

**COMPARING THE 'X'CEL PROGRAM
TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOL MODELS
FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS**

by

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A Master's Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to compare effective school models with the 'X'cel program, and determine the perception of the effect of the 'X'cel program on at-risk students. The research question asks is the 'X'cel program an effective school program that assists at-risk students in the Cartwright School District to academically achieve in the classroom because the program adheres to the characteristics of other effective scholastic improvement programs.

The study of the literature manifested ten common characteristics presently found in scholastic improvement programs for at-risk students. They were clear academic goals, safe orderly environment, academic time, using students as resources, ongoing programs, teachers roles, appropriate instruction, small and supportive environments, coordination between family, school, and community, and student and program assessment.

To determine the results of this study the historical and descriptive research methods were used. To compare the scholastic improvement programs and identify common characteristics primary source literature was reviewed and cross-checked with the 'X'cel program. Using these models ten common characteristics were found. Of the ten, the 'X'cel program used nine. (On-going assessment was absent).

A Likert-type student survey was given to measure students perceptions of the 'X'cel program. The student survey showed that the students had a positive perception of the 'X'cel program indicating that the 'X'cel program may be an effective program helping at-risk students. Survey items were measured by calculating the mean score of each survey item.

To measure academic growth in reading and math after the 'X'cel program was completed, pre-program report card grades were compared to post-program report card grades. It was observed that the majority of students in the 'X'cel program maintained their grade point level in reading while math grade point levels tended to increase.

The population of the study was all fifth grade students enrolled in the 'X'cel program at C.W. Harris Elementary School. This consisted of nine male and two female students.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

A student enters the fifth grade and can't read. Something may have gone wrong with the educational process or the educational system. The failure to read may have also been caused by the parenting or the student's mental ability. Regardless of why the student can't read, the school's responsibility is to help the student succeed in reading and all other academic areas.

The approach used to help students varies from school to school. Many different methods, practices, and programs are being used in an effort to improve the at-risk students' chances of succeeding in school. However, there does not appear to be any set formula for a successful scholastic improvement program.

Some educators are trying to identify the characteristics of effective programs for at-risk students. A review of different scholastic improvement programs currently being implemented, may provide some common characteristics. If this is the case, educators may agree that the common characteristics are appropriate methods for creating an effective scholastic program for at-risk students.

Development of the Problem

Within the Cartwright Elementary School District, money and time is spent on a program called 'X'cel. The idea behind the program is to provide an accelerated rate of instruction that can not be provided in the regular classroom. The program focuses on

students who are of average ability and have no other scholastic programs available to them. The goals are to increase student achievement scores on state testing instruments and to promote students' continued academic success.

Need for Study

Money and time are being expended for the 'X'cel program. It is important to review and evaluate whether it is an effective program. If the program is effective, it may serve as a model for other at-risk youngsters. The hope is to keep students from adopting at-risk behaviors that could ultimately lead to dropping out of school.

The at-risk student population is growing. As a result, programs for the at-risk population should also grow. If these at-risk programs are effective, then the at-risk students may have a better chance at graduating from high school. To ensure that the at-risk programs are working well, the characteristics of effective programs need to be identified.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare effective school models with the 'X'cel program, and determine the perception of the effect of the 'X'cel program on at-risk students.

Research Question

Is the 'X'cel program an effective school program that assists at-risk students in the Cartwright School District to academically achieve in the classroom because the program adheres to the characteristics of other effective scholastic improvement programs?

Definition of Terms

At-risk: A student that has a high probability of dropping out of school (Barr and Parrett, 1995).

English as a Second Language (ESL): A program that teaches non-native English speakers to speak and write English (Barr and Parrett, 1995).

General Equivalency Diploma (GED): Diploma earned when returning students finish required course work. The GED is equivalent to a high school diploma (Salerno and Fink, 1989).

Limited English Proficiency (LEP): A student with limited proficiency in the English language (Gingras and Careaga, 1989).

'X'cel Program: An after school scholastic program taught in the Cartwright School District.

Summary

Many different approaches are used to try and improve scholastic achievement for at-risk students. Currently there is not any set method. By reviewing different scholastic improvement programs, some common characteristics may occur. Comparing 'X'cel to these characteristics may help determine if the 'X'cel program is an effective program. This study will also determine the perception of the effect of the program on at-risk students. If 'X'cel is an effective program, it may be used as a model for future scholastic improvement programs.

