

MASTER OF EDUCATION THESIS DEFENSE

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Location: Atlantic Veterinary College - Lecture Theatre A

Alternative Education within an Inclusive System

ABSTRACT

The study followed a small group of at-risk students participating in the tier one cohort of an alternative education program in a Prince Edward Island high school. The study also included the cohort teachers, resource teacher, youth worker, and principal of this program. The research questions for this study were: 1. How does the alternative education program change the experiences of students?; 2. What are the different approaches and practices used by the teachers involved in this program?; 3. What alternative education programs exist for at-risk students in North America, and how have they addressed students' educational, social and emotional needs?; and 4. What elements of this program can be applied to other programs in public education? This ethnographic case study took the constructivist approach as it was important that the participants' comments were identified and understood. The four cohort teachers, resource teacher participated in staff focus group, while the principal and youth worker participated in individual interviews. One cohort teacher kept a diary summarizing her thoughts and opinions regarding her time in the classroom teaching these students. As the ethnographer, I facilitated focus groups and interviews, but also documented my own observations and opinions in my field notes. I also gathered data through an in-depth literature review. The overall findings of this study supported the continuation and improvement of the cohort program. Recommendations for improvement included the following eight suggestions specific to the cohort program: continuation of the breakfast and lunch programs to ensure students basic needs are addressed; urge administration to assign cohort teachers before other placements as it is key for teachers to be the right fit for the program to be a success; continue resource support in afternoon classes so students have access to support outside their cohort classes; increase professional development opportunities for teachers so they may learn better ways to meet the needs of at-risk youth; implement a legitimate, current practical program supported and recognized by the province; implement a work placement within the cohort program so students may gain work experience and prepare them for life after high school; implement a personal development course that students take as part of their cohort program; assess how the program can assist the working student who must financially support oneself and attend school at the same time.

