love and nourishment in order to survive the educational battle on the front lines. Teachers should provide all of this and more in the classroom learning environment. The actual method of lesson planning was crucial for the success of at-risk students. Using a variety of instructional strategies and assessment practice was essential. Levy (1992) states, "It is very important for the teacher to break away from the everyday routine, and explore more diversity and creativity. Teachers must challenge the students to succeed; students will only accomplish as much as educators let them."

It has always been helpful to use an assortment of strategies for different activities. If tactics applied in school were reinforced at home, educators would be empowered to build a bridge that students desperately yearn to cross. This collaboration may break down barriers that had previously interfered with student learning. START has believed that these ideas should be shared with parents in conferences or gatherings such as Back-To-School-Night. START would intend to issue a parent newsletter to highlight the instructional strategies and assessment practices.

Teacher’s actions should be designed to increase student’s motivation and interest in learning. Frequently, teachers needed to provide engaging reading and writing
activities in combination with other meaningful literacy tasks, such as math games, science experiments, or a social science reenactment. In having done so, the student was constantly exposed to various types of literacy tasks crucial to their motivational ability.

Ultimately, teachers created a literacy community within the classroom. The instructional strategies and assessment practices that were used contributed to the creation and development of the student’s motivation to learn within this community. The belief in a student’s own capabilities aided in the creation of a positive learning environment. If the belief that all students are able to learn holds true, literacy development will be promoted and encouraged. At times; however, teachers believed at-risk students lacked the ability to learn, and as a result did not promote literacy development. This situation needs to be annihilated. If teachers believed that all students, at-risk or not, had the ability to learn and succeed in the classroom, then it would be so. Furthermore, it must be understood that due to bureaucratic red tape, hands may be bound, but not rendered useless. Propositions such as 227 which attempted to radically end bilingual education, after 30 years in progress, only served to hinder students; however, educators overcame such impediments and confronted the implementation of English-only emersion as unconstitutional and thus maintained a continual quest for parallel academic success amongst all at-risk students.

In conclusion, the process of motivating at-risk
students was one of the greatest challenges facing modern day teachers. The most crucial point to emphasize was the at-risk student’s desire to learn is truly genuine. Unfortunately, due to negative experiences they have often experienced frustration and low self worth. By identifying the personal and cognitive factors that influenced at-risk students, teachers would be one step closer to having successfully provided them with the tools to achieve their highest potential. Words of comfort were that teachers now had the ability to assist students on their road to scholastic achievement. However, to have created this road in a warm, and inviting learning environment was the greatest contribution to all children and was a cause well worth aspiring for.
CHAPTER THREE: Implementation

**Step one:** Board and Community Approval (09/98-10/98)

The implementation of START will not be effective until the 1999-2000 school year. Therefore, sufficient time exists to perform a plethora of necessary work to be accomplished. The first step in this journey is convincing the Capistrano Unified School District Board to ratify this proposal. START will submit a detailed plan to the Board at the beginning of the 1998-99 school year. A synopsis of the plan is as follows:

I. Introduction of the S.T.A.R.T program
II. Capistrano Unified School District's itemized list of financial responsibility:
   A. $1,190.00 for release time:
      1. $850.00 allotted for substitutes for field trips. One reward field trip per month.
      2. $340.00 required for release time to interview elementary school teachers and potential START students.
   B. $1,000.00 for field trips transportation:
   C. $500.00 for academic material:
      1. i.e. computer software, pens, paper transparencies...
   D. $2,000.00 for instructional aides’ payroll

Calculations:

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Release time/substitute pay</td>
<td>$1,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District transportation</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational material</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payroll: instructional aides</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Start-Up Cost: $4,690.
It's important to mention why the community would be asked to supply some of the additional cost of this program. START believes it to be the district's responsibility to support a program, such as this, to their fullest financial ability. However, START also needs the community to be held accountable for partial responsibility and obligations. By holding each institution accountable, START students will reap the benefits.

Due to the fact that the program deals directly with the at-risk student and their need(s) to overcome adversity, START anticipates board and community approval with little difficulty. Once this approval is finalized, the program can begin communications with elementary school teachers.

**Step two:** Communicating and assisting elementary teachers in identifying potential START students (09/98-06/99)

Another major component of START involves working directly with elementary school teachers. It is through their advice, recommendations, and devotion that START can succeed. Since the program is new, assistance from these teachers will be necessary throughout the school year.

The program will begin communications with fourth grade teachers. The rationale for introducing the START program at this grade level is basic: "Children who do not read at least moderately well by the end of the third grade, long term studies show, have a very poor chance of even graduating
from high school" (Colvin, 1998). It is at this age that students become identified as being "at-risk." This is a direct result of their low reading and/or writing skills. Once START can begin communication with teachers of these students, then the tracking process may begin. Tracking will include grade print outs, attendance records, behavioral reports, and more importantly, writing portfolios. These writing portfolios will help in evaluating the student and their particular need(s).