CHAPTER 2

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will present descriptions of scholastic improvement programs for at-risk students. Ten characteristics are discussed to provide an outline of a model program. These characteristics are clear academic goals, safe orderly environment, academic time, using students as resources, ongoing programs, teacher roles, appropriate instruction, small and supportive environments, coordination between family, school, and community, and continuing assessment of student and programs.

At-Risk Student

With the diverse make-up of the American classroom, some educators say it is important to meet all students' academic needs. When students' needs are not met, they may become at-risk. Parrett and Barr (1995) define an at-risk student as a student who is more likely to drop out of school than a fellow student. An at-risk student is one who is at-risk of not getting an adequate education or someone who will be underemployed, unemployed, or unemployable.

The factors for at-risk are divided into two areas: family and those dealing with school. Some of the family factors that lead to being at-risk are socioeconomic situation, instability, and budget. The factors that deal with school are low achievement, retention, behavioral problems, poor attendance, low socio-economic status, and schools with large numbers of poor students (Parrett and Barr, 1995).

Even though the factors can be identified, there is no one cause for a student to be at-risk. Usually, it is a combination of factors. For example, some students are coming into the schools without school readiness; that is, they are lacking in basic pre-kindergarten skills such as colors and counting (Walter, 1994). Many other students are coming from diverse backgrounds where English is not the first language. Adding together the lack of basic skills and English being the second language, many of these students are at-risk of dropping out of school (Gingras and Careaga, 1989). Knowing the factors that lead to a student becoming at-risk helps identify students and allow the schools to enroll them in scholastic improvement programs for at-risk students.

Academic Goals

Academic goals for the at-risk youngsters vary from program to program. The common thread that is present in all programs is student academic improvement.

One program used for at-risk students is called Success For All. Success For All is an elementary school program designed to improve reading ability of all beginning readers. The clearly stated academic goal of the program is to reduce the number of students referred to special education programs (Slavin and Madden, 1995). Additionally, Success For All is also designed to decrease the number of children retained, or required to repeat a grade (Slavin and Yampolsky, 1992).

A second program used for at-risk students is the Accelerated Schools program. The academic goals of this program are to prepare students to operate at grade level when they graduate from grade school and the students will improve in achievement, attendance, participation, self-esteem, and behavior (St. John, Allen-Hayes, Davidson, and Meza, 1992). The Accelerated Schools want students to learn grade appropriate material in class and behave at grade level.

Other programs include Schoolwide Projects in Philadelphia to increase reading scores (Solomon and Orenstein, 1991), the Headstart program designed to give at-risk

students a foundation for learning to read and write (Walter, 1994), dropout retrieval programs designed for dropouts to come back to school and earn their GED's and to prevent LEP students from dropping out from school (Salerno and Fink, 1989).

The Valued Youth Partnership program was developed to ensure that students learn the basic skills and receive counseling when needed (Gingras and Careaga, 1989). The Newcomer High School's program is to produce LEP students that are truly bilingual (Gingras and Careaga, 1989) and the America Reads program a safe, drug free, learning environment is required for before and after school study (Keeping, 1997)

Orderly Environment

An important characteristic that many of the at-risk programs had in common was an orderly environment structured to facilitate learning. For example, in the Success For All program, a program facilitator worked with and coordinated the program within the schools (Slavin and Yampolsky, 1992). In the Accelerated Schools program, groups of parents, teachers, students, and administrators constructed goals for the school and meaning (Accelerated, 1994). In the America Reads program, qualified staff such as teachers and reading specialists were hired to oversee the program (Keeping, 1997).

Academic Time

Another characteristic that many of the at-risk programs had in common was the effective use of academic time. In the Success For All program the main focus is in the first grade. The idea is to develop first time successful readers. That is, students should be able to read when they exit the first grade. Each morning, 90 minutes of uninterrupted class time is dedicated to reading. In addition to the teacher, a reading specialist is available to assist. If a student needs additional help, he will receive 20 minute tutoring sessions (Slavin and Madden, 1995; Slavin and Yampolsky, 1992).

