FADING OUT:
COMPARING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WITH HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the elementary school experiences of high school graduates and high school dropouts through recollections of individuals. The experiences are compared to determine differences in perceived experience which may have contributed to the different educational outcomes of the two groups. Twenty individuals, ten high school graduates and ten high school dropouts, participated in extensive interviews which probed their memories of good and bad school experiences, feelings of belonging, school as a place to learn, encouragement from others, relationships with school personnel, peer relationships, parent influences, involvement in activities, career and educational goals and transition to high school. Many differences are noted in relationships, particularly relationships with family, and attitudes toward learning, from early elementary school through transition to high school. Findings of this study support previous research which report the correlational factors of dropping out. The findings also clearly indicate that the dropout decision begins to take shape long before the act of leaving school. Parent values, student academic efficacy, and student/teacher relationships are identified as key factors in the development of either healthy or weak bonds to school.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Ronald and Frances Smith, who were dedicated to their children's success, and to my children, Isaac and Meredith.

May learning be as exciting for you as it is for me.

"I sort of slowed down in grade 6, and I couldn't really say I ever really took grade 7. I guess you could say that I sort of just faded out of school."

Debbie

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CHAPTER 1

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

The dropout rate in North America has fallen steadily since the beginning of the century (Rumberger, 1987), yet public concern about dropping out continues to grow. The most prominently stated reasons for the concern are economic. The cost of educating a child to the end of grade 12 is far less than the social costs of unemployed or underemployed individuals (Macdonald, 1989). Unemployment Insurance payments, welfare, crime costs, lost taxes and decreased spending power all combine to increase the societal costs for undereducated people. In addition, there is a widespread fear that our undereducated North American young people will not be able to compete technologically in the international marketplace (Bernstein, 1988). The U.S. and Canada will fall far behind in terms of production and economic development.

Much less prominent, but perhaps a more important concern for individuals, are the human considerations in the dropout process (Wehlage, etal. ,1989; Macdonald, 1989). The frustration and despair experienced by individuals who drop out of school can contribute to a negative life cycle that may result in further rejection of society's institutions. Dropouts see no future for themselves in the existing societal structures, and they see themselves as powerless to change their situation.

With the rising concern over dropping out there has been a renewed effort by the research community to determine the causes, consequences and solutions of the problem. The existing body of research has clarified the correlates of dropping out, but solutions become further out of reach. The causes of the problem, it is widely believed, are as numerous as the

students who leave school before graduation. However, those causal links have not yet been drawn. We do not seem to be any closer to solutions.

Why do some students decide to stay in school while others decide to leave this institution that North American society deems as so important? The answers given by students at the time of leaving are diverse yet consistent and relate to the school, the home and the person individually. This seems to suggest that the difference in experience which determines the path the individual chooses - leaving or staying - occurs earlier in the school process than high school and is interactive in some way with the home experience. Although the decision to drop out actually occurs during adolescence, the shaping of that decision may begin in elementary school or, indeed, before a child enters school.

There is little research, however, which examines dropping out from a developmental perspective. Dropping out is generally viewed as an act rather than a process, so the elementary school years are rarely considered in dropout research. The notion of dropping out as a developmental process resulting from a lack of early bonding, and the abundance of research describing the correlates of dropping out led me to ask the following questions: Are there differences in the elementary school experiences of high school dropouts and graduates? What are the differences? Is there a point in elementary school when students are sufficiently bonded to school to ensure graduation? What factors affect bonding? To answer these questions I decided to speak to dropouts and graduates about their memories of their elementary school years, their perceptions of the schools they attended, and their interactions with others regarding schooling. It is only through a comparison of the school experiences of these two groups of students that we can begin to draw

conclusions about how the school may have an influence on students' decisions about schooling.

Finn (1989) raises some important considerations for research into the bonding of students with schooling and the school processes that can contribute to increased student participation. Like Finn, I am curious about the developmental patterns in school bonding that are common to students who complete school and students who do not. It is important to understand how students participate in their schooling, and how that participation translates into identification with school, in order to begin formulating ways to increase school bonding for all students and, presumably, decrease the rate of school drop out. Finn sees school processes and student actions as important areas to be clearly researched within his bonding construct. In addition to Finn's argument, I feel it is important to know not only the school's and the student's contribution to schooling, but also to understand the contribution families make to the bonding process.

There are two institutions that help shape a young person's decisions. One is the school and the other is the family. It is impossible for me, as an educator, to examine school processes without considering the family's influence on the student's perceptions of those processes. A student enters school with some knowledge and some values which were developed at home. School adds its own knowledge and values to these home-influenced ideas. Over time, a basis for individual decision making is formed which is, in some way, a combination of ideas from home and ideas from the school. By talking with dropouts and graduates about their experiences, I hope to begin to understand how the influences of family and school interact to form the child's views of schooling and, ultimately, the child's decision to graduate or drop out.

Even with a large, expanding pool of research on dropping out, it seems we are no closer to solutions to the problem of the early school leaver. There is little point in focussing on the high school. This merely reproduces the findings of the research which consistently identifies the correlates of dropping out of school. The school has no control over many of the identified correlates, especially those related to family background. Memories of the elementary school years offer a fresh avenue to identify similarities and differences in experience and perception, rather than background, which contributed to the individual's educational decisions. I believe my study will identify important differences in school experiences and perceptions of schooling between dropouts and graduates which will have implications for school processes at the elementary school level - prior to the dropout decision - and school processes as they relate to the child's home - the other important influence on the decision-making process. In studying factors schools may be able to influence - in this case student participation in school, identification with school, and bonding with schooling - we are following a practical line of research. In examining school experiences and the interaction between school and home, we begin on an avenue of research leading to areas over which schools have some control.

This study constitutes one part of a larger project pursued by a group of researchers at Simon Fraser University. The group of studies is intended to contribute to knowledge about family influence upon schools and classrooms. The larger project examines student and parent attitudes about schooling and, through an intervention aimed at improving working relationships between students, parents and teachers, attempts to measure change in perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. One of the outcome measures of the project is student bonding to school. With this study I

hope to support the findings of the project with respect to bonding and student behavior by examining attitudinal and experiential differences between school graduates and dropouts. Bonded students, or those with positive attitudes about schooling, are more likely to have a successful school experience. Additionally, parents of bonded students are more likely to have supported schooling consistently and clearly.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Education is a necessity and has become entrenched as a basic right. Few people would argue with the notion that all students have the right to education. The best available Canadian evidence on dropout rates comes from studies done in Ontario (Radwanski, 1987) and indicates that about 30 - 35% of any cohort leaves school before graduation. The well known definitional and data collection problems mean that this is only an approximation, but the number is certainly great enough to be a cause of concern. For about 30-35% of our young people (Levin, 1990), then, the right to a complete education is never fulfilled. They drop out of school before graduation.

> "The individual and collective disadvantages that accrue when a significant portion of students fail to complete their high school education are impossible to ignore, particularly in a society which is committed to equality of opportunity, and to the full participation of all citizens in political, economic and social affairs. (Natriello, et. al., 1986, p. 430)

While in school, dropouts have greater discipline problems than other students (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986) and other difficulties that are disruptive (Ekstrom, 1986). Dropping out is usually the end of a long history of school problems, and school is generally a negative experience for early leavers (Wehlage et. al., 1989). "The school is obligated to create an environment in which these youth can experience some kind of success, find institutional participation rewarding, and develop aspirations for additional schooling that can lead to satisfying employment." (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, p. 377)

In order to meet our responsibility, educators must address the dropout situation and seek solutions. There is evidence that it is, at least partially, a school problem. Research has shown that there is a difference between school systems, school districts, and individual schools within districts in their ability to keep young people in school until graduation (Rumberger, 1987). This would suggest that some schools do something that helps prevent students from dropping out. There are solutions that can be initiated by the school. But which interactions have an impact on a student's school experience? Student-teacher and student-student interactions, because they happen daily within a classroom, are obviously important. Because students come from different homes with different values, student-parent and teacher-parent interactions are also important to a student's school experience. More importantly, perhaps, is how the student perceives each interaction, and the effect that perception has on the student's actions.

In this chapter, the history of dropout literature is outlined followed by a review of the literature on student perceptions of their interactions with teachers and the literature on parent involvement. Collaboration between students, teachers and parents is suggested as a means of improving the educational experience for all students by focusing on the interactions between students, teachers and parents to improve student bonding to school.

PART I - DROPOUT RESEARCH: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Early research, in the 1960's and 1970's focussed on the characteristics of students who dropped out of school. The underlying theme was that somehow these students could be made to fit the existing

system, if we could just understand what was wrong with them. The current focus in educational literature on dropping out of school began in 1982 with the publication of the High School and Beyond research project which was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. This research characteristically examined school structures as causes of dropping out. Teacher behaviors in particular were questioned, since dropouts commonly cited teachers who didn't care as the reason they left school (Ekstrom et. al., 1986; Rumberger, 1987). The abundant literature that exists about dropouts and factors contributing to dropping out is consistent in reported correlates. Virtually all dropout studies which focus on dropout factors identify the same factors, both related to school and external to the system. The correlational literature revealed several factors related to dropping out, but it is not clear that any of these factors can be specified as causes. In most cases, the factors occur with dropping out but may be other symptoms of an unrecognized problem that has developed over time.

Most recently, the dropout research has focussed on the development of the decision to drop out as a function of the interactions between the student and the school. (Wehlage et. al., 1989; Finn, 1989) This recent focus does not preclude the importance of previous work. In her extensive review of the literature, Macdonald (1989) argues that knowledge about characteristics of students and schools which influence whether a student will graduate is important before we can assess the interrelationships and the impact they have on individuals.

A. Dropout Correlates

Children in our schools come from many different cultures and family backgrounds, which means each student has different social requirements.

Many times students' background characteristics can put them at risk of dropping out of school. The most common personal factors found to be related to dropping out are: SES, low support for education in the home, peer influence, family problems, substance abuse, trouble with the law, low self-esteem, and pregnancy (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Ekstrom, 1986). There are exceptions who don't appear to match a "typical" dropout background, but the majority of unsuccessful students display one or more of the usual dropout factors.

Although each dropout has a different story, there are some characteristics which tend to be commonly associated with leaving school early. These characteristics can be grouped as follows: Social or Family Background, Personal Problems, School Factors.

1. Social or Family Background

Students' family situations can have a major impact on their learning. SES, and all of the implications of it, plays a big part in students' school experiences. Research repeatedly supports that low SES students are at a greater risk of leaving school early (Radwanski, 1987; Rumberger, 1987). The absence of financial resources, though, is not the only reason SES is related to dropping out. Other family factors such as a lack of learning opportunities in the home, low educational expectations by parents, cultural differences, and low acceptance of middle class values are all related both to SES and dropping out (Ekstrom et. al., 1986; Rumberger, 1987).

Family experience with education is often similar across the generations. Often the parents of dropouts were dropouts themselves. Research consistently shows a positive correlation between the education

level of parents and the education level of their children (Radwanski, 1987; Rumberger, 1987; Macdonald, 1989)

Low SES can create a family financial burden that requires students to work to supplement the family income. Working can be a major factor in determining whether a student stays in school. The literature is consistent in reporting that students who work more than 15 hours per week increase their chances of dropping out (Radwanski, 1987).

Often dropouts come from homes with dysfunctional family systems, a phenomenon usually attributed to low SES (Busch et. al., 1987). The difficulties these children experience at home can range from a lack of family support for each other to extreme dysfunction such as family sexual abuse. There is probably a group of children whose difficulties are beyond the scope of what the school system can reasonably be asked to deal with, but, for the most part, schools and families may be able to work together to overcome more common family problems and get on with business of schooling.

2. Personal Problems

Personal characteristics of students are often cited as being correlated with dropping out of school. Perhaps the most difficult to assess is self esteem. Students who leave school early have lower levels of self esteem than their peers who remain in school. (Ekstrom et. al., 1986; Radwanski, 1987; Rumberger, 1987; Macdonald 1989). Self esteem is often related to peer influence. Students with low self esteem are influenced by their peers who are also alienated from the school environment (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Rumberger, 1987). Dropouts have friends who are dropouts.

Other personal problems that are connected with leaving school early include substance abuse, trouble with the law, and pregnancy (Ekstrom et. al., 1986). The correlations between these factors are strongly supported in much of the literature on dropping out (Rumberger, 1987).

3. School Problems

Behavior problems in school go hand in hand with dropping out of school (Macdonald, 1989; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Students who leave school early have been suspended more often and are more frequently in conflict with teachers and administrators than students who graduate from school (Rumberger, 1987). Not only do they come in contact with the discipline system more often, but they also perceive that discipline system to be unfair (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Attendance is an issue for school dropouts. They have more frequent absences and lates than their peers. Research supports that there is a positive correlation between poor attendance and dropping out (Radwanski, 1987; Macdonald, 1989)

Dropouts were simply not as involved in their schools as their more successful peers were. Holland and Andre (1987) studied the involvement of dropouts in extracurricular activities and noted a difference between dropouts and graduates. They felt involvement in such activities was important to the outcome of schooling.

Poor academic performance is the best single predictor of who leaves school before graduation. Academic difficulties are common for dropouts. Although many dropouts have average or above average intellectual ability, most dropouts are low achievers (Wehlage et. al., 1989). Radwanski (1987)

found that 82% of Ontario's dropouts had failed at least one high school subject, compared to only 50% of graduates.

Conrath (1986) describes an inability of at-risk youth to see the relationship between effort and success. They have a low self concept and do not cope well with school. As a result, they fall behind and perceive themselves as dumb rather than lacking skills. "They do not believe they have control over events and outcomes, whether successes or failures. Therefore success at school is due to good luck or easy work and failure is due to bad luck, teachers who refuse to help, or impossible work." (p. 25)

There is also evidence that reading achievement is a predictor of dropping out. Schultz, et. al. (1986), in their Chicago study, found that the lower the reading score, the more likely it is that the student will drop out. However, they do not recommend that students be retained in order to improve their reading levels. The other significant finding of their study was that high school entry age is an important factor in predicting drop out. The older the entry age of a student, the higher the likelihood of dropping out.