Cooperation between START teachers and elementary teachers is essential. Elementary teachers will report on potential START students. Reports will begin at the fourth grade level and continue until the seventh grade.

These reports will help identify and track not only the student’s academic success or failure, but also their social and physical environment. It is impossible to fully understand the student’s ability until there is a complete understanding of their background. With such a program, it is extremely important for START to work directly with teachers. These teachers associate and interact with their students on a daily basis making decisions and judgments based primarily on their academic records. These records would illustrate a solid informative foundation pertaining to student’s social or physical compositions. For example, many programs solely base academic decisions on recorded shortcomings lacking consideration to intangible factors. It is more important to understand events in the student’s social and physical environment in order to fully
comprehend the reasons attributed to their lack of success. Many questions need to be answered:

"Are they a latch-key child?"

"Are they an extrovert or introvert?"

"Whom do they associate with during and after school?"

The answers to these questions will aid in formulating a solid profile for each student. Furthermore, it is through continual portfolio evaluation that teachers may better understand individual student strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps this process will identify required help in areas such as clarity, organization, structure, or vocabulary in writing. Writing portfolios will further help in analyzing select individual’s limitations and develop plans of reconciling their afflictions. START teachers will receive a first-hand account of where students are lacking and, as a result, can work directly with them to correct the matter.

In addition, the portfolio is a tool for expanding the quantitative and qualitative information used to examine literacy learning and to plan for instruction. Through the use of portfolios, students are encouraged to become active participants and evaluators of their own learning. A strong reason for using the portfolio method of assessment is that it successfully delivers a complete picture of the at-risk student. “A portfolio is a cultural artifact, a highly individualized artifact, intended to serve the needs of a particular class working with a particular instructor” (Metzger and Bryant, 1994).

The current teacher will complete portfolio reports each
semester and forward them to the student's upcoming teacher at the next grade level. START will receive the portfolio at the beginning of the seventh grade then complete a paradigm of the student's academic and social development.

**Step three:** Working with community leaders to improve community funding and involvement with the START program

(09/98-06/99)

In order to have a successful program at any level of education, the community must be involved to a certain extent. This especially holds true in regards to the START program, which aside from advocating community financial responsibility, also requires of them a hands-on role in the tutoring process.

First on the agenda will be to contact the Chamber of Commerce Chapter in the City of San Clemente. They can provide a list of all businesses that participate with their organization. This list will serve to solicit community active businesses in support of START.

Undoubtedly, businesses will have several interested parties who are directly affected by district decisions. Their involvement may stem from the enrollment of their own children at the schools, or that of relatives or friends. More often than not, individuals will express interest in taking an active role in supporting the educational system. Often, local businesses will contact schools to offer their
services and support. This support may come in the way of donations, or public appearances.

Aside from the local businesses, START will also contact professional organizations such as the Sunrise Rotary Club, the Elk’s Club and the Kiwanis Club. These organizations are ideal due to their obligation to perform various forms of community service. The START program will initially be introduced in written form, via a letter, and then will follow-up with a scheduled appointment date and confirmation in order to elaborate on the program.

Another community project that START will undertake entails inviting local professionals into the classrooms to discuss the importance of an education. These individuals would demonstrate the correlation between an education and a career. At this junction in their lives, it is difficult for at-risk students to understand that the value placed on a good education is priceless. The purpose of these presentations is to provide students who have only experienced failure with dreams and aspirations through guidance.

One day each month will be allocated for community speaker presentations. South Orange County’s diversity will not make the task of finding professionals with varying backgrounds difficult. White collar professionals such as architects, doctors, attorneys, engineers, etc. will speak and inspire those select students with similar callings. Blue collar workers such as production line workers, mechanics, fast food industry employees, clerks of various fields, etc.
will also be recruited for students with similar ambitions. Public workers such as teachers, police officers, firefighters, public officials, etc. will speak to inspire yet another group of students. START will seek individuals with different credentials and incomes in order to expose students to various occupations. These speakers will serve as positive role models to children who need to formulate dreams. This experience will allow them to consider certain positions as a long term goals and others as stepping stones.

Another way to solicit business from the community will be to have students "shadow" an individual in the field that interest them. This is an effective way to receive hands-on experience and learn of the job descriptions. Many students want to be police officers, firemen, or other jobs that are in the public eye. However, students do not understand the work required behind the scenes. Writing and communication skills, meeting deadlines, and staying in good physical condition are some of the requirements for these jobs.