In some of the Accelerated School programs, to remove anxiety that may be caused by time limits, students are given time to finish their work, that is, they are not rushed through assignments. Furthermore, gifted and talented students were challenged with additional higher level problem solving instead of remedial work (Peters and McBride, 1997). The idea is to accelerate student learning by making better use of academic time.

In the Headstart program, academic time was incorporated. Students were not rushed to finish work. Academic time was provided in a print-rich environment that started with learning the teachers' and students' names, followed by learning the parent names. Writing was explored using with writing tables and through modeling by the teacher. For example, the instructor would write what the students said, modeling how to write (Walter, 1994).

In Colorado's Finest Alternative School, flexible class time is allowed. The students are able to adjust their class schedule to coincide with their work schedule. The outcomes of classes are to improve the student's employability. Teachers and students use the flexible class time to make sure basic skills are learned (Salerno and Fink, 1989).

In the America Reads program, it was realized that schools were vacant 65% of the time, therefore, schools would be ideal places to have additional scholastic programs. When school is not in session the schools are used to increase academic development by providing Saturday school, computer classes, sign language classes, and language arts activities (Keeping, 1997).

Students as a Resource

Many programs use students as resources. In the Success For All program, cross-age tutoring is used. Cross-age tutoring is when students, that are in a different grade, help other students learn class work. For example, third graders will come and read to

and with first graders. The purpose is to give the students practice at reading in a safe environment (Slavin and Madden, 1995)

In the Accelerated School program, students are included in the decision-making process to determine the goals and rules of the school and its programs. Within the classroom, students use cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is the process by which students work together in small groups to help solve problems or work on projects (Levin and Chasin, 1994).

The Headstart program uses read alouds. During read alouds, one student will read to the class while the others follow along in the book. Also, students participate in one-on-one reading. The student will read with the teacher and communicate the meaning of the story. Students also re-enact storybooks (Walter, 1994).

In the dropout retrieval program named Project Ready, groups of students talk to their peers to discuss careers, social issues, and other topics (Salerno and Fink, 1989).

In the America Reads program, high school students are recruited and given credit to tutor elementary school students one-on-one. The high school students help the elementary school student in the process of reading by reading and listening to the elementary student read (Keeping, 1997).

Ongoing Program

All the programs that have been discussed are continuing programs, continuing from year to year. For example, the Success For All program starts in the Kindergarten and continues through the third grade (Slavin and Yampolsky, 1992). The Accelerated School program is a thirty year program (Levin and Chasin, 1994). The Headstart program begins with pre-Kindergarten and continues through four years of age (Walter, 1994). The dropout retrieval programs continually provide peer, teacher and advisor counseling to students enrolled or reentering school (Salerno and Fink, 1989). The

America Reads program is taught daily throughout the school year and continues in subsequent years (Keeping, 1997).

Teacher Roles

Teacher roles vary by program. The teacher may be an instructor or mentor to other teachers, parents, or students. However in all the programs, the teacher is involved with increasing the students success and helping the students achieve the programs goals. In the Success For All program the teachers provide direct high quality reading instruction focused on prevention, intervention, and professional development (Slavin and Yampolsky, 1992). In the Accelerated School programs, in addition to teaching students, teachers are involved in the decision-making and goal-setting process for the school (Peters and McBride, 1997). In the America Reads program teachers from the university are mentor teachers at the high school and elementary schools (Keeping, 1997).

Appropriate Instruction

Appropriateness of instruction answers the question, "Is the instruction within the program related to the program goals and the student's ability?" In the Success For All program, students become successful readers. The strategy developed is homogeneously grouping students in three reading groups and using cooperative integrated reading (Slavin and Madden, 1995; Slavin and Yampolsky, 1992).

Within the Accelerated School programs, the instruction used is called Powerful Learning. Powerful Learning is experienced based hands-on learning (Brunner and Mims, 1995). Accelerated School programs also use manipulatives, cooperative learning, and peer mentoring to achieve student success in their cultural and experiential learning (Peters and McBride, 1997). With Powerful Learning and the use of other

various classroom instructional techniques the Accelerated School programs are gearing their instruction to their student population.