When dropouts are questioned about their reasons for leaving school, the overwhelming reason they give is the school itself (Strother, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Macdonald, 1989) Students who drop out feel, among other things, that teachers don't care, the curriculum is irrelevant, and the discipline is unfair (Rumberger, 1987). In an Ontario study, a large sample of dropouts were interviewed and it was found that about 45% of the reasons given for dropping out were school related. "For one reason or another - difficulty with one or more subjects, for instance, a sense of alienation or boredom, or learning styles that didn't match teaching styles - they just didn't fit comfortably into the structures of their high schools. In

a very real sense many of them felt rejected by the education system before they rejected it." (Radwanski, 1987, p. 8)

Table 1 summarizes the most common student characteristics related to dropping out.

SOCIAL OR FAMILY BACKGROUND
Low SES
Child abuse or neglect
Few at-home learning opportunities
Lack of consistent support and encouragement
Low education level of parents
Single parent homes
Working part time
Ethnic minority
Low occupational attainment of parents
Siblings who dropped out
PERSONAL PROBLEMS
Low self esteem
Learning difficulties
Older than peers
Legal problems
Substance abuse
Low aspirations
Health problems
Peers who drop out
SCHOOL PROBLEMS
Low achievement
Low reading ability
Poor attendance
Tardiness
Little participation in extracurricular activities
Irrelevant curriculum
Teachers don't care
Boredom
Lack of options
Dislike teachers
Unfair discipline policies
Retention in grade
Expelled

TABLE 1. Summary of Student Characteristics Related to Dropping Out of School

B. Dropping Out as a Developmental Process

Much research has pointed out that there is a connection between dropping out, delinquency, disruptive behavior, and attendance problems (Ekstrom et. al., 1986; Rumberger, 1987; Lloyd, 1978). An understanding of the process of dropping out may help solve other school related problems. There is evidence to suggest that dropouts can be predicted by the correlational factors when the students are in the early elementary grades (Lloyd, 1978; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989). If dropping out is predictable in
elementary school, interventions to identify and prevent dropouts need to be focussed on elementary classrooms (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Ekstrom et. al., 1986).

Rumberger (1987) calls for researchers to "uncover the processes that underlie and lead to this [dropout] problem." (p. 111) He feels that school processes have not been fully explored. Catterall (1986, as cited in Rumberger, 1987) sees dropping out "as a process of disengagement from school...that culminates in the final act of leaving." (p. 111) Wehlage & Rutter (1986) feel that "the process [of dropping out] is probably cumulative in most youth." (p. 385) Natriello, Pallas, & McDill (1986) refer to students "gradually"
withdrawing from school. Finn (1989) outlines a model of dropping out as a developmental process: the participation - identification model. The participation - identification model examines a student's bonding with school as necessary for continued participation. A student who has a sense of belonging or valuing of the institution is more likely to stay in than a student who does not identify with school.

The literature on dropouts shows that dropouts have a low level of participation in school, as indicated by the correlations between delinquency, truancy, disruptive behavior, and dropout (Ekstrom et. al., 1986). It seems reasonable that if the participation level of potential dropouts could be increased, they would experience more success and have a more positive bond with school. Wehlage et. al. (1989) focus on school bonding as a process of drawing students into a sense of "membership" in the school.

According to Finn (1989), successful performance outcomes which lead to identification with school need not be academic. If this is the case, how the teacher responds to student behavior and performance directly influences whether or not the students perceive themselves as successful. The relationship with the teacher either builds or breaks down a little with each teacher response to student behavior as does the process of bonding with school. Teacher response and student perception of that response are key in establishing a positive cycle of participation and identification.

Barrington and Hendricks (1989) suggest that the high accuracy of dropout prediction using third grade data reflects family attitudes toward education. They call for dropout prevention to begin in elementary school and involve parents wherever possible. There is a wealth of research supporting the notion that parent involvement in their children's education is essential to improve academic results (Moles, 1982; Henderson, 1988). Improving academic results is one area where students can experience a successful performance outcome and is likely to improve a child's bonding to school. The literature on parent involvement also indicates that when schools involve families in learning activities the families have an improved understanding of school goals (Epstein, 1987) and a higher opinion of teacher actions (Epstein, 1986; Dauber & Epstein, 1989).

Table 2 summarizes the indicators which show that the process of dropping out may have begun.

Low participation levels in class
Little extracurricular involvement
Little success perceived by student
Perceived negative teacher response
Negative attitudes toward teachers
Achieving below expected levels
Disruptive classroom behavior

TABLE 2. Early Indicators of the Drop Out Process

Both student perceptions of their interactions with teachers and teacher practices of parent involvement appear to be important areas to explore with respect to student bonding to school. The interactions between students, teachers and parents may be critical in improving student participation in school at an early age and, as a result, increase student identification with school.

Historically, dropout research has reached some tentative conclusions which indicate multiple causalities of this problem. There are as many reasons for dropping out as there are dropouts. Research that has been done, however, is not helpful to policy because it does not help us to know how or what tc change in order to retain more students in school. Examining early school experiences, especially with respect to student perceptions of school and parent involvement in schooling, is more likely to offer clearer directions for policy makers.

PART II - STUDENT PERCEPTION LITERATURE

The existing literature on student perceptions generally focuses on student perception of school. Student-teacher relationships is often a subheading of the more general schooling discussion. Three areas of student knowledge which involve teachers are identified in the literature: 1) student perceptions of teachers and teacher behavior, 2) teacher role in developing student self concept, 3) student perceptions of school climate. As with the study of most social phenomena, there is overlap between the three areas identified, but it is necessary to make divisions in the body of research in order to draw a framework on which to base further study. Findings in each of these areas help build a concept of the effect of student perceptions of the teacher-student relationship on student bonding to school.

A. Student Perceptions of Teachers and Teacher Behavior

As social beings, we are constantly evaluating others and our relationship with them. The school is a social institution of major significance to children, as it is where they spend the majority of their waking time. Teachers are necessarily significant to children by the nature of the daily interaction between the two parties. Students form opinions about teachers based on their perceptions of those teachers and the teachers' attitudes. Research has focussed primarily on student descriptions of specific teacher types.

Mergendoller and Packer (1985) studied shared descriptions to categorize student perceptions of teachers. When students were asked about teachers, they spontaneously recalled, among other factors, their appraisal of and attachment to specific teachers. Mergendoller and Packer

found a common understanding of what constitutes a specific type of teacher and that not all students perceive specific teachers as fitting the same type. Also, students do not always separate teacher personality characteristics from the work they assign or their teaching behaviors. "Students perceptions are not simply descriptive. The words seventh graders use to describe teachers express...their expectations for how an effective, successful and likeable teacher should act." (p. 597)

Beck (1967) found that fifth graders describe "good" teachers as warm, friendly, supportive, clearly commanding, effective motivators and disciplinarians, and flexible in procedures. Students perceive "good" teachers to be in charge of the classroom and positive in their concerns for students, according to Goodlad (1984). Samuels and Griffore (1980) studied elementary school and college students and found that teacher knowledge of subject matter and ability to teach are important characteristics of "good" teachers. Young children identify feedback about good performance as a very important quality of good teaching. In schools with high delinquency rates, Rutter (1979) found that teachers are perceived as more authoritarian. It seems that a "good" teacher is in control of the classroom but is also concerned about the well-being of individual students as demonstrated through a warm, friendly, caring approach to interactions with students.

The way students view teachers is definitely not static. In reviewing the work of Lizbeth Hedelin and Lennart Sjoberg, Berliner (1985) notes that students perceptions of their personal relationships with teachers become more negative as they move through the grades, with the largest drop occurring between grade 5 and grade 7. Fullan (1982) supports the view that the number of students who think that teachers understand their point of view decreases as educational level increases. Bishop (1989) found

that older students perceive their teacher as disinterested, apathetic and lacking in dedication. Teachers of upper grades, especially high school, need to take extra care to create a positive learning environment for their students if they hope to increase the number of students who graduate from school.

The behavior of others is often the only cue we have about our relationship with those others. Students use behavior cues from teachers to draw conclusions about the teacher-student relationship. In her review of the literature, Weinstein (1983) notes that a wide range of teacher behaviors and student characteristics have been studied with little overlap. The findings are diverse and often contradictory. Steed (1985) linked students' disruptive classroom behavior to student perception of inappropriate teacher behavior. Stayrook (1978) noted that student perceptions of instructional behaviors predict student achievement. This suggests the importance of perceptions in determining student success in school. In their report for the Royal Commission on Education, Marx and Grieve (1988) note that the students of British Columbia see a direct connection between good teaching and the enhancement of learning.

Much of the research on perception of teacher behavior focuses on differential treatment of students, especially with respect to low and high achievers. Students perceive that teachers have different expectations for high achievers and low achievers. The perceived teacher behaviors toward low achievers include negative feedback, more work, and a rule orientation. High achievers are perceived as having more opportunity for choice (Weinstein & Middlestadt, 1979; Weinstein et. al., 1982). Cooper and Good (1982) found that students for whom teachers have high and low expectations correspondingly perceive more or less frequent teacher interaction. The perceptions of differential treatment of high and low

achievers has also been linked to congruence between student and teacher expectations. Students who perceive differential treatment usually hold the same expectations for themselves as the teacher holds for them (Brattesani et. al., 1981). The implications for teachers in assessing their own teaching behavior, then, becomes significant. By forming conceptions of individual students, teachers run the risk of initiating a negative cycle for the student which could culminate in dropping out.

B. Teacher Role in Developing Student Self Concept

People develop a concept of themselves based on how their interactions with others occur over their lifetime. Perceptions of significant others' feedback enable people to evaluate areas and degrees of competence and self efficacy (Juhasz, 1989). Galbo (1984) established a connection between children's aspirations and adult expectations concerning those aspirations. He determined that teachers, although less influential than parents, are still considered by children to be significant adults. Cottle (1990), in his description of one family's reaction to the closure of a local school, reveals the impact a single teacher had on one boy's life. The teacher, who other students mocked, helped the boy develop belief in himself and encouraged him to look toward college. It seems that the influence teachers have over the development of self concept varies with individual students and the perceived relationships established with them.

Teacher contact with students is almost completely limited to the school. The ability of teachers to have an impact on other areas of children's lives seems remote. Galbo (1984) found that teacher influence tends to relate to school matters only. Teachers who create an

environment in which students feel successful and personally attached to the teacher enhance their students' sense of well being (Berliner and Casanova, 1985). Davidson and Lang (1960) found that positive perceptions of teachers' feelings are related to positive self image, higher achievement, and better classroom behavior. Weinstein (1981) found that students focus on teacher feedback to learn about their relative intelligence. It appears that children's perceptions of their own competence may be based on their perceived evaluations from teachers.

The importance of teacher influence over children's development of self concept cannot be overlooked by educators. "The way students see themselves, how they relate to the schooling experience, and their hopes for successful achievement and productive futures are grounded in the way they perceive themselves as learners." (Marx & Grieve, 1988, p. 56) Wang (1982) noted that student perception of high personal control minimizes the effects of teacher expectations on student learning. Brookover et. al. (1979) found that students' perceptions of teachers' evaluations of them contribute to student self-reliance. If teachers are to reduce the effects of their personal expectations for individual students, it is vital that they work toward developing a positive self perception and a high level of self efficacy in all students.

C. Student Perception of School Climate

School climate can have a direct impact on children's thinking about schooling and, as a consequence, their achievement. Brookover (1979) found that students in high achieving schools believe that teachers care about their academic performance, that they are expected to learn, and that there are high achievement expectations in the school. Rutter et. al. (1979)

identified climate factors which influence students' perceptions of school: general conditions for students, staff attitudes toward students, shared activities between staff and students, student positions of responsibility, and student success and achievement. Berliner and Casanova (1985) point out the need for balance in a school climate. Academic achievement depends on more than skill development. "Experiencing a sense of well-being in the classroom helps students to have a positive feeling about school. That's the necessary condition for their development of the motivation to work." (p. 13) A warm, respectful environment seems to be essential to developing a positive cycle of student bonding with school.

Not all classrooms and teachers give the same climate messages to students. Weinstein et. al. (1982) note that different climates exist not only within schools, but within classrooms for different students. Mergendoller (1985) draws attention to teacher personality and the effect it has on the formation of a particular type of class with "correlative forms of experience for students who find themselves within it." (p. 592) The climate experience is different for individual students, depending on their perceptions of the behavior and attitudes of others.

Teachers should be aware of the cues given off by classroom and school climate. Climate is shaped, in large part, by principals and teachers. A move toward high expectations, opportunities for student responsibility, and respect for students as individuals with different backgrounds and talents can provide a climate in which students perceive themselves as contributing to the school in a meaningful way. This type of climate can go a long way in strengthening the participation-identification cycle for all students.

Student perceptions of teachers, classrooms and schools are powerful motivators for individual students. Teachers' actions and their students'

perceptions of those actions are one institutional factor that plays a significant role in developing positive attitudes in students toward school. In order to improve the bonding cycle for more students, teachers, administrators and policy makers must consider how their actions are perceived by all students and what changes in behavior may be necessary to encourage students to participate in school in a positive way.

PART III - PARENT INVOLVEMENT LITERATURE

Ideas and issues around parent involvement in schools and schooling are not new. Roles, rights and responsibilities of families and schools have been discussed and questioned since formal public schools began. Merely the focus changes over time with changing family pressures in other social areas. Today's parent is under considerable stress. Homes with two working parents or a single parent who must work to survive must juggle daycare, after school care, care for sick kids on working days, work commitments, children's activities, and their own social lives. With all of these conflicting pressures, parents are demanding a role in school decision making and the right to shape their own children's education.