An important contributor from the community is law enforcement. It will be mandatory to have the Orange County Sheriff be an active participant in the START program and reiterate the importance of an education. Many students, not just at-risk students, have trouble understanding the repercussion of a criminal record. More eminently, for those lacking positive role models, who need to know that street gang membership is not an alternative. Many at-risk students are looking for someone, or something, to associate with. Unfortunately, desperate desire to fit-in usually leads to
trouble. Having law enforcement officers share their experiences of wayward teens and advise on the perils of the streets would serve as a deterrent to trouble.

Aside from an academic relationship, the community must be held responsible in the funding of extra-curricular activities. This is of benefit to all students, not just the at-risk student. Many students, especially those at-risk, are latch-key kids. They arrive home, after school, to an empty house without supervision which is the main ingredient for trouble.

Community involvement will not be something achieved with a mere letter. In order for this program to get started, program directors must telemarket, walk the streets, get the parents involved, and make positive noise in the community.

**Step four:** Receiving complete support from the administration and teaching staff. Monthly meetings with the principal and vice principal(s) in collaboration with the staff meetings (09/98-06/99).

In order for this to become a successful program, START must acquire the complete support of the administration. The Start program is worthy and should receive priority over other programs. Some of the items START would request are additional release time, computers (word processors), use of the resident substitute on short notice, district mailing fees, one additional prep necessary to review student’s work.
and communicate with their core teachers, and an additional stipend for after school tutorials. Furthermore, the START class size would be a maximum of twenty-to-one ratio. Larger numbers would defeat the purpose of START’S individualistic approach.

The teaching staff will be another valuable asset to be utilized. START will pass out biweekly progress reports to teachers with START students. These reports will solicit:

* current class grade
* current behavior/attitude
* missing work, attendance and tardies

In addition to progress reports, the staff would be asked to donate additional materials, lesson plans, or their own time to the program. Often, at-risk students will identify with a certain teacher who will cause a positive impact. Having teachers donate their prep period once a week would alleviate problems associated with the initiating of a new program.

There are also alternatives for those teachers hesitant to render their prep period. Besides weekly tutorial during school hours, START will utilize additional tutorials after school. This will benefit both student and teacher. First of all, students could remain after school and receive additional help in all the subject areas. This would allow them to be productive with their spare time, while also preventing them from going home to an empty house or “hanging” with the wrong crowd. The teacher, on the other hand, would receive the satisfaction that comes with helping
one in need, while also supplementing their income with an additional hour's pay.

Given the many options, the bottom line still remains, in order for success, START requires the complete support of both the administration and staff. By working with both parties throughout the 1998-99 school year, establishing deadline and goals, working out differences and communicating with the district office, START is expected to be implemented in the 1999-2000 school year.

**Step five:** Interviewing potential START students and parents for the 1999-2000 school year (04/99-07/99).

Following the completion and approval of the initial application, START staff will begin to interview students and parents for the available openings. Interviews will be based on recommendations from the elementary school teachers. However, prior to interviewing students, the START staff will review individual writing portfolios, attendance and behavioral records, and any additional relevant information. During the actual interview, certain pertinent questions will be directed to the student:

**"What do you like most about school?"**

**"What do you like least about school?"**

**"What is your favorite/least favorite subject and why?"**

**"What do you want to be when you grow up?"**

**"Who is your favorite super hero and why?"**

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Response to the final two questions will not be taken into consideration, but are designed to place the children at ease during the rest of the interview. Once certain basic information from the student is attained, START will turn its attention to the parent(s).

Dialogue with the parent(s) is crucial. At this point, START staff receives the majority of information about the child's social and physical environment. Honesty is very important during this stage of the interview. Parent(s) are advised of the intensity of the START program. Success entails a commitment to strict policy on behalf of the program and parents. It is made clear that this program will serve to benefit their child only in conjunction with their support at home.

It is the parent's responsibility to see that their child's homework is written down and signed by the teacher. That work is reviewed and completed by the end of the night. Also, parents are advised to establish a curfew, and to monitor who their child associates with. START understands that many at-risk kids come from broken families surrounded by divorce, abuse, or neglect. However, the purpose behind interviewing parents is to convey the message of the effectiveness and intensity of START and to share the belief that ultimately, parents have a responsibility in raising their child.

The final step in the interviewing process is to read and sign the START contract by all parties.
Step six: Interview and hire all instructional aides (07/99-09/99).

While it is understood that this program will be soliciting the community for individuals to donate their time in the form of tutoring, it is also presumed that on occasion, certain tutoring confirmations will be canceled. In cases such as these, START will have instructional aides on hand as back-up support.