The Headstart program's instructional idea has teachers providing opportunities for students to explore their prior knowledge of reading and writing, gaining the student more language experience. The Headstart program believes the best way to help incoming school children is to have them use their own ideas and construct their own meaning of reading and writing through the ideas that they see around them (Walter, 1994).

The Yesleta pre-kindergarten program goal is to prepare students for elementary school. Therefore the instruction focuses on what knowledge is needed to have the children prepared to enter school. The program teaches language awareness, the five senses, and motor skills. Creativity through fine arts, self concept and self esteem are also explored (Gingras and Careaga, 1989).

The type of instruction a program uses is based on the program's goals. If the students are young and the goal is school readiness, then the instruction is focused on school readiness. If the goal is to prevent dropouts, then the instruction is focused on how to keep or reenter these students in school. If the goal is to have the students successfully reading at grade level, the instruction dealt with reading. In the programs, the instruction types were different, however they were all appropriate for the goals of the program.

Small and Supportive Environment

Making a small and supportive environment is important to many programs. For instance, in the Success For All program, a failing student receives one-on-one tutoring to improve reading (Slavin and Madden, 1995). In the Headstart program, one-on-one tutoring is used with the student. The instructor reads together with the student and shares writing experiences (Walter, 1994). In the Yesleta pre-Kindergarten program, the

teacher works with the students in small preschool classes of eight to ten students (Gingras and Careaga, 1989). Whenever students were having trouble academically, the programs always try to provide a smaller group setting for the student. This is either one-to-one contact, as in the Success For All and Headstart programs, or smaller groups such as the Yesleta pre-Kindergarten program.

Community Coordination

The programs have either direct or indirect involvement between the family and school. Some of the programs want direct involvement. For example, in the Success For All program, there is a family support team. This team works with the principal, facilitator, teacher and the community. This team discusses goals, plans and implements programs to achieve the goals (Slavin and Madden, 1995). In the Accelerated Schools program, parental involvement is encouraged in decision making. They want the entire community to play a role in the school (St. John, et al., 1992).

The America Reads, Headstart, and Karen Trust Family Literacy project programs use a slightly different way of direct parent involvement. In the America Reads program, parents can come to Friday night dinner or attend Saturday school with their children (Keeping, 1997). In the Karen Trust Family Literacy Project, parents are taught job readiness, literacy, and parenting skills while the children go to preschool (Gingras and Careaga, 1989). These programs are tying parent programs in with the student programs. They believe if they can educate the parent, then they will be better able to educate the children.

If the program doesn't require direct involvement of the community or family, some programs indirectly involve them. For example, the Headstart program has home visits with the parents. They also send newsletters and have conferences to discuss the child's academics (Walter, 1994).

All the programs have family and community involvement. It may occur through direct involvement as in Success For All, Accelerated Schools, and America Reads programs or through teacher initiated contact such as Headstart.

Assessment

Some of the programs have an assessment mechanism to see if the student and program are working. In the Success For All program, every eight weeks a student assessment is done (Slavin and Madden, 1995; Slavin and Yampolsky, 1992). In the Accelerated Schools, assessment is performed at the end of the year. At the end of the year the school reflects to see if it has met its goals (Accelerated, 1994; Levin and Chasin, 1994). The Headstart program holds conferences with parents to discuss student progress (Walter, 1994). In programs designed to get students to graduate or get their GED the success of the program is measured by how many students succeed in graduating (Strategies, 1989). All programs have their own form of assessment that is appropriate for their goals.

Summary

The study of the literature manifested ten common characteristics presently found in scholastic improvement programs for at-risk students. They were clear academic goals, safe orderly environment, academic time, using students as resources, ongoing programs, teachers roles, appropriate instruction, small and supportive environments, coordination between family, school, and community, and student and program assessment.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to compare effective school models with the 'X'cel program, and determine the perception of the effect of the 'X'cel program on at-risk students. This study provides information on effective characteristics of academic programs designed to help at-risk students achieve in the classroom. With the common characteristics identified, they were cross-checked with the Cartwright School District's 'X'cel program. The research question asks is the 'X'cel program an effective school program that assists at-risk students in the Cartwright School District to academically achieve in the classroom because the program adheres to the characteristics of other effective scholastic improvement programs.