Parents are not the only ones crying out for more parent involvement in schools. Researchers have clearly identified parent-teacher partnerships as a critical element for improving schools and student performance in schools. In her review of school climate research, Anderson (1982) notes many studies which found parent involvement to be a positive contributor to school climate. The National Committee for Citizens in Education reviewed numerous studies which found that parent involvement makes a critical difference in student achievement (Henderson, 1988). In his review of home-based contingency models, Barth (1979) clearly outlines several

studies where communication between home and school resulted in improved student behavior and achievement. Oliver Moles (1982) synthesized some research on parent participation and noted that the benefits include reduced absenteeism, higher achievement scores, improved behavior, and improved parent confidence in schools. Purkey and Smith (1983) include parent involvement on their list of critical organizational variables for effective schools. Fehrman et. al. (1987) studied secondary schools and found that parent involvement has a positive effect on grades. Fullan (1982) says "direct parent involvement in instructional activities designed to contribute to child development ... consistently influence(s) educational achievement of students." (p. 196) Epstein (1982) studied student attitudes and found that there are consistent and measurable effects of parent involvement on students' attitudes about school, about homework, and on students' perceptions of family and school ties. The research is loud and clear that if parents become involved in their children's school and school work, those children will do better in school and have a more positive outlook: more participation and identification.

A. Types of Parent Involvement

Most research divides parent involvement into four distinct categories. Epstein (1987) identifies these categories as: 1) The basic obligations of schools; 2) Parent involvement at school; 3) Parent involvement in learning activities at home; 4) Parent involvement in governance and advocacy. She later added a fifth category; the basic obligations of parents (Brandt, 1989). Other researchers give these

classifications slightly different titles or may only examine one category, but the general division is similar.

1. The Basic Obligations of Schools

Rowell (1981) identifies parents rights to three different types of information: information about teachers and principals, information about curriculum, and information about policies. The British Columbia School Act (1990) identifies parents' rights to be informed about their children's attendance, behavior and progress, to receive reports on the effectiveness of school programs, and to access student records. The basic obligations of schools are to be sure these rights are honored. Home-school communication varies in form and in frequency, but it is essential in a parent-teacher partnership. Different forms of communication include memos, notices, report cards, conferences, newsletters, school open house, personal phone calls, newspaper, radio, phone calls and others.

A study done in Abbotsford (Cattermole & Robinson, 1985) revealed that parents want to be informed about school matters, and they prefer the first-hand sources of information that are provided by direct home-school communication. Lucas and Lusthaus (1977) point out that communication is a two-way function. They surveyed parents to determine their perceptions of home-school communication in terms of "openness" and "closedness". Parents are generally positive in their perception of parent-teacher and parent-principal communication, but there is an indication that schools are not as accessible as parents would like them to be. Schools should reach out to parents through more positive communication and more accessible personnel in order to facilitate two-way communication. Parents want to communicate back to schools.

2. Parent Involvement At School

Traditionally, parent involvement at school has included such activities as hot dog sales and fund raising. The research is clear that parent involvement in student learning at school makes a considerable difference in student performance, parent attitudes and teacher efficacy. Parents can play a number of different roles at school. Parents can assist teachers, administrators and children in classrooms and other areas of the school. They can tutor students in teacher-initiated activities, teach students a skill outside the teacher's realm of knowledge, mentor students with similar interests, organize activities such as field trips, plan and implement social events for students, provide information to other parents, and many other creative activities. Henderson (1988) cites studies that clearly show that programs of parent involvement within a school improve student achievement. Other spinoffs are more positive parent attitudes toward teachers, the school and education in general, and improved teacher efficacy.

Examples exist of programs with extensive parent involvement in schools which show benefits to students, parents and schools. The Yale Child Study Centre (Comer, 1986; Haynes et. al., 1989) implemented parent participation projects in low achieving schools. There were marked improvements in school climate, teacher efficacy, and parent support for schools. Johnston and Slotnick (1985) taught in the Salt Lake City Open Classroom Program and strongly support the involvement of parents in classroom activities. There are organizational and time difficulties, but the enriching benefits to students, parents and teachers are too critical to ignore.

Unfortunately, these programs are exceptions. In a survey about parent attitudes and practices of parent involvement, Dauber and Epstein (1989) found that parents are not very involved at school. In a similar survey of teachers, Epstein and Dauber (1989) found that this situation gets worse in higher grades. Teachers are positive about parent involvement programs, but they do not have those programs in place.

3. Parent Involvement in Learning Activities At Home

Parents can become involved in teacher-initiated activities or in child-initiated requests for help with class work, and in assisting or monitoring their own children with learning activities that are coordinated with class work. Most parents want to be involved in this type of home tutoring, but many are unsure of how to help (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Parents want teachers to advise them about what types of activities to use and how to use those activities. Parents who are given such guidance by teachers spend more time helping with homework than other parents (Dauber & Epstein, 1989). In addition, parents of children with teachers who involve parents in this way are more positive about teachers and give them a higher rating in overall teaching ability (Epstein, 1985). The improved relationship between home and school that results from parents being involved with learning activities has some very tangible benefits for students.

> "The key to achievement seems to lie in students' positive attitudes about themselves and their control over the environment. And these attitudes are largely formed at home, although they are strongly influenced by the myriad interactions between the family and the surrounding community, including the school." (Henderson, 1988)

Family background can have a powerful effect on school achievement at an early age through its effects on attitudes toward school and learning that takes place at home. Early achievement influences subsequent attitudes and performance in school (Rumberger, 1987). Parents who are involved in home learning are more satisfied with teachers and schools, and they pass that positive view on to their children. Teachers who encourage parent involvement in home learning activities are more satisfied with their relationship with parents and approach their job with an improved sense of efficacy. Students whose parents help with homework perform better in the classroom and have a more positive attitude toward schooling throughout their school careers.

4. Parent Involvement in School Governance and Advocacy

Parents can function as decision-makers at all levels of education, and they can be very effective in promoting change by acting as an interest group. Involving parents in decision-making roles, whether it's at the school level, the district level, or the provincial level, is an issue receiving more attention recently. Parents are demanding involvement in school decision-making and using strong techniques to influence school districts (Bula, 1990). The British Columbia School Act (1989) gives all parents the right to form a parent advisory council within their children's schools. These councils are not new, but they have often been nothing more than a group of parents who endorse and approve the school administrator's wishes (Lucas, Lusthaus & Gibbs, 1978). Robinson (1977) calls for "political mechanisms that provide for more meaningful participation in educational decision-making." (p.18) There is much work to be done before Parent Advisory Councils represent true parent involvement.

Parent interest groups have had a more successful history of political influence in education, although Davies and Zerchykov (1981) note that there are more interest groups *for* parents than interest groups *of* parents. The growth of special education programs is one example of the reaction of school districts to parents playing an advocacy role for their handicapped children. A particularly strong interest group in education is The Canadian Parents for French, who advocate immersion programs for their children. Many districts in British Columbia offer some form of French Immersion program to students.

Parent involvement in governance and advocacy in public schooling is clearly less developed than parent involvement in their own children's learning activities. The literature is sparse, and that which exists is quite negative about the effectiveness of present models of school governance. In addition, educators tend to view parent involvement in decision-making about policy as inappropriate (Chavkin & Williams, 1987). As Rowell (1981) points out, however, parents have the right to influence both administrative decisions and school policy. After all, they pay the bills for schools through their taxes.

B. Implementing Parent Involvement Programs

It is clear that parent involvement in a useful educational tool, and the form of parent involvement does not seem to be important (Henderson, 1988). The benefits to all educational stakeholders, and especially to students, are great. Partnerships, however, are not a widespread phenomenon (Epstein & Dauber, 1989). There is an indication that involvement is related to parent education level (Stevenson & Baker, 1991). If this is the case, it is up to schools to take steps to involve parents who

may not involve themselves. Barrington and Hendricks (1989) call for schools to encourage parental attitudes more supportive of education in order to increase the number of students experiencing success in school. Dauber and Epstein (1989) found that the school's practices to involve parents were more important than any other factor in determining whether parents stayed involved in their children's education. Implementation of comprehensive parent involvement programs seems to have great potential for improving student bonding to school.

Parent involvement in their children's learning is clearly a key element in student bonding to school. Parent attitudes easily transfer to their children and either help or hinder the process of participating and identifying with schooling. If educators hope to improve student attitudes toward school and, thus, decrease the dropout rate, they must pay special attention to this much needed resource by implementing programs specifically designed to involve a large number of parents with their own children's school experiences.

PART IV - CONCLUSION

Schools are complex social organizations with internal and external influences affecting them daily (Coleman & Collinge, 1991). In order to improve the probability that students' experiences in schools are positive, all of these influences must be considered. In addition, the student's own perception of daily interactions is important in understanding individual experiences. This may mean that some influences are more important than others for individual students and teachers. A bonding model which includes interactions between students, teachers, and parents is probably most descriptive of the essential influences on individual bonding to school.

Coleman and Collinge (1991) argue that changing the relationship between teachers, parents and students is essential to improving schools, especially when improvement is measured by the school's ability to hold students until graduation. They outline a collaborative triad model to improve student bonding to school and, presumably, retention rates. Lightfoot (1981) feels that interactions between families and schools should include the child. "The family school relationship should be a triangular one, including the experiences and perspectives of parents, teachers, and children." (p. 103) Researchers believe interactions between students, teachers and parents are critical for improved student bonding.

The objective of this study is to examine student perceptions of their elementary school experience, especially their perceptions of relationships and interactions, and compare the experiences of students with different educational outcomes. The research is clear that bonding develops over time, as does nonattachment to school, but it is not clear if there is a critical point in a child's education that identification with schooling is necessary to ensure success. Research also suggests that families play an important role in the bonding process, but the relative importance of teachers and parents is unknown. Through a retrospective exploration of the elementary school experience of dropouts and graduates, perhaps we can start to identify differences in experiences which may help us to understand the critical elements of a positive bonding cycle.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

There is disagreement about how to approach educational research. Some believe that validity is best reached through quantitative methods, while others argue that true understanding of the complex social nature of education can more accurately be found in qualitative study. As the debate continues it becomes increasingly clear that a continuum exists along which most educational researchers are distributed and that our methodological biases influence our perception of research. Along with the realization that many stances are possible and potentially valid, comes the necessity for researchers to explain the standpoint from which their data is analyzed (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In this chapter, then, I will first try to clarify my beliefs about research methodology and follow with a presentation of the methods used in this study.

PART I - EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Research is cyclical inasmuch as it begins and ends with a question. What we learn from current research helps us to identify what is not yet understood. Research builds on existing knowledge to improve our understanding of the world around us. Interpretation of information gained from research helps us not only know what happens but also understand why. Research helps us give meaning to the actions we identify and observe. Understanding our observations improves our practice and helps us to identify other areas where our knowledge is limited. This

identification of future research directions leads us to begin the research cycle again with a new question.

Miles and Huberman (1984) believe that social phenomena exist in the objective world as well as in the mind and that the objective existence of social phenomena occurs through common perceptions. Understanding of human actions is based on shared social meanings. I agree that human perceptions, intentions, motives, beliefs, and attitudes are all important in understanding human action. Any research which focuses on human action must consider these unobservable yet important human characteristics. Educational research clearly examines human action and must, then, consider the social meanings of those actions in order to suggest practical solutions to educational problems.

Because of the importance of internal characteristics in human research, it is often difficult to separate actions from beliefs. As Soltis (1990) points out, qualitative educational research cannot be value-free. A major purpose of qualitative research is to improve our understanding through interpretation and description. "Description is not neutral. It is the interpretive result of an interpersonal engagement with others." (Soltis, p. 252) The interaction between the researcher and the subjects helps form the findings into sensible ideas. It is through common perception that we can begin to sort out what is important in furthering our understanding and what is not. Findings in qualitative research, then, must be based on common beliefs and perceptions in order to make practical sense.

Since the interaction between humans is important, the perceptions of the researcher must be considered in qualitative research. Research findings are bound to the context in which they were observed. Time, place, and conditions matter. Results may not be exactly replicable at

different times in different places with different subjects, but trends should be universally recognizable in all situations in order to be of practical use. The researcher, then, must be cognizant of personal bias in observing, coding and reporting data in order to ensure the study is valid. Triangulation of methods and sources can help the researcher maintain objectivity and add validity in this necessarily subjective area of research.

Some would argue that numbers don't lie and, therefore, a strictly quantifiable study is the only sure way to maintain objectivity in educational research. This argument is weak in two ways. First, it is not the numbers we are concerned with but, rather, the interpretation of those numbers and the meaning given to them by the researcher. With the array of statistical tools available and variations in possible statistical tests, this interpretation is as subjective as the reporting of qualitative data. Secondly, analyzing social phenomena strictly quantitatively puts unnecessary restrictions on research in education which limit our understanding of the social world. In order to develop questions and answers that reflect the full richness of the educational field, it is necessary to embark on research that examines words, thoughts, feelings, attitudes and perceptions of the people in the field. Quantitative research can examine these human characteristics but only in a very limited way. Qualitative analysis is ideal for studying the depth of the educational experience.

As a researcher, I lean toward the understanding of human qualities rather than human quantities. I am more interested in knowing the why of human behavior than the how or the how many. I believe that the experience of each individual is as personal as a fingerprint and that experience is influenced by interaction with other humans. It may seem futile to study human behavior if each experience is potentially so different, but I also believe we can only begin to offer practical answers to our why

questions by studying individuals and looking for similarities in experience. Recognizable trends in results are the building blocks of understanding individual experiences that may at first seem diverse. Discovering these similarities can shape practical ideas that can be used to make a difference in the educational experience of all people. There is not one answer to any question in educational research, but, rather, a range of ideas to help predict individual experience.