Two aides will be recruited from the teacher credentialing office of local colleges such as U.C.I, and Cal-State Fullerton. Their responsibilities will entail more than just tutoring. Their work description will consist of, but not be limited to:

*copying and filing papers
*shadowing the students to class to observe their note taking, listening, and behavioral skills.
*assisting the START teacher with all tutorials
*contacting parents on their student’s progress.

The relationship between the START teachers, instructional aides, and students, benefits all three parties. First of all, the teacher is alleviated of miscellaneous paper work and endless phone calls that come with a new program.

Second, the instructional aide will be receiving university credits, as well as a paycheck. Furthermore, the program familiarizes aides with teachers and administrators while adding credentials to their resume. Most importantly, aides are receiving valuable hands-on experience in a classroom situation.
Finally, the students benefit as well by having the luxury (not to mention great fortune) of receiving additional help from individuals who truly care about them and their future.

**Step seven** Establishing the proper guidelines for the tutorials (06/99-08/99).

Tutoring any student is difficult, but attempting to establish a program in which to tutor at least twenty at-risk students is a challenge. Guidelines and boundaries must be implemented for appropriate tutoring to take place in this atmosphere. In order for the proper tutoring skills to be accomplished, START will emulate the tutorial program applied to the A.V.I.D (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program.

There are various methods and procedures of tutoring. The first, and most beneficial, is one-on-one contact between the teacher and student. However, this is not feasible in the START program due to the student/teacher ratio. Unfortunately, there does not exist sufficient instructors to apply the one-on-one method nor does there exist sufficient time.

The second method of tutoring allows the student to be taken out of a particular period (say, physical education) in order to meet with a START teacher to discuss their needs. This method proves to be unpractical as well, since the student will fall behind in the class from which excused.
The logical alternative is to implement a program that satisfies all parties. Tutorials will be conducted by subject area. For example, all students requiring help in social science will meet in a group; all those who need help in English will meet in another group; still those who need help in science will meet in yet another group. However, the difference between this method of tutoring and others is the students do the research and help each other, while the tutor acts as the facilitator.

It would be considered extremely elementary for at-risk students to sit in a tutoring group while the tutor answers the questions. In cases such as this, learning is definitely not in effect. A more suitable situation would be for students to write down their questions or problems on a piece of paper then attempt to resolve them as a group. Each student in the group would research their personal notes, or books for the correct answer. In this process, all the students are inquiring and gaining valuable information. The worse case scenario in such a group would be the inability to produce an answer. In which case, the tutor would act as the facilitator and direct their efforts, but not supply the answer. This method allows the students to remain responsible for answering the question and learn how to analyze and comprehend the solution.

Step eight: Creating the curriculum for the START program (06/99-09/99).

The curriculum for the START program will encompass two
different sections: tutorials on Tuesday and Thursday, and organizational, study, time management, reading and writing skills on Monday and Wednesday. Friday will alternate between classroom skills, tutorials, or free time (games, computer work, or rewards) depending on the schedule and student needs.

There will be a multitude of reading and writing activities that will be addressed in the Appendix Section.

**Step nine:** Having teachers, administrators, and community leaders recognize and reward students for scholarly or behavioral achievements (09/99-02-00)

One of the simplest, but least used, techniques for building of self-esteem is recognition. Accomplishments, no matter how simple, are still accomplishments nonetheless. Recognition can range from a pat on the back, to a positive letter home, or even a certificate of improvement at a school assembly.

An objective of START during the implementation of the program is to ensure that all teachers identify and understand a START student when enrolled in their class. This is not to propose extra privileges or rewards, but instead to inform the teacher that this student has certain difficulties, yet is eager to succeed in their class.

If at-risk students are adhering to the contract they signed, and are making an honest effort to flourish, then
they should be recognized for their efforts. Recognition through certain accolades is effective:

* student of the month
* citizen of the month
* a certificate of accomplishment from the principal
* outstanding achievement award presented to them from a representative in the community

The underlying purpose for this type of acknowledgment obviously is an attempt to build self-esteem. By recognizing students, START is helping them understand the importance of their accomplishments, and therefore building upon their once very shallow, or superficial confidence level.

Furthermore, by notifying the staff of the student’s limitations, but also of the student’s will to succeed, START hopes to eradicate erroneous stereotypes. How many times have educators, labeled a student “lazy,” “anti-social,” or a “renegade” without actually knowing that particular student’s history or home environment? Surely, all of society is guilty of such hastened judgments in one form or another.
CHAPTER FOUR: Evaluation

The assessment of this project will encompass everyone from the student, to the community, and back to the administration. It is only through combined feedback that the START program can truly assess the status of the project.