Research Design

Two methods of research design will be implemented in this paper. The historical method looks to the past for an explanation of why things are the way they have become (Merriam and Simpson, 1995). The historical method is appropriate to view this problem because based on the programs being implemented in the past and the characteristics being picked out as effective, they are deemed credible and therefore educational best practices.

Additionally, the descriptive research design method will also be applied to help explain that the 'X'cel program is an effective program. The descriptive design is used to

describe facts and characteristics of an area of interest (Merriam and Simpson, 1995) in this case, the 'X'cel program. The descriptive design is also appropriate because it allows the researcher to survey the students who were in the program to see how they were effected by the program. A Likert-type survey instrument was used to measure 11 students' perceptions on the degree of academic effectiveness. Data was also gathered from the student report cards to measure academic growth in math and reading while under the auspices of the 'X'cel program..

Assumptions and Limitations

The study has been done under the assumption that if an at-risk program is in use, it has some positive effect on at-risk students. However, without longitudinal studies the exact effectiveness of all the programs was not known. Short term studies of several years have been used to derive trends, implications, and assessment procedures. Longer term studies are recommended.

Another assumption is there is a relationship between the programs that have been reviewed and the 'X'cel program and that the 'X'cel program can be measured be using the characteristics of the reviewed programs as criteria. It is assumed that the students understood the survey and answered honestly.

A significant limitation to this research has been the lack of longitudinal studies. The 'X'cel program has been in place for two years. As of November, 1999, the mechanism to assess the progress of the students in the program was not in place. To offset this limitation, a survey was done on students attitudes for the 'X'cel program. This was done in hope of providing some short term results.

The sample size of eleven students is also a limitation on the research. Only large generalizations may be made because the sample size is so small.

Population and Sample

The Cartwright Elementary School District #83 is located in Phoenix, Arizona. The borders of the district are Camelback Road to Van Buren Street and 43rd Avenue to 83rd Avenue. The Cartwright School District serves approximately 17,321 students in grades Kindergarten through 8th grade. The ethnicity of the district is approximately 70% Hispanic, 10% Black, and 20% White. Approximately 77% of the student population is on free or reduced lunch. 40% of the students are English as a second language learners (ESL).

The size of the sample surveyed in the study was 11 students who participated in the 'X'cel program from a 5th grade classroom at C.W. Harris Elementary School in the Cartwright School District. The sample was selected using the convenience sampling method. The sample represents all of the fifth grade students who were enrolled in the 'X'cel program at C.W. Harris Elementary School during the 1998-1999 academic school year. The sample was composed of two females and nine males. All males and one female were Hispanic; One female was Caucasian. There were three Hispanic males and one Hispanic female who were enrolled in the ESL program.

Procedures

For the historical research design, primary and secondary sources were accumulated through Arizona State University Library in Tempe, Arizona. Twenty professional articles were read and information disseminated pertaining to academic programs in pre-kindergarten, elementary, and high school. The ten prominent effective school characteristics were derived from this literature.

For the descriptive research design data was gathered using a student Likert-type survey and report card information. These data techniques were used because they provide a base for establishing what an effective program is and objective and subjective evaluations of the effectiveness of the 'X'cel program. The 'X'cel program effectiveness

will be measured by the increase or decrease in student grades as well as their perception of the effectiveness of the 'X'cel program.

Instrumentation

The measuring instruments were student grades from report cards and a student Likert-style survey (Appendix A). Reliability was established by collecting data about students who participated in the program during the 1998-1999 school year. Validity was established by comparing pre-program student grades and attitude towards school with post-program student grades and attitudes towards school.

Methods of Analysis

The methods of analyzing the data include comparing pre-program math and reading grades with post program math and reading grades after participating in the 'X'cel program for one school year. The information from the survey was analyzed using the mean to measure the central tendencies of the group based on calculation of mean scores for all survey items.

Academic programs that assist at-risk students in achieving in school can be examined to determine what the best practices are that make an effective academic program. Using this information, the 'X'cel program can be evaluated and determined whether it is an effective program. Furthermore, this information can be used to set future goals and objectives.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Presentation and Analysis of the Data

By reviewing literature on scholastic improvement programs for at-risk students ten characteristics were evident from model programs. Once the ten characteristics of the at-risk programs had been identified, they were cross-checked against the Cartwright 'X'cel program to see whether the 'X'cel program contained these ten characteristics. Nine of the ten were present. (On-going assessment was absent). It was found that the 'X'cel program is an effective scholastic improvement program to assist the at-risk students in the Cartwright School District in maintaining grade point level in reading with a tendency toward improving grade point level in math because the program adheres to the characteristics of other effective scholastic improvement programs.