PART II - STUDY METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

There are volumes of research on dropping out of school. Much of the research agrees about the reasons given by dropouts for leaving school (Rumberger, 1987). Most of that research was quantitative (Ekstrom et. al., 1986; Rumberger, 1987) and, thus, little is known about the individual experience that shaped the decision to drop out. If, as Finn (1989) suggests, the process of bonding to school for successful students is a positive progression, then the process of dropping out must also be progression, but in a negative cycle. Students do not decide to drop out in a minute. The decision grows with their individual experiences with schooling. Research designed to solve the problem of the dropout cycle must be clearly different than what has previously been done. The feelings, perceptions, attitudes, thoughts and words of individuals must be examined to determine the commonalities in the individual experiences. Comparing these individual experiences to the experiences of high school graduates will help us to focus on if and how the school experience differs for dropouts.

Many of the present dropout literature reviews recommend that the early school experience be examined more closely (Ekstrom et. al., 1986; Finn, 1989), but little has been done beyond suggesting this direction for study. Research into the development of the dropout decision must therefore be exploratory, as suggestions as to what answers may emerge are vague and not well supported. The areas to be probed can be driven by previous research to some degree. There are studies which show that elementary school data can predict the dropout decision (Lloyd, 1979; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989). Also, the common reasons given for dropping out offer a point at which we can start exploring. This study is an attempt to focus on the range of educational difficulties that dropouts experience early in their school careers and to lead the research cycle into a more fruitful and practical line of study. By looking at the beginning of the educational experience we can hope to change the school outcome for students whose experience led them to drop out of school.

B. Data Sources

One difficulty with doing research on dropping out is the lack of agreement about what a dropout is. Definitions include or exclude items such as age, grade completed, follow up activities (such as work or GED completion), number of years in and out of school, and stated reasons for leaving. The dropout is defined according to the needs of the agency reporting the statistics (Rumberger, 1987). In order to gather the stratified purposive sample I needed, I was faced with the task of defining what I thought a drop out to be. I decided that whether students were asked by the school administration to withdraw or decided to withdraw on their own was unimportant. School administrators are, presumably,

committed to education and only ask students to leave when their behavior indicates a lack of commitment - also a sign of withdrawal according to Finn (1989). For this study, that the individual had ceased to attend school and that the school had a record of that withdrawal were the two criteria which identified the dropout.

I also had to gather a group of respondents who could be termed "successful" in school in order to draw comparisons between experiences. Educators tend to measure success by achievement and marks. I decided, however, that my successful group need not be top academic students, as I was concerned only with the differences between completers and non-completers. An average student may have a different perspective on school success than a student who found academics easy. I felt a more comprehensive picture of bonding may emerge which included all students - not just the academically talented. Success, therefore, was measured only by whether the individual graduated from high school.

The dropout respondents were all gathered from one high school in British Columbia. The school was chosen because I had previously worked there. One of the biggest problems cited in studying dropouts is that the respondents do not keep appointments or return phone calls - accessing the group to be studied is difficult (Luby, 1989). I felt that individuals who were familiar with me would be more willing to contribute to my work.

I decided it would be easiest to choose dropouts who should have graduated by the time the interviews occurred in order to easily identify the successful group. Likewise, I did not want the respondents so far past school age that locating them became impossible. The school supplied me with a list of students who had withdrawn between 1987 and 1990. I also received their last known phone number. From these lists I deleted students who had withdrawn because they had moved to another city and

students who had since returned to school. This left literally hundreds of students to choose from, so I started with students who left in the 1989-90 school year. Many students had since left town or the phone number I received from the school was now incorrect. In addition, if I tried a number at three different times with no answer, I deleted that individual. This narrowed the field considerably. I also balanced the number of male and female respondents. Most of the dropout respondents were living independently, but their parents were helpful in locating the individuals either by supplying me with a new phone number or passing on a message to call me. Without exception, the dropouts returned my calls.

The graduate respondents were chosen to match the dropouts as closely as possible. The following factors were considered in determining a match: sex, last elementary school attended, number of parents in the home, parents' occupations, parents' education levels, respondent's proper graduation year. In many cases I was unable to get past the third factor in determining a match, but I later discovered that other important factors , such as reading ability, number of parents and parent occupations, matched coincidentally. The first step in determining a match was to ask the dropouts themselves if they could think of anyone they went to elementary school with who might fit. In most cases this produced a list of students whose permanent record cards were checked to determine a match. If the dropout was unable to name anyone, the administration of the high school identified a list of students and, again, permanent record cards were checked. All graduates matched a dropout at least with respect to sex and last elementary school attended except one pair. In that pair, both respondents attended more than one school elsewhere in British Columbia, which is as close as the school match could be. This pair matched closely, however, in family background.

I did not set out in this study with a number of respondents in mind. Instead, I interviewed individuals until I was satisfied that I was not hearing any new answers and, through continuing data analysis, that patterns were emerging in the data. The size of the group turned out to be 20 respondents: 10 dropouts and 10 graduates.

C. Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected from many sources. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) support multiple data sources to avoid method dependent findings. Fielding and Fielding (1986) encourage triangulation through linking different data sources as opposed to combining different data sources. The findings from all sources should be connected to show how they relate to the conclusions drawn. Information for this study was obtained directly from the respondents both through an intensive, face-to-face interview and a one page questionnaire. When I identified the areas to be probed and generated an initial list of questions for an interview, it became clear that a number of the items were simple survey questions. The large number of interview questions required paring down, so I decided to include a short survey to obtain answers to some of the questions I cut from the original list. Indirect data was obtained from the respondents' permanent files.

The open-ended interview questions and the survey questions were developed both by reference to previous research and by discussion with academic colleagues. They explored the following areas:

1. Memories of the elementary school
2. Good and bad school experiences
3. Retention in grade
4. Feelings of belonging

5. Attendance
6. School as a place to learn
7. Encouragement from others
8. Homework
9. Relationships with teachers and principals
10. Peer relationships
11. Parent - Child relationships
12. Involvement in extracurricular activities
13. Goals
14. Transition to high school
15. Parent involvement with the school and schooling

An interview guide, complete with probes, was used in each interview in order to obtain information about similar kinds of experiences from each respondent. Following the suggestions of Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990), respondents were encouraged to elaborate on responses which seemed incomplete or which may have revealed a fresh perspective. I believe this was necessary in order to ensure that the greatest number of possible answers emerged. I did not, however, explore new avenues opened by a respondent with subsequent respondents unless they led their interviews in that direction. Lists of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A and survey questions can be found in Appendix B.

Interviewing began in the spring of 1991. Respondent pairs were identified one at a time and interviewed immediately. Six dropouts and four graduates were interviewed in May and June of 1991 and their tape-recorded interviews were transcribed immediately. I transcribed the first four myself and the other six were transcribed verbatim by a hired secretary. The remaining four dropouts and six graduates were identified and interviewed between November 1991 and January 1992. Their tape-

recorded interviews were also transcribed immediately, two by myself and eight by a hired secretary.

Hammersley & Atkinson (1983) suggest that the place an interview occurs can make a difference on the outcome and that many people are more relaxed when interviewed on their own territory. In order to ensure the greatest comfort, interviews were conducted at a place chosen by the respondent. In most cases this was the respondent's home, but some respondents chose to be interviewed at my home or at the school. In all cases, the respondents seemed extremely comfortable in their surroundings. Each interview lasted approximately 75 minutes, and the respondents were asked to fill in the short survey following the interview.

D. Data Analysis

1. Analysis During Data Collection

In order to understand the experience of each respondent, permanent record cards and permanent files were examined and a chart was prepared. The chart included information about schools attended, absences, reading test scores, marks achieved and teacher comments about student attitude and behavior. Pseudonyms were assigned and a profile was drawn up outlining the information obtained. Pseudonyms were matched alphabetically by dropout/graduate pair: Amy/Anne, Betty/Barb, Craig/Christopher, Debbie/Donna, Ed/Eric, Fiona/Florence, Glen/Greg, Heather/Helen, Ivan/Ian, Jason/John. This was done for each respondent immediately following the interview. These profiles can be found later in this chapter.

The first step taken with the data was to fully transcribe the tapes. Then the set of interview transcripts was carefully read and each transcript was corrected with the tape-recorded interview. This step allowed me to develop some initial codes based on the questions posed in the interview. These first level codes identified the themes and ideas expressed by each respondent and were recorded as marginal notes.

The initial set of ten interview transcripts were not coded before coding of the entire set of transcripts was started. I did not want answers obtained in the first set of interviews to influence my interview techniques in the remaining interviews. Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that coding should be done throughout the interview process in order to direct the exploration when the site is revisited. There are two reasons that I decided this would not be appropriate for my study. Most importantly, since this study is an exploration of memories, I wanted to ensure that I received spontaneous answers from the remaining respondents. If the respondents felt an experience was important to mention without prompting, that may indicate its relative importance in their overall experience. Secondly, each respondent was interviewed only once since many of them were difficult to locate originally and some had left town since the interviews. I simply did not have the opportunity to probe new leads with previous respondents.

The use of a focussed interview technique (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1990) was essentially a form of analysis during data collection as it allows the researcher to probe more deeply on issues driven by the respondent and return to the interview skeleton for subsequent respondents. This maintains the exploratory nature of the study while allowing more detail on potentially significant ideas posed by the respondents.

2. Analysis during Data Reduction

The data in this study were analyzed using a grounded theory, or inductive, approach which allows descriptions and theoretical ideas to come from the data. Although the interview questions were directed somewhat by previous research, they were designed to elicit unbiased responses from the respondents. The questions were open-ended, allowing the respondents to identify the specific experiences that they felt were important.

Coding was relatively straightforward as the questions were written and asked in a logical sequence. An annotated list of codes was developed throughout the initial coding steps and referred to throughout the remainder of the coding process. The first interview was also given to two academic and professional colleagues to be coded using my annotated list of codes in order to ensure validity and meaning of these codes and provide triangulation of researchers (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). I also recoded the first interview to ensure reliability of my own coding. In all cases, coding was almost identical so I continued with coding the remaining interviews.

Interviews were coded in the order they were collected since none were significantly more comprehensive than the others. This meant that a dropout transcript was coded followed by a graduate transcript and so on until all of the transcripts were complete. Four new codes were added when they were required. If a new code was added, previously coded transcripts were reviewed to see if the new code should have been used. An annotated list of codes is included in Appendix C.

Memoing and marginal notes, as described by Miles and Huberman (1984), were used throughout the coding process to clarify my perceptions of respondent statements and identify emerging patterns. The data was

then entered in a computer database according to code using four fields: code, brief statement, respondent, and page number. The data was reduced at this stage by entering the responses in a brief format and omitting irrelevant information. Stories and anecdotes were reduced to a descriptive sentence, and direct quotes that appeared important were also stated briefly and entered under existing codes.

The database allowed me to print my data in several ways for different purposes. First, I printed all of the statements made by each individual as a separate report and attached it to the original interview. This was essentially the raw data for the respondent reorganized according to the code structure. Second, I printed all of the statements made by matched pairs together in a report for each pair. This allowed me to examine similarities and differences specific to the pair. Lastly, I printed a report for each code which contained all of the statements made by all of the respondents which corresponded to each code. This report was used to further reduce the whole data set for analysis.

3. Analysis After Data Reduction

Analysis of the information on all of the respondents' school charts was enabled by combining the charts into a metachart. Recorded school and family background were compared, and characteristics were noted.

Data analysis of the interview material was done in two ways. First, all of the information given by all respondents was compiled in a database, as described above, in order to facilitate a general comparison and enable me to draw conclusions about elementary school experiences. Second,

information given by matched pairs was compiled in a report to enable specific analysis.

A second database was then compiled, according to code, to enable me to see patterns in overall responses. In order to facilitate comparison of dropout and graduate responses, a column was kept for each respondent under each code heading for identifying with a mark who had given the response. Thus, several columns could be marked for each response or, if the response was only given by one individual, one mark would appear in one column. Each column would correspond to a respondent. Many marks made it easy to distinguish trends across the respondent group.

After the master list was complete, the information was reorganized. Similar responses under each code and amongst different codes were clustered to allow patterns and trends within the major code to emerge. This step was initially very easy, as many responses were almost identical. It did become more difficult to discern meaning as the responses involving attitudes were examined. Often the original transcript had to be referred to to determine the respondent's intent. These responses were only used when the intent was clear based on the context of the response. As a result of clustering like responses, some tendencies became very clear. Other tendencies were only discovered through a thorough examination of whole pieces of interviews. In some cases, tendencies were hidden because the respondents chose to use similar words for different experiences. Once again, examination of context within interviews differentiated respondents' meanings and clarified group characteristics.

In order to report the data and findings in a clear and understandable way, the codes were combined into five general headings which emerged as a result of clustering. The findings were further divided into subgroups where these divisions occurred in the data and, in some cases, in previous

research. A summary of findings was drafted. The summary of findings was checked carefully against the original transcripts in order to confirm my certainty about the conclusions. Both dropouts and graduates were reported on in the findings. Contrasts and comparisons are made and differences in experience are noted. Since analysis of matched pairs did not reveal any new data from that found by comparing whole groups, the pair data is subsumed in the reporting of general tendencies.

In reporting the significance of the findings, both dropouts and graduates are included, and it is the differences I was interested in. The educational outcome of each group was so different that I would be remiss to combine the findings into one large pool of similarities - the differences made the difference, so to speak! The findings are explained in relation to the conceptual frame of the study and new ideas are noted.

PART III - THE SAMPLE

The following profiles were compiled using school records and information obtained directly from the respondents. The information included is not consistent because the information found in school records was often incomplete. My primary focus in drawing up these profiles was the descriptions of attitudes given by elementary school teachers about each respondent. Behavior patterns emerged readily from the information in the student files and a clear picture of each respondent as a young student was easy to envision. This, combined with information gleaned from the interviews, became the basis of each profile.