The Student

The program will begin with the actual student who is, after all, the focal point of our attention. START anticipates receiving a large number of applications. The first part of the evaluation process will be based off of grades, attendance and behavior of those individuals in the program, in comparison to those who were recommended, but did not register. It is hypothesized that individuals in the START program will receive better marks compared to those who did not enroll. Other studies have proven that students who are in programs such as AVID perform better in the long run.

The Scores

Aside from evaluating the program from one semester’s work, START will also compare student scores in the START program with their scores at the elementary level. Once more, START would need to utilize the elementary teachers and their assessment. START staff would review the strategy of establishing guidelines for those recruited, and determine the validity for their being considered at-risk, and assess their improvement.
Achievement Level Test

Another valuable assessment will be the comparison of the Reading and Language Achievement Level Test scores in the fall versus those in the spring. This test is administered twice a year to all students in the Capistrano Unified School District. One test will be given in the beginning of fall quarter and the other at the end of spring. This will be a valuable indicator of improvement or setback. Since these students have been identified as at-risk, due to low reading and writing skills, this test will establish a beginning score at the start of the program and then determine their improvement at the end of the program with the spring test.

The START Program Directors

The administration, teaching staff, and START program directors will be held accountable during the evaluation phase. To establish academic awareness rewards through certification, lunch parties, group field trips and other activities will be an attained objective. At the semester’s end a program review will be scheduled to determine if goals were reached. How many certificates were awarded? Were there enough lunch parties? Did the field trips have educational value or were they simply for entertainment purposes? These and other questions will also be reviewed as part of the evaluation.
The Teaching Staff

The teaching staff will critique their assessment in a survey given at the end of the semester. They will identify the START students that were in their class. They will answer such questions as: Were START students actually devoting a valid effort, or were they riding the coat tails of others? If they were trying, were they ever nominated for student of the month or citizen of the month? Furthermore, were any certificates presented to these students at school assemblies? The response to these questions will be a major part of the evaluation, since the motivational rewards are accredited as the lure for student success. If at-risk students remain unmotivational and continue to perform poorly, then there exists no purpose behind the establishment of the START program.

The Administration

The administration assessment will encompass the same objective as that of the teaching staff. Did members work inside the school and in the community to support these students? START will review the number of academic assemblies given during the semester. Considering the middle school is on the quarter system, at least one assembly per quarter is appropriate. In addition to academic acknowledgments, START will assess if students were rewarded for good behavior or perfect attendance. Grades will be an important instrument for measuring success; however, it should not be the only instrument. Many students may not
show academic improvement for a year or two, but this should not take away from the efforts they are exuding.

The Community

Another influential aspect of the START program will be the community—subjected to its own evaluation. Since they are a vital part of the success of the program, their assessment will be more scrutinized. Throughout the program, START staff will measure the community involvement through tutorial time logs, specifically, the number of hours accumulated in one quarter. START staff will also take into consideration the actual individuals who participated. Were a variety of professionals from different occupational backgrounds, ethnicities and gender diversity represented?

The financial funding from the community will be measured through a general ledger record by the office manager and filed in the principal's office. These funds will be deposited into an A.S.B account titled "Community Funding for the Start Program." The directors and community leaders will establish certain financial goals to be reached at the end of each semester. These goals will be reviewed and revised each semester.

Recommendations

Future scholars looking to emulate a project such as START, may consider various methods of implementation. First, it is highly recommended to include E.L.D. (English Language Development) and S.D.A.I.E (Specially Designed
Academic Instruction in English) students. At least one of the program directors should be S.D.A.I.E credentialled. START believes that language should not be a barrier for success. These students are categorized “at-risk” due to low English reading and writing skills, but that is not to imply their native language skills are suffering. This group was not included in START because credentials at hand did not support such a maneuver.

The second recommendation is to offer at least four or five sections of the program. Over the recent years, newspaper articles have discussed the growing problem of incoming college freshmen lacking remedial English, thus costing millions of tax-payer dollars. This is a direct result of the failure within the educational system. Allowing students to slip through the cracks is unacceptable. Undoubtedly, many of today’s remedial English college students would have qualified as “at-risk.” If more programs such as START were in effect today, the future would be a brighter.

The final recommendation is in regards to class size. A maximum of twenty students per class, with a minimum of two instructional aides at all times is an ideal learning environment. Overcrowding would not permit students to work in small groups, one-on-one, or individually with the teacher or aide if necessary. These numbers also allow for more individual contact, which should not be sacrificed at any cost.