Demographics

The sample consists of 11 fifth grade students enrolled in the 'X'cel program during the 1998-1999 school year at C.W. Harris Elementary School.

Figure 1. Respondent Demographics

Survey Respondents - n = 11	Percentage of Total	Number of Participants
Gender:		
Female	18.2%	2
Male	81.8%	9
Ethnic Group		
Caucasian	9.1%	1
African-American	0.0%	0
Hispanic	90.9%	10
ESL Student		
Yes	36.4%	4
No	63.6%	7

Findings and Results

Common Program Characteristics: When reviewing other scholastic improvement programs for at-risk students, ten common characteristics were found in programs.

Comparing the 'X'cel program to the other models, 'X'cel had nine of the model program characteristics. The common characteristics are clear academic goals, a safe and orderly environment, positive use of academic time, students seen as resources, an on-going program, positive teacher roles, appropriateness of instruction, small and supportive environments, a coordination between family, school, and community, and an on going assessment of the student and program.

First, similar to many of the programs reviewed, the 'X'cel program has clear academic goals. These five goals are:

To focus academic attention on students who are motivated, have good attendance and classroom behavior; To provide a more accelerated pace of direct instruction than may be possible in the regular classroom; To provide hands-on experiential learning/motivation; To increase student achievement on state testing; To promote continued student academic success. ('X'cel, 1998, p. 1)

The establishment of clear academic goals is a common theme of effective programs, and the 'X'cel program has them.

The second characteristic many of the effective programs have is a safe and orderly learning environment. The 'X'cel program is conducted in the school classroom and is taught by certified teachers from the school. The students are familiar with the teachers and the surroundings hence, providing them with a safe and orderly learning environment.

The third characteristic that effective programs have is a positive use of academic time. The 'X'cel program is an extension of the school day. The program is held for 45 minutes after the regular school day is over. The students are taught math, reading, and writing through direct instruction, hands-on experiential learning, and cooperative learning. Using these teaching techniques, the teacher is using the time in the classroom positively.

The fourth characteristic of an effective program is the students are seen as a resource. The teacher in the 'X'cel program allowed the students to use cooperative learning as well as hands-on experiential learning. The students worked together to solve problems and create projects and writings. Often, the students would peer edit and assist each other in their work. The 'X'cel program used the students as a resource which is another characteristic of an effective program.

The fifth characteristic of an effective program is that the program is on-going. 'X'cel is an on-going program. The program has been in place for two years. A student can be enrolled in the program from third through sixth grade. Furthermore, the program has also been extended to include the first two weeks after school is released for the summer. With students continuing the program for four years, the 'X'cel program is effective program because it is on-going.

The sixth characteristic of an effective program is the teacher role. In all the programs the teacher's role varies from educational instructor, mentor to other instructors, to facilitating student tutoring. The teacher always plays a positive role in the students development and learning. For example, the 'X'cel teacher provided an

accelerated pace of direct instruction to the student. Knowing the goals and the students, the teacher was able to facilitate student learning by playing a positive teacher role.

The seventh characteristic of an effective program is appropriateness of instruction. Knowing the program goals and the students that are involved, the 'X'cel teacher covered the appropriate curriculum for the grade level. Additionally, the teacher used different teaching methods, such as direct, hands-on, and cooperative learning depending on the learning situation. Using different methods allowed the instructor to use an appropriate form of instruction.

The eighth characteristic of an effective program is small and supportive environments. The 'X'cel program also offers a small and supportive environment. The recommended class size is twelve to fifteen students per teacher. The fifth grade 'X'cel class had eleven students which is a small and supportive environment.

The ninth characteristic of an effective program is coordination between family and school. The 'X'cel program doesn't have direct involvement with the parents, however progress reports (Appendix B) are sent home at the middle and end of the program. Parents were also encouraged to sit in on the class. Direct and indirect family involvement is very important to the at-risk programs, the 'X'cel program provided opportunities for the students' parents to be involved.