For the purposes of these profiles school location is described as rural, suburban or urban. The city in which the study was conducted had a farming community in close proximity to the city. The schools in this area

are described here as rural. Some of the schools attended by the respondents are in purely residential areas of the city. These schools are described as suburban. Urban schools are those located near the business centers of the city.

A. Dropouts

1. Amy

Amy is a high school dropout who was working as a daytime babysitter at the time of the interview. Her future plans were not definite but she was interested in hotel management or music. Amy did not mention any further schooling. In order to graduate Amy requires Math 10, Science 10 and six senior credits.

Amy attended one rural elementary school from kindergarten to grade 7 then moved to the junior high school across the street to complete grade 10. She moved to an urban high school without having completed Math and Science to the grade 10 level. Math was Amy's weakest subject: she took Math 8 three times and Math 9 twice, finally passing it at summer school. At high school her marks were below average except in music where she achieved A's. Her frustration increased in high school and manifested itself in attendance problems. Amy was eventually asked to withdraw until she was prepared to attend regularly. She registered the following September but withdrew shortly after the school year started. Amy's mother worked as a teacher and her father was a freelance journalist while Amy was in school.

Amy's reading test scores in elementary school were average or slightly below and her days absent per year ranged from 2 to 9. Amy's teachers described a student who was eager to learn and excited about school, but who also had difficulty adjusting to the routine of school. Her

attention span was short and her friends held more importance for her than curriculum did from grade 1 on. Amy was a hard worker but was easily frustrated by abstract concepts. Elementary school was difficult for Amy, but her perseverance pulled her through.

2. Betty

Betty is a high school dropout who was unemployed at the time of the interview. After she dropped out of school she had a child and moved in with her boyfriend who was also an unemployed dropout. Betty intended to stay home with her child for one more year then to take a long term care aide course at a regional college. The program did not require a high school diploma. Betty requires all of her senior credits to graduate.

Betty attended a suburban elementary school from kindergarten to the end of grade 4. She completed grades 5 to 7 at an urban elementary school. Grade 8 through 10 was completed at an urban high school in an academic program. Betty achieved high marks in all but the year she dropped out. She is adamant that she will never return to complete her high school education. Her mother worked as a secretary and her father was a laborer while Betty was in school.

In elementary school, Betty was a hardworking, helpful, highly capable student. Her reading test scores were well above average and her attendance was near perfect until high school. She was described as an independent worker who put in a sincere effort. She participated in enrichment classes from grade 5 on. In grade 7 she received the top academic award but was also displaying a negative attitude and poor behavior. Betty was an extremely bright student who started to derail in late elementary school.

3. Craig

Craig is a high school dropout who was employed as a laborer at the time of the interview. His future plans changed almost daily but might include a G.E.D. from a regional college. Craig was seriously exploring ways to become employed at a mill. Craig requires Math 10 and most senior credits to graduate.

Craig attended one urban elementary school from kindergarten through grade 7. He attended one urban high school until the end of grade 10. His program was general and his marks were below average. Craig had particular difficulty with Math. Craig returned to his high school with the intention of graduating on two occasions, but he dropped out again shortly after registering. Craig's mother stayed home while he was in school and his father was a manager at a mill.

Craig's teachers described a boy whose school work was fine but whose behavior was not always good. He was easily distracted and wasted a lot of time. By the intermediate years he was having difficulty with school work but showed spurts of improvement. Craig was an average student who required much teacher direction to keep him on task. He had average reading ability and his attendance ranged from 2 days missed to 10 days missed. His grade 7 teacher described him as "coasting through life".

4. Debbie

Debbie is a high school dropout who was pregnant at the time of the interview. The pregnancy occurred after Debbie had dropped out of school. Her future plans were unclear as so many things in her life were changing due to the pregnancy. One possibility was to complete school later. Debbie requires Math 10 and all senior credits to graduate.

Debbie attended one suburban elementary school to the end of grade 7. She then moved to a nearby junior high school where she achieved extremely low marks in grade 8 and 9. She registered in an alternative education program in grade 10 and did quite well. She moved to an urban high school to complete her grade 11 and 12 in a regular program but only lasted a few months there. Debbie's mother stayed at home while Debbie was in school and her father was a manager at a mill.

Debbie's reading test scores were slightly above average and her attendance ranged from 2 to 14 days missed per year. Debbie's teachers described her as inconsistent, unable to work independently, easily distracted and spoiled in the primary years. Her attitude toward school was her greatest weakness. Debbie repeated grade 4 and, after that year, her teachers' comments were far more positive. She was described as cooperative and a good worker. Debbie got off to a slow start in school but showed considerable improvement in the late elementary years.

5. Ed

Ed is a high school dropout who was working full time at a restaurant at the time of the interview. His girlfriend was expecting a child. Ed intended to go a regional college to learn a trade but had not decided when he would begin his education. Ed requires four senior credits to graduate but did not intend to complete high school.

Ed attended two different elementary schools. The move to the second school was made following the break up of his parents. Ed started high school in one rural high school and transferred to an urban high school, in the city where this study was conducted, in grade 10. His program was academic and his marks were above average. In high school, Ed had attendance problems which he attributes to a problem with alcohol

abuse. He saw his move to a new city as an opportunity to change his lifestyle and achieve more in school, but he was unable to find a niche for himself. He felt disconnected from both teachers and students. Ed's mother, with whom he lived, worked at various blue collar jobs and at times was unemployed through Ed's school career.

Ed's teachers described a strong student with a lazy streak. He was highly motivated in his primary years and less organized by the end of grade 7. His strength was his peer relationships and his ability to recognize and acknowledge others' feelings. Ed participated in a district wide enrichment program from grade 4 to the end of grade 7 and achieved high marks in it. His reading test scores were well above average and he missed between 2 and 14 days per year. He was a bright student, but he could have done better work.

6. Fiona

Fiona is a high school dropout who was employed full time at a gas station at the time of the interview. Although her future plans were not definite, she did express an interest in a G.E.D. from a regional college. Fiona requires English 10, Social Studies 10 and all senior credits to graduate.

Fiona attended the same rural elementary school from kindergarten through grade 7. She attended a rural junior high school and transferred to an urban high school after grade 9. Fiona achieved below average marks in high school and ended up trying an alternative education program at the urban high school with no success. Her mother was at home for most of Fiona's school career and her father was a mechanic.

Fiona was described as an average student who was cooperative and likeable. She worked hard and always tried her best. Her reading test

scores were very low and she missed between 11 and 26 days per year. By the late elementary years Fiona's achievement level was below average, but she continued to work steadily to do what she could.

7. Glen

Glen is a native person who dropped out and was unemployed at the time of the interview. He intended to pursue more education in the form of trades training. In particular he was interested in drafting. Glen requires grade 10, 11 and 12 to graduate.

Glen attended two urban elementary schools. He completed grade 9 with low marks at an urban high school. Glen lived with his mother and stepfather throughout his school career. His mother was a chambermaid off and on and his stepfather was a loader operator.

Glen's teachers describe a boy who was easily frustrated in elementary school. He was usually cooperative but needed much support and encouragement. He had many friends and was a pleasant student. Many of his teachers mentioned that he was sleepy, disorganized and slow to complete work. Glen's reading scores were slightly below average and several teachers mentioned that he found academic work difficult.

8. Heather

Heather is a high school drop out who was married and had two young children at the time of the interview. She intends to stay home and raise her children until they begin school. She may return to school eventually to complete grade 12, but she has no concrete career plans. Heather requires grade 10, 11 and 12 to graduate.

Heather attended several different elementary schools, most of which were rural. Her last elementary school was a small urban school. She

attended an urban high school until she dropped out in grade 9. Her high school marks were average and her program was academic. She lived at home with both of her parents throughout elementary school. Her mother worked off and on as a cashier and her father was a truck driver.

Heather's reading ability was below average and she missed up to 20 days of school per year. Her teachers described her as cooperative and pleasant with good citizenship qualities. She won the citizenship award several times. Heather was a diligent worker with good, independent work habits.

9. Ivan

Ivan is a high school drop out who was unemployed at the time of the interview. Ivan did not have any definite plans, but he felt he might complete his grade 12 at the college some time in the future. Ivan would have to return to grade 10 to complete a regular high school graduation.

Ivan attended four different elementary schools. His intermediate years were spent at two urban schools and he attended an urban high school where he achieved below average marks. Ivan repeated grade 6. He dropped out after grade 9. Ivan lived at home with his stay-at-home Mother and his father who was a machinist.

Ivan's reading test scores were average and he missed between 9 and 24 days per year. Ivan was a cooperative, pleasant student who could have worked harder in elementary school.

10. Jason

Jason is a high school drop out who was unemployed at the time of the interview. In the future he would like to become a drummer or an artist and feels some education might help him in his pursuits. Jason could

not graduate from high school on a regular program, as the last grade he completed is grade 6.

Jason attended one urban elementary school where he repeated grade one and grade six. He was promoted to grade eight at an urban high school without completing grade seven because of his age and his size. At high school he was placed in a pre-employment program, which included work experience, where he was quite successful. Jason left school to deal with a severe drug problem and never returned to school. He lived at home with his father, who was imprisoned at one point, throughout his elementary school years, and he did not know his mother at that time. His father, who was illiterate, worked at a mill.

Jason's reading test scores were extremely low throughout his school career. He had learning assistance every year he was in school and he missed up to 15 days per year. Jason's teachers describe him as hard working and very likeable. He was a steady and methodical student who found school work increasingly difficult over the years. All of his teachers mentioned his positive attitude, but several also mentioned that he was a bully on the playground. Jason tried hard, but school was very difficult for him.

B. Graduates

1. Anne

Anne is a high school graduate pursuing a university degree. She was in her second year at a regional college at the time of the interview and hoped to transfer to university the following year. She would like to become a university professor.

Anne went to the same rural elementary school from kindergarten to the end of grade 7, then moved to a rural junior high school situated across the street from her elementary school. She completed grade 11 and grade 12 in an academic program at an urban high school with high marks. Both of Anne's parents worked throughout her school career. Her mother was an accountant and her father owned a contracting business.

Throughout elementary school, Anne's teachers described her as dependable, capable, cooperative, polite, respectful, trustworthy and a hard worker. She got along well with the other students and had a good sense of citizenship. Her reading ability was well above average, and her attendance ranged from 2 to 10 days missed in a year. Anne was an alert, interested, enthusiastic learner who enjoyed challenges and took pride in her accomplishments.

2. Barb

Barb is a high school graduate who was attending a regional college to upgrade her high school results at the time of the interview. Although she was uncertain about her future plans, she was exploring the possibility of teaching elementary school.

Barb attended the same elementary school from kindergarten to the end of grade 4. She failed grade 2. While in grade 4, Barb received learning assistance in Language Arts and completed a modified Math curriculum. In grade 5 she registered in a church-based private school which used a curriculum that the students worked on at their own pace. She transferred to an urban high school in grade 9 where she stayed until graduation. Her high school program was general and her marks were below average. Barb lived at home with both parents throughout her school days, and the family was very involved with their church.

Barb missed between 1 and 4 days per year. Barb was a below average student in terms of achievement. Her teachers consistently reported that more effort was needed, and her reading test scores were well below average. However, Barb persevered and graduated from high school to go on to post secondary education.

3. Christopher

Christopher is a high school graduate who was intending to go to a regional college in September. He expected to spend one year at the college and complete a Business and Administration degree at a university. He hopes to become a promoter for musicians.

Christopher attended the same urban elementary school from kindergarten to the end of grade 7. He attended one urban high school from grade 8 until graduation. He pursued an academic program throughout high school with above average marks. While he went to school, Christopher's mother stayed at home and his father worked as a laborer at a mill.

Throughout elementary school, Christopher's teachers described him as conscientious, hard working, capable, courteous, and self confident. His attendance was near perfect and his reading level was somewhat above average. He participated in enrichment classes and was quick to grasp new concepts. Christopher was a strong, confident student.

4. Donna

Donna is a high school graduate who plans to become a doctor. She had just completed high school at the time of the interview and planned to begin college in the fall.

Donna went to the same suburban elementary school from grade 1 to the end of grade 7 then to a nearby junior high school to the end of grade 10. She completed grade 12 at an urban high school enrolled in the International Baccalaureate program. She obtained straight A's in high school. Donna's mother stayed home while Donna was in elementary school then went to work as a school librarian. Her father worked as a college instructor.

Donna missed up to 8 days per year and had a reading ability well above average. Donna's teachers described a quiet, attentive student with a high standard for behavior and work quality. She was an outstanding student: meticulous, neat, capable, conscientious, and cooperative.

5. Eric

Eric is a high school graduate who was working full time in a laborer position at the time of the interview. He intends to go to college and would like to pursue a career in the legal field, but he was unsure of his immediate plans.

Eric attended eight different elementary schools in six different cities. He started high school in one city then transferred to an urban high school in a different city for grades 10 through 12. He graduated on an academic program with slightly above average marks. He lived with his mother for most of his school career, except for his early years of high school when he lived with his father. His mother worked in a clerical position and his step father, who joined the family in Eric's grade 10 year, was a laborer.

Eric's teachers described him as conscientious and motivated. His reading test scores were slightly above average and he missed 7 to 14 days per year. He made friends easily and was very popular with the other

students. Eric has an excellent sense of humor and was, at times, rambunctious and disruptive. He maintained a positive attitude throughout elementary school and a high level of enthusiasm.

6. Florence

Florence is a high school graduate who had attended an American fashion college for half a year and was registered in a regional college at the time of the interview. She would like to become a pharmacist.

Florence attended the same rural elementary school from kindergarten through grade 7. She then moved to the junior high school across the street from the elementary school to complete grade 10. Her senior years were completed at an urban high school on an academic program. She achieved high marks throughout school. Her mother stayed home while Florence went to school, and her father was a farmer and also owned a sawmill.