In conclusion, it is pertinent to remember when
interacting with at-risk students to momentarily view the world through their eyes. This may help teachers relate and bond with their students and together conquer the frustrating factors which hinder the learning process. By motivating students to become active participants in their own education, they are motivated to become active participants in their own lives. By providing support and encouragement, teachers are empowering students with hope and providing them with control of their destiny. These efforts will someday make a lasting difference not only in both the student’s and teacher’s life, but also in every life they encounter.
APPENDIX A

Introducing the Community to Our Program

City of San Clemente
Chamber of Commerce
3182 Camino Capistrano
San Clemente, CA 92672

Dear Chamber of Commerce:

We're currently starting a special program that deals with students who are at-risk of dropping out of school because of their low reading, writing, and social skills. We are turning to you, as a member of the community, for help. There are a couple of different avenues you could pursue.

We're in need of materials for the classroom (pens, pencils, paper and transparencies), computer items (hard or soft disks, ink cartridges, any software), or miscellaneous materials (folders, files, markers).

If none of these items are feasible, the one item that we're in desperate need of is your time. We plan on conducting tutorials for the students. They need role models to assist them with their work. They need someone to say, "Good job," or "I care."

If you can help us out in any of these areas of concern, we would appreciate it. You can contact us at Shorecliffs Middle School (949) 498-1660.

Sincerely,

Matthew J. Raith
S.T.A.R.T Coordinator Representative
APPENDIX B
START Student / Parent / Teacher Contract

Success Through Academic Responsibility and Togetherness

Name of Student_________ Enrollment Date_______

START is a program which prepares students meet the
challenges in the middle school curriculum.

Student Goals and Responsibilities:
1) To turn in all assigned homework on time.
2) To not accrue more than three absents per quarter.
3) To establish a 2.0 grade point average your first quarter
   in the program and improve each quarter afterwards.
4) To receive no tardies, truants, or office referrals while
   enrolled in the program.
5) Have all your teachers sign your "Binder Reminder" even
   if no assignments were given.
6) Attend all possible after school tutorials.

Parent Goals and Responsibilities:
1) Review all homework every night and sign it off.
2) Keep a biweekly contact with the START teacher on your
   student’s progress.
3) Establish proper guidelines and be role model for your
   student

Student/Parent Agreement:
I agree to accept the above terms and do my best to adhere to
them.

Student Signature____________________

Parent Signature____________________

Teacher Signature____________________
Dear Mr. Moore,

I received your name from my brother, Mike Raith. He informed me that you may be able to lend a helping hand to a program being initiated at my school: S.T.A.R.T, (Success Through Academic Responsibility and Togetherness). This program deals with students who are at-risk of dropping out due to academic, social, emotional, or economic reasons.

The reason I’m contacting you is because I have received permission from Capistrano Unified School District to install vending machines at Shorecliffs Middle School. The commission from these sales would go directly to the START program. However, our district has a policy that prohibits soda being sold at the middle school level. Mike informed me that Pepsi can accommodate us with other products such as PowerAid, water, and Fruitopia or whatever you may recommend.

I look forward to meeting with you at your nearest convenience. You can contact me at Shorecliffs Middle School (949) 498-1660. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Matthew J. Raith
S.T.A.R.T Coordinator Representative
APPENDIX D

Motivational Merchandise for the START Student

Jeff Kelly
General Manager
Killer Dana Surf Shop
24621 Del Prado
Dana Point, CA 92629

Dear Mr. Kelly,

Middle School is a very difficult time for many students. As a teacher who works with low-motivational students, the difficulty of my job is intensified. Many of these students do not understand the correlation of a good education and a successful job. The activities they identify with are surfing, skating and roller blading.

Your surf shop is a symbol of their ever-pursuing quest of educational freedom. It is for this reason that I am seeking your services. I would appreciate any items (stickers, skateboards, rollerblades etc...) that you could donate to my class. I would use this form of teenage entertainment to reward their efforts. It is my objective to motivate these students through positive reinforcement. If these items are not feasible, please feel free to offer other merchandise. Your community involvement is pivotal for the success of the educational institution.

I can be contacted at Shorecliffs Middle School (949) 4989-1660. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Matthew J. Raith
S.T.A.R.T Coordinator Representative
APPENDIX E

Suggested Reading and Writing Activities for the Program

One of the many goals of the START program is to have the students become active readers and writers on a daily basis. Part of the curriculum will consist of the class reading the same novel during the non-tutoring days. In order for the students to become more involved, and enthused, about reading and writing, the program will implement certain strategies from the California Literature Project to encourage this development. These strategies include, but are not limited to the following:

1) DOUBLE ENTRY/DIALECTICAL JOURNAL

What: A double-entry journal allows the student to take notes and add his/her own reflection while reading literature. It provides two columns which are in dialogue with each other. The journal provides a non-threatening beginning to writing and promotes writing fluency. Students are encouraged to explore ideas, responses, and to take risks in their writing.

When: As the students progress through the text.