The tenth characteristic of an effective program is having an on-going student and program assessment. The 'X'cel program has student progress reports, but currently does not have a mechanism in place to monitor students progressive academic success in a qualitative manner. The progress report provides subjective comments for the parents and students, but it is not passed along to other teachers or a district coordinator. Currently, there is not on-going student and program assessment in the 'X'cel program.

After cross-checking the ten common characteristics found in other scholastic improvement programs for at-risk students to the 'X'cel program, the 'X'cel program had nine of the ten characteristics found in effective programs. The characteristics it had in

common were clear academic goals, a safe and orderly environment, positive use of academic time, students seen as resources, an on-going program, positive teacher roles, appropriateness of instruction, small and supportive environments, and a coordination between family and school. The one characteristic the 'X'cel program did not have was an on-going assessment of the student and program.

Student Grade Results: In addition to comparing characteristics of the 'X'cel program to other at-risk programs, pre-program student grades were compared with post-program grades. Figure 2 shows a comparison of 1998 final math grades with 1999 final math grades, and shows that 54.5% of the 'X'cel students increased their math grade by one letter grade. Comparing the 1998 to 1999 reading grades shows that 27.3% of the students increased their reading grade by one letter grade.

Figure 2. Math and Reading Grade Comparison

from 1998 to 1999		
	Math	Reading
Grades:		
Increased	6	3
No Change	2	5
Decreased	3	3

Student Survey Results: In addition to comparing grades, student perceptions towards 'X'cel's effect on their schooling and being a good student were also measured using a Likert-type survey. The survey used an interval response. The interval response survey assumes that the distance between the points are to be equal. The scores ranged from 5, meaning strongly agree, 4 meaning agree, 3 meaning neutral, 2 meaning disagree, and 1 meaning strongly disagree. Figure 3 shows the frequency response distribution and the mean score for each question.

Figure 3. Frequency Response Distribution and Mean Score from the Survey

	Strongly				Strongly	
Question:	Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Disagree (1)	Mean
The 'Xcel program was challenging	5	2	4	0	0	4.09
'Xcel helped me become a better student	8	1	1	1	0	4.45
I was excited to go to 'Xcel	8	2	1	0	0	4.64
I did better in school because of 'Xcel	4	3	3	0	1	3.82
I want to be in 'Xcel next year	10	1	0	0	0	4.91

When asked if the 'Xcel program was challenging, the mean response was 4.09. The frequency of responses was five students strongly agreeing, two students agreeing, four students neutral, and no students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. The mean score indicates that students tended to agree that the 'Xcel program was challenging.

When asked if the 'Xcel program helped them become a better student, the mean response was 4.45. The frequency of responses was eight students strongly agreeing, one student agreeing, one student neutral, one student disagreeing, and none strongly disagreeing. The mean score indicates that the students tended to strongly agree that the 'Xcel program helped them become better students.

When asked if they were excited to go to the 'Xcel program, the mean response was 4.64. The frequency of responses was eight students strongly agreeing, two students agreeing, one student neutral, and no students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. The mean score indicate that the students tended to strongly agree that they were excited to go to the 'Xcel program.

When asked if they did better in school because of the 'Xcel program, the mean response was 3.82. The frequency of responses was four students strongly agreeing, three students agreeing, three students neutral, no students disagreeing, and one strongly disagreeing. The mean score indicates that the students tended to agree that they did better in school because of the 'Xcel program.

When asked if they would like to continue in the 'X'cel program, the following year the mean response was 4.91. The frequency of responses was ten students strongly agreeing, one student agreeing, and no students remaining neutral, disagreeing, or strongly disagreeing. The mean score indicates that the students tended to strongly agree that they wanted to continue in the 'X'cel program the following year.

The weakness of the analysis was in the small sampling of the population. Conclusions can be drawn, however predictive ability for future populations cannot be taken from this analysis.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to compare effective school models with the 'X'cel program, and determine the perception of the effect of the 'X'cel program on at-risk students. The research question asks is the 'X'cel program an effective school program that assists at-risk students in the Cartwright School District to academically achieve in the classroom because the program adheres to the characteristics of other effective scholastic improvement programs.