Florence's teachers described her as thoughtful and respectful of others, pleasant, cooperative, and very capable. All of her teachers commented on her quiet, gentle manner. One teacher described her as a "gifted" student but also noted, as did other teachers, that Florence did not like to push herself. Her quick, eager mind and leadership qualities were praised by many teachers. Reading tests placed her well above average and she missed up to 8 days per year. Florence worked quickly and efficiently in both regular class work and enrichment class. She was an outstanding elementary school student.

7. Greg

Greg is a high school graduate who was in grade 12 at the time of the interview. He planned to take a year to travel and work then go straight to university. He hopes to become a physiotherapist.

Greg attended one urban elementary school from Kindergarten to the end of grade 7. His high school years were spent at one urban high school. Greg was enrolled in a very tough academic program and achieved above average marks. His mother stayed home throughout his school years and his father was a manager in the logging industry.

Greg was described as an enthusiastic, cheerful, helpful student with a thirst for knowledge. His reading ability was above average and his attendance was near perfect. He had a tendency to rush his school work which caused quality to suffer somewhat. Greg's inquisitive mind and super attitude allowed him to perform well in enrichment programs throughout elementary school. He was a very creative student who could have taken more time to produce more thoughtful work.

8. Helen

Helen is a high school graduate who was enrolled in grade 12 at the time of the interview. She intends to go to college and become a lab technician.

Helen attended the same urban elementary school from kindergarten to the end of grade 7. She registered in an urban high school in grade 8 and stayed there until graduation. She participated in the International Baccalaureate program in grade 10, but her health required her to cut back to a regular academic program in grades 11 and 12. She graduated on an academic program with above average marks. Helen's mother stayed at home while Helen was in school and her father worked as a welder.

Helen was a quiet, bright student who worked well independently. Her teachers consistently praised her work habits, leadership qualities and achievements. Her reading abilities improved considerably over her elementary school years making her a well above average reader. She missed up to 13 days per year.

9. Ian

Ian is a high school graduate who was working full time at a nursery at the time of the interview. He intended to go to a regional college in the September following the interview, then on to university to become a Social Studies teacher.

Ian attended one urban elementary school from kindergarten through grade 7. His high school years were spent at one urban high school. His high school program was academic, but his marks were slightly below average. He had a difficult time with grade 12 and ended up having to return to high school to complete enough credits for graduation. His mother was employed as a dietary worker at the hospital and his father was a carpenter throughout Ian's school years.

Ian missed 9 to 18 days per year and his reading test scores were below average. Ian was described as polite and mannerful by all of his elementary school teachers. He was an eager student with a good attitude. Ian was a cooperative, pleasant student with average achievements.

10. John

John is a high school graduate who was working full time at a grocery store at the time of the interview. His greatest hope was to become a professional baseball player, but he also intended to go to college for a diploma in business administration. His career goals were still unclear.

John attended one urban elementary school from grade 1 through grade 7 and one urban high school until graduation. He studied a wide range of subjects in high school and achieved average marks. His high school achievements would allow him to attend a regional college. John lived with only his father throughout his school years. His father was unemployed due to a physical disability.

John's reading test scores were average and he missed up to 7 days per year. John's teachers described a sensitive child who was reliable, friendly, and courteous. John showed a good interest in school work and was eager to learn. In grade 3 his teacher's comments show that John became pouty and moody and prone to temper outbursts. Later teachers described him as argumentative and uncooperative at times, but they also noted that he was highly motivated and a good worker. John was a hard working elementary school student.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Findings of the study will be reported in five sections: Relationships, Participation, Identification, High School Experience, Future Goals. These sections will be further divided to add clarity to the reporting. Students who did not at first seem to fit with their respondent group will be discussed following the data reported under the five major headings. All findings are from student reported recollections of their elementary school experience except where they were specifically asked to recall their high school experience. Quotes were chosen from the interviews to exemplify the common characteristics of the experiences.

A. Relationships

The respondents in this study were asked specific questions about their relationships with other people who they were involved with in their elementary school years. All respondents spoke specifically about these relationships when questioned, and they also made several references to relationships when relating other experiences. The respondents explored their relationships with their peers, their families, their teachers and their school principals. Many of the respondents developed special relationships with one or more people that helped to shape their school experience.

1. Peer Relationships

All respondents spoke at length about their peers, and it was apparent in all of the interviews that friends played an important role in the respondents' school lives. Differences were apparent in the descriptions of peers and the activities that the respondents participated in with their peers.

- Graduates recall "goofing around" with their friends.

Students who finished high school told stories about having fun and playing with their friends. Not only did they remember these fun moments, but they also told the stories with energy and enthusiasm. Eric describes a common theme, "I remember when they put in the jungle gym. We used to play tag on it. It was a blast. And running around in the bush trails. Girls chase the guys and all that." There was a sense of good, clean fun in their descriptions.

- Although dropouts recall time spent with friends, their recollections are not as playful as graduates' recollections.

As Craig said, "We would just hang around together." When asked what types of things he did with his friends, Jason said, "We would just kind of do stuff. Nothing important." These statements are very typical of those offered by all of the dropouts in this sample. There was no sense of fun and play in their descriptions of the time they spent with their friends.

- Dropouts recall being involved with fighting.

Boys and girls alike fought with other individuals, and these fights were not isolated incidents. Amy recalled, "I used to fight all the time. Especially with this one guy. All the time." Betty indicated that she felt students had to fight. "Everybody had to scrap because if you didn't you were in trouble." It was apparent in all of the dropout interviews that fighting was not an uncommon occurrence for them throughout elementary school.

- Many dropouts described their friends in anti-social terms.

Although the dropouts were clearly talking about their friends, the words chosen to describe those friends were not complimentary. Betty described her friends as "a bunch of hoseheads". Most of the dropouts referred to their friends as "rowdy" at least once. This was in definite contrast to the graduates who used such descriptors as "nice" and "fun" when they talked about their friends.

- Graduates credit their friends with helping them be successful.

Although graduates recall playing with their friends and having fun with them, there is a more serious side to their recollections. These students recognized the support and encouragement their friends offered. Barb said, "I had such good friends. If it wasn't for them, I would have dropped out for sure." The credit given to graduates' friends goes deeper than support, too. Graduates talk about the positive influence their friends had on the choices graduates made. Florence's description of her friends' influence is typical of graduates, "L pushed me in the right direction. And my other friends too, because I had good friends. They were never a bad influence." There is clearly a respect amongst friends who graduated from

school and a recognition that a different choice of friends may have resulted in different outcomes.

2. Family Relationships

Although there were positive and negative statements made about parents by both dropouts and graduates, the graduate group tended to speak more positively and place greater importance on their relationships with their families than the dropout group did. Dropouts' recollections about their families were either negative or, at best, unimportant, where graduates' memories gave their families a more significant place in their school experience.

- Graduates recall talking to their parents about school and learning.

Many of the graduates spent time talking with their parents about school every day. They felt that their parents were interested in their daily lives. As Barb said, "We talked about school all the time! They just wanted to know how it was going for me." Some graduates recalled a regular time and place that school discussions took place. For Greg, this exchange happened every day, "I'd come home every day and grab something to eat and while I was eating she'd (Mom) always ask me how it was going and everything." Where dropouts talked with their parents about school, the focus was on sports and special events like concerts and fun nights.

Although graduates recall talking about many things with their parents, such as friends and activities, where they differ from dropouts is that they recall talking about things specifically related to learning. Helen's response to the question of what kinds of things she talked to her parents about could have been given by any of the graduates, "I talked to them about

everything from how I did on tests to the teacher, my fears, everything." Some graduates recall that learning was sometimes the only topic of school discussions. "I just talked to them about school work.", said Florence. "Not like my friends or anything. Just what we were doing in school each day."

• Dropouts may have had a poor relationship with their families with little communication.

It was not uncommon to hear dropouts relate stories about not getting along with their parents. Betty flatly stated, "I never got along with my parents. Especially my Mom. She was a bag and I was a little snot." Others revealed their family difficulties by relating stories which involved their parents. Jason spoke of an instance where his older brother stole some of his belongings and left town. Because of his reaction to the incident, his relationship with his mother came to an end, "He was her favorite, so my Mom shut me right off. She never talked to me again." All of the dropouts had a story to tell about a family problem. Some families' difficulties were more subtle and seemingly "normal" disturbances, but it is interesting that none of the graduates talked about family difficulties.

Many of the dropouts were very clear that school was not discussed at home. Glen put it simply, "Nope. We never talked about school." Some of the dropouts did discuss school with other people, though. Heather said "I'd always go and talk to somebody else (about school)." When asked if he talked to his parents about school and school work, Jason responded, "Did I talk to them about anything? No way!" Communication was not a common occurrence in the homes of dropouts.

It appears that the lack of school discussion may have, in some cases, been initiated by the dropouts themselves. Many of them said that they did not want their parents to know what was happening at school. "When it

came down to volunteering, like helping for doing something," said Glen, "I didn't want them to know about it." The separation of parent and child was quite apparent in all of the dropout interviews. They expressed an ability to look after their own interests without their parents' help. They put up barriers to keep their parents at a distance. Heather described a typical barrier, "We (me and my sister) always got mad at them if they were sticking their nose into our business or something like that and so, I don't know, they just kind of asked 'What did you learn today?' and we'd say 'Nothing.'" Dropouts seemed to actively pursue their independence and resent any attempt by their parents to become involved at school. As Jason put it, "Sometimes my Dad would go in to talk to the teacher and it was like 'Oh no! Don't go! You're going to embarrass me.'"

• Graduates and dropouts alike remember their parents helping with homework, going to parent interviews, and attending school events.

Apparently all parents help with homework on a regular basis and attend all parent/teacher interviews in elementary school. Parents also attend many special events at the school. Ian's comment is not uncommon, "I remember Mom cheering at soccer games. I remember my Mom and my Dad watching my Christmas concerts and going to parent/teacher interviews all the time." There was no difference between graduates and dropouts in this type of parent involvement.

• Dropouts recall their siblings helping them with homework and they note the lack of involvement of their father in school-related activities.

It is interesting that dropouts mentioned their older siblings helping with homework. Glen recalls, "My sister helped me with homework all the time." Siblings were seen as knowing how to do the work. Ivan stated,

"My big brothers would help me with homework because they had learned it all already." Sometimes the dropout simply found the sibling helpful in a particular subject. For Amy, the subject was Math, "When there was the Math thing, I'd get my sister to help me sometimes when I brought it home." Jason talked about his father's inability to help, "It was more like me learning him." Others clearly had one parent who was more helpful than the other and, in most cases, it was the mother who helped. Debbie's experience is common, "Mom helped, I guess. My Dad tried to but he's not tolerant enough. He used to get so frustrated if I didn't understand right away." Many dropouts, like Jason, had fathers who were frequently absent from home. "He wasn't there most of the time. My Dad was always working." Most of the dropouts only mentioned their mother helping with homework with no reference to their father at all. It is not clear in these cases if the fathers did not help at all, but it is clear that the mothers were the main source of school support for dropouts.

• Graduates recall the involvement of both parents in the learning process, and their parents are likely to have been involved at the school.

Graduates' parents both helped with homework in two parent families. Florence put it simply, "My Mom and Dad would always ask if I needed help." Sometimes the parents had specific areas they each helped in. Christopher said, "Mom always helped when it was Math, but other than that, Dad usually was the one helping." Graduates also feel that both parents were encouraging about school. Anne recalled, "My Mom and Dad always encouraged me to do well in school." It appears that fathers played a greater role for graduates than they did for dropouts.

In addition to being helpful at home, graduates' parents were helpful at school. Some parent involvement at school was simply hot dog sale

involvement. Helen remembered, "Even in kindergarten she'd (Mom) bring my little sister. She'd come and she'd be the Mom who would help out with making the snack and cleaning up all kinds of stuff." Much of the parent involvement mentioned included parents in field trips and out of school activities. Ian's family is typical, "My Mom, she'd like in grade 4 we went to this big hike out to the cutbanks and stuff and she came along. She was always helping out like that." Others, like Donna's parents, were involved with academic activities at school, "Mom used to come in for reading and she would take a group of kids and read to them and stuff. Sometimes she did that in my class or sometimes in some other classes. She really liked it, I guess." In most cases, graduates recall their parents being involved in a variety of activities at school. Greg reported, "Another time we went to my Dad's work because my Dad's the manager of a caterpillar (tractor) place. I don't know. I guess they were always volunteering. Like my Dad helped them to set up the playground equipment." Not only did the graduates recall their parents' involvement at school, but their recollections had a sense of appreciation. Parent presence in the school was not remembered with resentment.

- Dropouts remembered their parents trying to help and encourage them.

All of the dropouts felt that their parents had tried to help them but had somehow been unable to do enough. As Glen recalls, "They'd stay up and help me with homework. If I ever had any problems they'd stay up until it's all done. But we mostly got every one wrong." Others, like Craig, expressed an inability of their parents to encourage them in school. "They always tried to tell us to do good in school, but we didn't hear too much about it."

There was a sense of dropouts having faced their school difficulties with little parent support. This lack of support is reflected in stories about being treated differently than siblings. Heather said, "My sister always got straight A's and everything like that and the parents are always bragging up the straight A student and everything so I was just kind of get jealous kind of like and then, sometimes people do worse and sometimes people do better, but I just did the same. Like I still got jealous because the parents are always bragging somebody else up over their straight A instead of your C average, you know."

Dropouts were rewarded for doing well but, in many cases, these rewards were extrinsic. Many of the dropouts remembered receiving such things as money, presents, dinners out, and new clothes for doing well in school. Ed recalled, "They bribed us with money. A lot of parents do that." Some of the rewards were quite extravagant. Craig reports, "We got a passing present like a bike or something." Dropouts also remember being punished for doing poorly. "If I brought home bad report cards then I'd hear about it.", said Craig, "The lectures!"