Why: To actively involve the student in making meaning by encouraging interaction with the text. This journal not only develops a method of critical reading, but also encourages habits of reflective questioning. The journal creates a visible, permanent record and allows the student to interact personally with the literature.

How: Divide a sheet of paper in half. On the left side, the student copies a quotation or passage from the text that has
been selected by the teacher or the reader. The student records quotations which he finds luminous, enlightening, enigmatic or otherwise stimulating. On the right side of the paper, the reader may respond, question, make personal connections, evaluate, reflect, analyze, or interpret.

2. METACOGNITIVE JOURNAL

What: Students analyzes their own thought processes

When: Following any activity

Why: A higher level of critical thinking occurs when one is aware of one’s thought processes. Metacognitive encourages the student to reflect on the steps which evolved into the completion of the reading, the final draft of the paper, or the presentation of a project. What enabled the student to gain the most from this experience? What would the student do differently if he/she had the time to return to the project?

How: Divide the paper in half, and on the left side the student records, “What I learned.” On the right side of the paper, they record, “How I came to learn it.”

3. LEARNING LOGS

What: A Learning Log refers to a written response by students most commonly used in response to literature but can be used in other content areas. This strategy is not as tied to text as the double entry journal. The left column entries can be used to research notes, vocabulary, or questions
instead of direct quotations. Right column entries are the student’s response, interpretation, or analysis of the left column entries.

**When:** When the student needs to “write to think,” or “write to learn.”

**Why:** These Learning Logs allow a personal response to a learning situation. In the right-hand column, the student “owns” the new facts by putting them in his/her own words or by raising his/her own questions.

4. **SYNTHESIS JOURNAL**

**What:** The student reflects on cumulative activities in light of his/her own experience and plans for personal application.

**When:** At the end of the week’s activities, or at the end of a chunk of instruction.

**Why:** This journal encourages the students to review past experiences and plan for future applications. The act of writing reinforces the concept learned.

**How:** Divide a piece of paper into sections. Record “What I did,” “What I learned,” and “How I can use it.”

5. **SPECULATION ABOUT EFFECTS JOURNAL**

**What:** The student examines events and speculates about the possible long-term effects resulting from these events.

**When:** When events occur which may have long-range results.

**Why:** To encourage the students to anticipate the changes which might occur based on the event(s) experienced.
How: Divide the paper in half and on the left side record, "What happened." On the right side, they would write, "What might/should happen as a result of this."

6. QUICKWRITE

What: Quickwrite is a special kind of writing that lets the student use the act of writing itself to discover what they already know. It works only if the students write without planning and without looking back.

When: To solidify an impression of the student's thoughts about any subject before, during, or after learning experience.

Why: It is a special type of writing that surfaces internal discoveries to provide insight into the student's own thinking. This writing clarifies thinking.

How: Write breathlessly, recklessly, passionately until fingers are tired or for a given amount of time (i.e. 2 or 3 minutes). The students write anything they can think about in regards to the topic. They need not worry about punctuation, spelling, or grammar...just write.

7 THINK ALOUD PROTOCOL

What: This activity allows students to explore ideas and exchange thoughts. Partners encourage each other and extend each other's thinking. This activity should be limited to pairs so that immediate feedback is possible.
**When:** Thinking aloud can best be used while pairs read a piece of literature.

**Why:** This allows maximum involvement between involvement between pairs as they attempt (grapple) to unlock literal level meaning of the text (i.e. vocabulary, speaker, images) and to discover how they came to understand the selection.

**How:** Put students in pairs with the text so they can read aloud and exchange interpretations, concerns, and ideas. As students read aloud, they freely express any thoughts about the content, any problems or dilemmas they encounter and how to resolve them, any connections to real life characters or situations, and/or interpretations or judgments they are making.

8. **K-W-L**

**What:** A megacognitive format that involves a three-part thinking process which asks the student to respond: (1) to what they know prior to the reading; (2) what they want to know after they’ve read, and (3) what they have learned following the reading.

**When:** This process is introduced before the reading and continues to be used during and after the reading.

**Why:** This process performs three services. One, it activates previous knowledge or schema. Two, it provides purpose for reading. Three, it provides a summary of what has been learned.

**How:** Divide a piece of paper into three column with the
following headings: What do you know (K)? What do you want to find out (W)? What did you learn (L)? The (K) and (W) columns are completed prior to reading the selection. The selection is read and answers to the (W) column questions are recorded in the (L) column. Unanswered questions can become the focus of follow-up lessons.

9. TRANSFORMATION (FROM GENRE TO GENRE)

What: Rewrite a text into a new form. For example the students would write a short story into a play, novel into a poem, or a poem into an essay.

Why: Deepening of personal meaning from a text.