The study of the literature manifested ten common characteristics presently found in scholastic improvement programs for at-risk students. They were clear academic goals, safe orderly environment, academic time, using students as resources, ongoing programs, teachers roles, appropriate instruction, small and supportive environments, coordination between family, school, and community, and student and program assessment.

To determine the results of this study the historical and descriptive research methods were used. To compare the scholastic improvement programs and identify common characteristics primary source literature was reviewed and cross-checked with the 'X'cel program. Using these models ten common characteristics were found. Of the ten, the 'X'cel program used nine. (On-going assessment was absent).

A Likert-type student survey was given to measure students perceptions of the 'X'cel program. The student survey showed that the students had a positive perception of

the 'X'cel program indicating that the 'X'cel program may be an effective program helping at-risk students. Survey items were measured by calculating the mean score of each survey item.

To measure academic growth in reading and math after the 'X'cel program was completed, pre-program report card grades were compared to post-program report card grades. It was observed that the majority of students in the 'X'cel program maintained their grade point level in reading while math grade point levels tended to increase.

The population of the study was all fifth grade students enrolled in the 'X'cel program at C.W. Harris Elementary School. This consisted of nine male and two female students.

Conclusions

One conclusion is that a program developed to assist at-risk students should have the characteristics identified in the research. A new program adhering to these guidelines stands a better chance of success in helping the at-risk student maintain or improve math and reading skills.

After cross-checking the ten characteristics found in other scholastic improvement programs for at-risk students to the 'X'cel program, the 'X'cel program was assumed to be effective because it had nine of the ten characteristics found in effective programs. Additionally, the results of the Likert-type survey show that the 'X'cel program has had a positive impact on the students according to their perceptions. After comparing reading and math pre-program report card grades with post-program report card grades, it was also observed that the majority of students in the 'X'cel program maintained their grade point level in reading with a tendency toward an improving grade point level in math.

Recommendations

To ensure that educational programs are successful, continued assessment needs to be done. While the short term results of the 'X'cel program seem promising, more long term studies need to be done. Besides looking at grades and attitudes, I would suggest that future research should also compare the scores on standardized and state testing. Using this information a longitudinal study could be implemented to reinforce the short term results.

The program goal of promoting continued student academic success and to provide additional educational opportunities to motivated students seems to be met. However, constant and continuing assessment need to be implemented to ensure the continued success of the 'X'cel program.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT SURVEY

To help me plan 'X'cel for next year, I would appreciate if you could answer the following survey. Thank you!

Grade _____

Male _____ Female _____

How many years have you been at Harris? 1 2 3 4 5 6

How many years have you been in 'X'cel? 1 2 3 4 5 6

What is your favorite subject?

- A. math
- B. reading
- C. science
- D. social studies
- E. writing

What is your least favorite subject?

- A. math
- B. reading
- C. science
- D. social studies
- E. writing

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being strongly agree, 3 being neutral, and 1 being strongly disagree, circle the best answer.

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. The 'X'cel program was challenging. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 2. 'X'cel helped me become a better student. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 3. I was excited to go to 'X'cel. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 4. I did better in school because of 'X'cel. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5. I want to be in 'X'cel next year. | 5 4 3 2 1 |

APPENDIX B

'X'CEL PROGRESS REPORT

Cartwright School District #83**'X'cel Progress Report****Grade: 3 4 5 6****Session: 1 2****Student** _____**Date** _____**School** _____**Classroom Teacher** _____

- Your child has been working in the areas checked below

Mathematics**Language Arts**___ Problem Solving

________ Reading Skills & Comprehension

________ Number Sense

________ Writing & Editing

________ Geometry & Measurement

________ Other

________ Probability & Statistics

________ Other

_____**Attendance****Teacher Comments**

___ Excellent

___ Satisfactory

___ Needs Improvement

'X'cel Teacher Signature

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Todd Ludwig currently lives in Tempe, Arizona. He earned a Bachelors of Arts degree in History from Arizona State University in 1992. For the last five years he has been teaching a 5th grade self-contained ESL class at C.W. Harris Elementary in the Cartwright School District. Additionally, he has been teaching the 'X'cel program afterschool for the past two years. Within the community, he is a volunteer baseball and flag football coach.

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