One area where dropouts felt supported by their parents was when the child claimed to be dealt with unfairly at the school. Several dropouts recalled incidents where a teacher had said or done something considered to by unfair and the parent had contacted the teacher to support the child. Debbie's story is representative, "Mrs. L phoned her and started complaining (about my behavior) to my Mom and my Mom told her off." In some cases, like Jason's, this home school communication was unprompted by the teacher, "He'd (Dad) give the teachers trouble a lot too, because I wasn't learning anything." In all of the stories of parent support at school that were related by the dropouts the parents were described in confrontational terms. Again, Debbie's words are not unusual, "She (Mom)

marched right in and said, "Look what he (another child) did to her. What are you going to do about this?'" It seems that dropouts viewed the relationship between the family and the school as adversarial.

• Graduates felt an enormous amount of family support for them with respect to school.

Graduates' families were very influential on the success these students enjoyed. Their siblings set good examples for them. Ian remembered, "I had to be successful. Especially with my sisters setting the good example and living on their own. I didn't want to live at home all my life." Graduates give their siblings credit for being a positive influence. As Florence said, "I started off well in school because of my sisters because we always used to play school and stuff. They would be the teachers because they were in school and knew what it was all about and they would teach me spelling and stuff." Others held their siblings up as someone to strive to be like. Anne recalled, "I felt that I had to keep up to my sisters. They were older than me and they always did well in school."

Graduates parents helped them to be successful, too. Donna said, "My parents had a big influence on my success." Parents helped by supporting their children. Florence perceived, "They really supported me but it was just because I started out doing good that it was expected of me." Parents also recognized achievements and areas to improve. Ian's description is typical, "Mom would look at my report card and say what I did good. Lots of talking. Going to the teacher interviews and coming back and talking about what I needed to do." Parents of graduates let their children know that they were expected to do well in school. As Anne said, "It (doing well) was more or less built in right from the beginning because all my sisters did it and it was just expected."

Graduates received the message from their parents that school is important. When asked how her parents encouraged her, Donna said, "They let us know that education is very important." The message that school is important was sent through parent actions. Florence recalled, "We never had to do chores if we had homework to do. Mom always said our homework was more important. And Dad always had the time if we asked (for help with homework), even though he was so busy with his work." Parents of graduates also talked a great deal about the importance of school, and graduates internalized the message. Christopher reported, "He (Dad) would always tell us, 'It is not to please me. It is for yourself. I'm not the one is going to get you a job and support your family and all that when you grow older. It is going to be you.' But now it is even if he didn't tell me, like if he stopped telling me now, I would still do it on my own because I know it is important."

3. Relationships with Teachers

Both groups of respondents made positive comments about teachers and some individuals in both groups credited teachers with being helpful and supportive. Once again, however, dropouts were more likely than graduates to recall negative aspects of their relationships with teachers.

- Dropouts found some teachers encouraging.

All of the respondents had a favorite teacher, but the reasons for liking those teachers differed. Generally, dropouts liked the teachers who they found helpful. Fiona's description, "Like the teachers, if you had a problem, were always right there helping you, you know.", is typical of the dropout group. For some dropouts there was a sense that the help they

received was special because the teacher had to stop doing something else in order to help. Amy recalled that "She'd (teacher) take time out and help me." Most of the dropouts recalled their favorite teachers in terms of how much help the teachers offered them individually.

Some dropouts recall their teachers initiating positive contact with their parents. As Ed said, "There was a real parent/teacher - I don't know what it was - but they talked a lot. The teachers were basically like friends of the family." For some dropouts, the contact was more like a regular reporting by the teachers. Jason's teachers called home "when I was being a menace. But when I was doing good actually they even phoned my Dad. They complimented me then." Others only report teachers contacting home when things went awry. As Amy said, "You didn't want to be bad very often, because your Mom would sure hear about it!"

Dropouts are likely to have disliked at least one teacher. Betty reported, "I disliked Mrs. K. I was scrapping with her. We didn't get along for quite a while." For some dropouts, like Craig, a dislike for teachers was more general, "I didn't really like my teachers that much in elementary school because they were the authority." Debbie offered a common perspective of the whole dropout group, "You have good teachers and you have ignorant ones. Everyone does. I can't imagine anyone going all the way through school and liking all their teachers or not thinking anything about them. I couldn't imagine going to school and thinking, 'Oh, well. They're my teachers and that's OK.' I couldn't imagine that because you know right when you walk in the class if you're going to like them or not just by the way they do things."

In addition to disliking teachers, dropouts often feel that a teacher disliked them. In remembering the teachers she liked, Debbie said, "I only liked the teachers who liked me." Many of the dropouts felt as if one

teacher had singled them out. As Glen put it, "She always used to pick on me." Ivan's perception that he was disliked by teachers spans his entire elementary school experience, "They never liked me. I had long hair and wore jean jackets so they didn't like me. Not one."

Both graduates and dropouts discussed situations where they were disciplined by teachers. Eric's tone is typical of the graduates when he said, "One day we were sitting there working and the teacher walked by and just as she was walking by I was getting out of my chair and she had a lip dig over the chair. I got chewed out pretty good about that." Although he was disciplined, Eric did not express a great deal of resentment. The dropouts who reported discipline situations, however, also judged the situations to have been somehow unfair. Betty described a situation where she felt she had been treated unfairly, "We got into a fight, me and this other girl. I had to go and pick up garbage for two days and I was the one with the bleeding nose. I was the one with the black eye. It didn't seem fair."

- Graduates have many positive recollections of their teachers.

In discussing their teachers, graduates often remembered having fun with them. Christopher described his favorite teacher, "He was just a funny guy and all that. You always wanted to be in his class or something. Mostly because of his antics and stuff." Graduates also remember having fun with their teachers outside of class. As Ian recalled, "During his supervision he'd always play with us after school and stuff." Some graduates recall the fun created between teachers. Greg remembered, "It was funny. They'd go around doing all their pranks on each other. It was a pretty fun atmosphere."

- Graduates usually liked all of their teachers.

Anne spoke for most of the group when she said, "I really liked all my teachers. I didn't dislike any teachers." When asked if there was a teacher he disliked more than the others, Eric replied, "I don't really know if you have a worst teacher in elementary school." Graduates did not seem to take teachers' actions personally. As Christopher said, "Of course there was some stuff that you didn't like what they did but other than that I never hated no teacher. I really liked them all."

The graduate group expressed the view that they felt their teachers liked them and that positive relationship contributed to their sense of belonging. Donna recalled, "Kind of acceptance by the teacher (made me feel like I belonged)." Most graduates, like Anne, recall being liked by all of their teachers, "I got along well with all of my teachers." Some graduates remember being liked by a teacher who would typically be expected to dislike students. Barb describes her favorite teacher, "She was a grumpy old lady with curly hair and she was kind of grumpy a lot, but she really liked me."

- Graduates liked teachers for many different reasons.

Many graduates, like Anne, enjoyed teachers who challenged them, "Grade 4 and 7 were great because they were very challenging teachers." Some graduates appreciated strict teachers. Helen reports, "Not very many people liked Mrs. F because she was quite strict. But as long as you basically did what you were told and didn't fool around, she was pretty good." Most commonly, graduates liked the teachers who were involved with them in and out of the classroom. John recalled his favorite teacher, "probably my grade 7 teacher because I'd play basketball against him. It was probably the sports thing."

4. Relationships with the School Principal

All respondents said very little about their school principals. Many respondents reported having had several principals during their time at one school. The brief descriptions given by the respondents, though, revealed some differences in the way dropouts and graduates viewed their principals in elementary school.

- Dropouts hated the principal, and felt the principal hated them.

For some dropouts, like Betty, the principal was disliked because he was an outsider who had no right to offer advice. "This guy would just about treat you like you were his kid. Telling you what you should be doing and stuff. Pretty personal. I hated him. It was none of his business." For others, like Heather, the principal was disliked because he was the disciplinarian, "You always hated the principal in school because he was always getting mad at you."

- Graduates describe principals in positive terms.

Most graduates felt their principal was interested in students. As Anne said, "He was great. He was interested in us and he knew everyone." John described his principal as knowing all the students regardless of their involvement in school. Many graduates remember the direct involvement their principal had with students. Christopher recalled about his principal that, "He was pretty well known. He would always make soup for the kids at lunch time and have different students work with him to sell for a quarter, I think it was."

5. Special Relationships

Many respondents talked about special relationships with a parent, sibling, peer, or teacher. These special relationships differed from the dropout group to the graduate group.

- Dropouts had special relationships with people who made them feel wanted.

Most dropouts focussed on teachers when they talked about people who had been special in their lives. Amy described a special teacher, "Like Mrs. S. She was sort of like another Mom to you." The dropouts who mentioned a special relationship always talked about a person they felt understood them. Ed's special relationship with a teacher is typical of the dropouts who had special people, "She was just different. She was a lot closer to the students than a lot of the other teachers. I could relate to her well, I guess."

- Graduates discuss people who had a major impact on their lives.

Christopher's father played an important role in forming his values about school, "He just hammered me over the head with it - still does to this day. He goes, 'Even if you do get a job, you know, continue learning stuff.' Yeah. Nobody measures up to my Dad." For Florence, her best friend was extremely special, "L was my biggest encouragement. I think she made me who I am. Not really, but she pushed me in the right direction. I think she had more of what's right than I did so I followed her in some things because I knew what she was doing was right. Not workwise but maybe morally-wise or whatever. She was really good." For Anne, her sister was

her role model, "I think I wanted to be a veterinarian so bad because my sister was going to be and she was the big role model."

B. Participation

Data about student participation in activities will be reported under the following subheadings: School-Based Academic Activities, School-Based Non Academic Activities, and Community Activities. In reporting on participation in activities, I have avoided reporting student likes and dislikes. These will be reported on in the Identification with School section of this chapter. This section simply reports activities students recall actually doing.

1. School-Based Academic Activities

All respondents reported on learning activities they remember doing at school. In addition, most respondents made reference to their personal actions with respect to school work. These actions indicated a level of participation. A few dropouts made statements that would be more typical of graduates, just as graduates sometimes mentioned activities or actions that were more commonly spoken about by dropouts. There was a notable difference, however, in the overall characteristics of statements made by dropouts and graduates. Also, not all years were the same for dropouts. Some years their actions were more typical of the dropout characteristics than other years. In general, dropout actions became more like the rest of the dropout group as the individuals neared grade 7.

• Dropouts remember a period of time that they were unproductive in class.

Betty's experience in grade 7 is not uncommon. She had been a straight A, enrichment student in grade 5 and 6 but of grade 7 she said, "By the end of the year I was getting D's and D minuses. I was doing nothing. I didn't think I had to." For most of the dropout group, however, the year is less specific. They cannot remember being attentive students. As Jason described, "I was always fooling around a lot. I never paid attention." For a few dropouts, their non-productivity meant they didn't do their own work. Amy recalled, "I used to copy other people's work. I never really learned, I guess." Debbie was more blunt, "I used to cheat in Math." Whether the individual cheated or simply didn't do the work, all of the dropouts remembered a period of time when they were not engaged in learning.

• Dropouts did little assigned homework.

Dropouts and graduates both noted that they did not do much homework in elementary school. However, dropouts reported not doing homework because they chose not to bring it home. As Debbie said, "I didn't do a whole lot of homework. I used to say I forgot it all the time." Graduates, on the other hand, do not recall teachers assigning much homework. Christopher's description is common, "Didn't get much (homework). Didn't get much. The stuff that you did get you could do like in ten minutes or something. But homework, there wasn't much in elementary." In addition, graduates reported completing their homework when it was assigned.

Dropouts and graduates also differ in the types of homework activities they remember doing. Dropouts finished class work at home. As Ed said, "Most of our homework was just stuff we didn't have time to complete during the day." Graduates recall specific homework assignments. When

asked what kinds of activities he was assigned for homework, John replied, "Reading materials. Books for each grade and they'd get you to read a chapter or something like that and then you'd have to do questions on each chapter. Or math questions. You'd just do them out of the book."

- Graduates remember being involved in learning.

Most graduates reported working hard and paying attention in class. When asked why he was successful in school, John responded, "Probably because when I was in class you listened to what was going on and you did your homework." Many of the graduates did extra work when they had completed the daily assignments. Anne recalled, "If you really liked something you could do it quickly and get more work to do. If you finished early you never just sat there. There was always more work to do." There was a sense from all of the graduates that the extra work was something they looked forward to.

Competition was talked about frequently by the graduate group and not mentioned by the dropout group except when referring to sports. Graduates clearly competed academically. Greg recalls that school "was just one big competition to see who could get the highest marks." In most cases, graduates competed with their "best" friend. Eric said, "I remember my best friend, A, and it was always like I was always trying to compete with him." Not only did graduates compete, but they wanted to be the best. Donna describes her motivations, "I would work as hard as I had to to beat everyone." The focus on competition was one of the most differentiating characteristics of the graduate group.

2. School Based Non-Academic Activities

All of the respondents except one reported being involved in formal school sports and really enjoying that involvement. In most cases, the type of activities respondents were involved in did not appear to by important in differentiating dropouts and graduates. Different individuals were involved in different activities. The range of activities the group was involved with is wide. They were in choir, band, and sports. They performed in school operettas or helped as reading buddies. They sold soup at lunch and organized dances. They were library monitors and school guides. No two individuals were involved in the same activities. There is a sharp difference in the number of different activities a dropout is involved with compared to the number of different activities a graduate is involved with.

- Graduates are more likely than dropouts to be involved in music activities.

In this sample of respondents, only one dropout was involved in any music activities. Amy was in choir and band throughout elementary school. The graduate group included six individuals who were in the school choir. In addition, five of those individuals were also in band or participated in the school operettas.

- Graduates participate in more activities than dropouts.