How: Model, discuss, write, share

When: After reading and/or the study of the text.

10. READERS THEATER (DRAMATIZATION)

What: The scripting of a piece of literature into dialogue. It is then read aloud dramatically.

Why: Deepens appreciation and transforms discursive into presentational form. Helps to summarize the story, but more importantly, enables students to become the characters they portray.

How: Appropriate portions of literary works are assigned to readers who write and perform them as drama.

When: Readers Theater is most successful when performed with literature containing 85% or more dialogue.
11. CREATING CHAPTERS TITLES (SYNTHESIS)

What: Creating Chapter Titles help determine the main idea/theme for that portion of text.

Why: This activity helps develop higher level thinking while focusing on important concepts.

How: Put the students in collaborative groups with learning partners, or individually. Next the students create a title for the chapter, and they share their titles with the class.

12. SKETCH TO STRETCH (SYMBOLIZATION)

What: The sketch to stretch activity allows for visual representation to provide an exploration of meaning.

Why: Enables the student to create visual meaning making.

How: Students work in groups and discuss what intrigued them in the story. They can consider the text as a whole, a character, a theme, and individual episode, symbols, or whatever interest them in the story. The students' interpretation guides them in creating a VISUAL to share with the class. Groups can use poster paper, colored markers, or magazine pictures to create their graphic. Finally, the visuals are shared and explained to the class.

When: This activity may be used during or after completion of the literature.

13. GUIDED IMAGERY (VISUALIZATION)

What: This visual activity helps develop meaning by creating personal pictures of the text in the mind as sensory description are suggested or read by the teacher. As a
result, this helps ‘set’ the scene mentally for students prior to reading the literature or writing a descriptive paper.

**Why:** This technique is used to connect personally, but vicariously with the literature and the setting. Basically, it demonstrates how ‘place’ contributes to meaning.

**How:** The teacher reads aloud as all students close their eyes and formulate mental pictures using the five senses.

**When:** This is performed before, during, or after the reading.

14. **LIFE EXPERIENCE (MAKING PERSONAL CONNECTIONS)**

**What:** This technique allows students to remember or explore an experience or aspect of their lives which is similar or related to an experience or important aspect from the reading selection.

**When:** It can be used as an introduction to a literary work; in anticipation of a critical point during the reading, or in response to the reading of a work.

**Why:** This is an excellent activity to encourage students to make personal connections between their lives and a character’s experiences. It also helps students understand that universal truths and experiences are explored in literature.

**How:** The teacher should identify the theme(s) in the literature and ask students to quickwrite about or discuss a personal experience related to this particular theme or focus. Examples could consist of: first love, an
exhilarating experience, prejudice, or the death of loved one.

15. HOT SEAT (CHARACTER ANALYSIS)
What: This activity allows students to assume the persona of a character in the literature being read. The student (in character) answers questions from others in the group. More importantly, this requires the student to live in the shoes of the selected character.
When: The Hot Seat is best illustrated after a portion or all of the text has been read.
How: The teacher should divide the class into small groups of 3-5 students. Once that has taken place, each student selects a different character to emulate. Finally, the students are given two minutes to respond "in character" to the questions posed by all the members of the group.
To facilitate this implementation:

1. Have the groups brainstorm all possible questions. These questions might focus on why a character did something or how he/she felt about something that happened.

2. In order for these students to respond to the questions, put them in expert character groups to share ideas about these characters.

3. Some lead-in activities might include using puppets, character masks, and living murals.
APPENDIX F

Questionnaire for the Elementary School Teacher

School Name

Student Name

Grade Level

Date

Please rate the student on the following categories. Fill in a score of 1-to-11 for each category list (1 being extremely weak and 10 being strongest possible)

Category                                      Rating

1) Writing skills                              
2) Reading skills                              
3) Social skills                               
4) Organizational skills                       
5) Classroom Behavior                          
6) Classroom Participation                     
7) Attendance                                  

Teachers, in order to avoid rating a student on a scale, please elaborate on the following questions:

8) In your opinion, does the student have proper financial/emotional support from their family? (Are they recipients of free or reduce lunch? How do they dress for school? How do they get to and from school? What does their family structure, consist of: Divorced parents, married parents, single parent, foster parent, or grandparents etc...).

9) Does the student have a history of mental or physical handicaps? (Attention Deficit Disorder, English Language Development, hearing or visual impediment etc...).

10) Does the student participate in extra-curricular activities? (School related sports, organized activities outside of school, drama, band, etc.).

11) Does the student participate in class or school activities? (Does the student work well in class groups/participate in school functions?)

Finally, please keep a student portfolio on their writing activities (journals, reports, and homework). It is important that you record grades, attendance and behavior in these portfolios.
REFERENCES