Graduates in this sample were all involved in three or more activities, including sports. Seven of the graduates recall being involved in five or more activities in their elementary schools. In contrast, the dropouts were involved in three activities at the most. Most of the dropouts participated in one or two activities while in elementary school.

3. Community Activities

Some of the respondents discussed their involvements outside of school time. Respondents who did not mention community involvement may still have participated in such activities, but they did not feel it was important enough to discuss in this interview. That many respondents felt a need to talk about their community involvement indicated that it may have been an influence on their elementary school experience.

- Graduates were involved in formal activities in the community.

Several of the graduates talked about music lessons and sports leagues. Anne recalled, "And outside of school I was in gymnastics which took up a lot of time - two times a week." It was not uncommon to talk to a graduate, like Donna, who mentioned taking piano lessons, "I had been playing the piano for about seven years already and so it (band) was kind of a continuation." Most of the male graduates played baseball, hockey or soccer in a formal league.

- Dropouts participated in informal activities outside of school.

Although dropouts talked about playing sports outside of school, these were usually informally organized. Glen's experience is typical, "We'd sometimes get together in the lot and everybody would play baseball, and that's about it." Dropouts were also more likely to participate in socially unacceptable activities outside of school, even at the elementary school level. For some, like Debbie, these activities were forbidden by parents, "I used to get all dressed up and sneak out to Valentino's (teen night club). I wasn't allowed to go so we found our way there." For others, like Jason, these activities were unhealthy, "We used to smoke dope and drink and

smoke cigarettes and such." In contrast, several of the graduates noted that smoking was "not cool" and a definite reason to exclude someone from the group. Eric recalled a time when he and his friends had found an unopened beer in the bush. One boy wanted to open it and drink it. The others discouraged it, "No way. We weren't getting involved in that." Many of the dropouts were involved with fighting in the community and, like Betty, were worried about their well-being, "I was pretty worried about getting beat up again because we have this big deal going on with these people in the neighborhood and they don't like me. They already jumped me a couple of times."

C. Identification With School

Students identify with school on two levels. First, they identify with the people. They develop friendships and relationships with the other people in the building to foster a sense of belonging there. Second, they identify with the purpose of the institution. They connect with learning and value the process of schooling. The respondents in this study made comments which reflected both belonging and valuing with respect to school. The findings are presented, then, under the headings Belonging In School and Valuing Of School.

1. Belonging in School

All of the respondents indicated that they felt like they belonged in their school. Many of the respondents attributed this sense of belonging to their friendships. There were differences between the dropouts and the graduates with respect to the degree of belonging experienced.

• Dropouts discuss belonging in terms of length of time they have had their friends.

Most of the dropout group made reference to being part of a group over a number of years. When discussing why she felt that she belonged, Amy said, "I felt like that just, I guess, being friends with them all for so long like growing up since kindergarten, I guess, that you sort of started bonding." There was a sense of ownership in the dropouts' discussions. They owned the group and the group owned them. As Betty described, "You're with your own people. How can you not feel like you belong?"

• Graduates discuss belonging in terms of being liked.

The graduate group very strongly indicated that they felt they belonged because they got along with everyone. "It was easy to fit in.", as Barb said. Not only did the graduates feel that they fit in, but they were also popular. Anne discussed being well known in the school. Florence declared outright that, "I was popular and I had lots of friends and we were the in group." Even Eric, who attended eight different elementary schools, felt he had, "good friends. We were close. Always real close."

• Dropouts reported differences between themselves and their peers.

Although they said they felt that they belonged in their school, many of the dropouts also described their own physical differences. Ed was the youngest in his class. Jason was bigger than the other students and started growing a moustache in grade 6. Amy was overweight. Several of the others also described differences. These differences caused conflict for the dropouts. Amy recalled, "I just remember fighting with a lot of the guys because I was bigger than everyone so I just got picked on." Most of the

dropouts felt picked on by someone, and it was not necessarily their peers. Debbie recalled, "(The principal) used to pick on me when I was little and make me cry." Most of the dropouts felt that being picked on was the worst experience they had in elementary school.

- Graduates reported not being rejected at school.

As mentioned previously, graduates felt that they fit in to their schools easily. They expressed this belonging from a positive point of view. They also expressed what had not happened. Anne pointed out, "I didn't feel outcast or anything like that." John felt he belonged because, "no one brushed me aside." Graduates noted that they were not excluded from their peer group.

- Dropouts had different friends at home than they had at school.

Some of the dropouts made references to neighborhood friends and school friends. For some, these two groups were very different. Ed noted that his school friends were more well behaved than his neighborhood friends, "I used to go get into trouble with neighborhood kid's then go to school and not get in trouble." For others, like Debbie, the other children at school were not considered to be friends, "I can't say that I didn't want to have friends at school, but I didn't like them. I just didn't like them. I had friends that lived around here (home), though."

2. Valuing of School

Valuing of school was indicated first by respondent likes and dislikes, then by respondents' statements about learning. All of the respondents had things that they liked about school and things that they disliked. There was

a difference in the types of activities that dropouts and graduates enjoyed doing, as well as in their overall outlook toward school. In some cases, the difference was evident only after re examining interviews and noting the depth of the respondents' answers.

• Dropouts discussed their likes and dislikes about school in generalities, where graduates were more specific.

When asked what kinds of learning activities they enjoyed or disliked, dropouts tended to identify a subject area. Debbie "loved English and stuff like that." Fiona "really liked P.E." Amy "always hated Math and Science." Heather "just hated Socials." Glen "hated practically all the subjects." When a dropout reported liking a specific activity, it was usually linked to changing rooms. Craig "really enjoyed reading because we went to the library for reading." Ivan "thought Socials was OK because it was in the other room."

Graduates, on the other hand, identified specific activities as likes and dislikes. Donna enjoyed tests, projects and research. Ian liked activities "where you got to use stuff. Like building models and stuff. It was neat." The graduate group did not identify many dislikes, but when they did, the dislikes were specific. Greg felt "grammar was boring. You learned the same thing every year." Helen disliked reporting on novels.

Most of the graduates enjoyed activities that entailed competition and reward. Eric liked "the stuff like teams, split this half and that half. Math questions or spelling, stuff like that." Christopher liked spelling because, "we would have this big poster on the side wall and each time you got - it was out of 20 marks, each one. You put a sticker up if you got 20 out of 20.

• Both dropouts and graduates felt that their school was a good place to learn, but graduates spoke more favorably.

When asked how their school was a place to learn, all of the respondents responded positively. "Good" was the most common adjective chosen by both groups. In most cases, though, graduates added a more complimentary adjective such as "great" or "very good". Anne's description is a good example, "My school was a very good place to learn. All the teachers made a good learning environment and let us know that school was important." Many of the graduates commented on the good teaching they experienced. Ian remarked, "It was excellent. There's a line between teaching and being taught and I always felt taught. Learning was really good."

Just as the graduates were more positive, the dropouts were slightly less positive about their school as a place to learn. Many of the dropouts described their school as "OK" and their explanations seldom included teaching. Ivan is typical, "The school was alright. Mostly even when I was younger than the other kids. I had big brothers and that made a difference. They protected me." Many of the dropouts said their school was a good place to learn then described how it was not good. For example, Betty said, "It did a good job but there's lots of ways to get around things. The teachers knew what they were doing, it's just if the kids want to learn or not. There'd be like 30 or so kids in the class and you could just do what you pleased."

• Dropouts found learning frustrating.

Most of the dropouts had difficulty in one or more academic areas. In describing her difficulties with Math, Amy said, "I just wasn't good at that stuff." Some of the dropouts found the pace of learning frustrating. Debbie

felt it was too slow, "In school it's just inch by inch. My brain just gets hungry sometimes." Glen thought he had been left behind, "You're not going to learn much if you're behind. It's kind of hard on you. I didn't really like school because I couldn't do good at it." Whether it was a skill, a subject or a method, dropouts found something about school difficult. Many dropouts did not feel they had the ability to do well. When describing his experience with learning, Jason said, "Of course, I was on the stupid side."

- Graduates had a positive concept of learning.

Graduates felt that they had achieved well in school. For example, Eric said, "I always did good. My marks were always pretty decent." Their good report cards were not the only reward they received. Many of the graduates received academic awards from the school. Florence remembered setting goals in grade 7 and stating that she would win the Top Student Award. She did win it. There were less tangible rewards, too. Greg remarked, "My parents always talking about how well I do makes me feel good."

Not only did they achieve well, but they had high expectations for themselves. Donna described herself, "I'm kind of a perfectionist, so I worked as hard as I had to to get the marks that I wanted." Along with their high expectations, however, went a fear of failing. Eric's worst fear was "failing a grade when I was in elementary school. It was my worst fear. It was always, "Holy smokes. I got to get through this, I got to. I can't fail. I don't want to be behind."

Graduates expected to do well and they did. They also gave themselves credit for their success. Greg felt he did well "because I pay attention. It doesn't seem like I pay attention, but I do." John's view of his success was similar, "when I was in class I listened to what was going on

and I did my homework." Many graduates, like Ian, indicated that they had internalized the importance of school, "I had a commitment to school. I knew I had to be there." For some, it was learning that encouraged them to do well. Donna "just wanted to learn, wanted to know more. There is so much you don't know still."

- Elementary school was a great experience for graduates.

Dropouts and graduates both had positive and negative memories of elementary school, but dropouts were more likely to feel that the whole experience had been bad. Glen recalled, "I didn't really like elementary school. It was so hard." All of the dropouts had at least one bad experience to relate during the interview, and that experience was easily recalled. Although some graduates recalled some bad experiences in elementary school, their memories were overwhelmingly positive. Ian spoke for the group of graduates when he said, "I always loved elementary school. It was my favorite." For most graduates, elementary school was one good experience after another. Helen summed it up best, "My best experience? Oh boy. That's a hard one. Whooee. I can't think. There are so many!"

D. High School Experience

Although the purpose of this study was to explore respondents' memories of elementary school, questions were asked about transition to high school and the respondents' expectations about that transition. This line of questioning led many of the respondents to talk about their experiences in high school. The data about the high school experience are presented in three sections: Grade Seven, Transition to High School, and Quitting School.

1. Grade Seven

Both groups of respondents talked about their experiences in grade 7. The most common comment from all respondents referred to being the oldest students in the school and the prestige that position carried. Fiona used a phrase that was used by several others, "You are king of the school, I guess, because you are the oldest and stuff." It was an important year for all of these respondents. Dropouts differed from graduates, however, in their enjoyment of the grade 7 year and their feelings about moving to grade 8.

- Graduates enjoyed their grade 7 year, but dropouts did not enjoy it.

It was characteristic of graduates to talk about grade 7 in terms of having been at the school for some time. There was a sense of having earned a position within the school. Christopher described his feelings about grade 7, "It was probably the most memorable year, I guess, because you are leaving school and all that. It is more like your turf, I don't know. It is just...I don't know how to say this...you just know it was an important year because everything was all for me. I still remember it quite a bit." Some, like Ian, felt grade 7 was their best year, "It was the best year. I had the best teacher. It was kind of like the wonder years. New things were always happening."

Conversely, many dropouts did not like grade 7. Craig is a good example, "I didn't like grade 7. I didn't like my teacher, so I didn't like it too much." A number of the dropouts were anxious to leave the school. Ivan recalled, "I was kind of looking forward to it (grade 8) to get out of elementary school."

- Both dropouts and graduates expressed fears about moving to grade 8.

All respondents talked about their fear of high school. Most of these fears stemmed from rumors the students had heard about initiation activities. John expressed it most succinctly, "(I felt) like we were going to get beat up because we heard all the rumors. Stuck in a locker. I was scared!" Graduates were also afraid that high school would be academically difficult and their marks would fall. Helen recalled, "I was pretty scared because I'd heard all these horror stories about how there's so much work and your marks drop real drastically, so I was pretty scared."

- Dropouts expressed excitement about high school.

Although they were afraid of high school because of initiations, dropouts were more excited to start grade 8 than graduates were. When they talked about their excitement, they also usually mentioned change. As Heather said, "You're happy because you're getting into something new." It appears that dropouts saw grade 8 as a new start in a different environment.

2. Transition to High School

The respondents reported their transition to high school in terms of whether or not their expectations were met.

- Graduates found the transition to high school easier than they had expected it to be.

Many of the graduates expected hard work and lower marks. Donna was pleasantly surprised, "I didn't have to work as hard as I thought I would, and the transition just wasn't as bad as I thought it would be." Eric enjoyed his grade 8 year, "I expected to get picked on all the time and all

that and it wasn't that at all. No initiation or nothing. It was great." Most graduates felt that high school met their expectations. As Anne described, "There were no big surprises and just each year followed in sequence with the last year. Nothing ever changed, really. I never felt any different in one year than in another year." There was a sense in all of the graduate interviews that high school was seen as part of a bigger schooling process. Christopher remembers, "It didn't bother me much. It was just another step in school."

- Dropouts had many unmet expectations of high school.

Some dropouts, like Heather, had expected easier work, "The work's a lot harder than it was (in elementary school) and a lot more homework." Others, like Ed, expected harder work, "Grade 8 really threw me off. All it was was a repeat, basically." Ed also felt a change in his relationship with teachers that was not uncommon in the dropout group, "Didn't have the same kind of teacher/student contact in high school which I think is important any time." The dropout group were disappointed by high school. Debbie recalled, "I thought it would be a lot more fun than it was."

3. Quitting School

Because leaving school was an important event for each of the dropouts, they all chose to talk about the experience of quitting. All of the dropouts regretted the decision, and many of them talked about wanting to return to school. There were some experiences the whole group shared and there were others that were shared by only a few. Only those experiences which were shared are reported here.

- Dropouts skipped out of high school.

All of the dropouts reported skipping out in high school. Most of them also reported that they had never skipped school prior to that. It was common for the dropouts to see skipping out as contributing to dropping out, as Amy did, "Then I got to the high school and heard you could skip, no problem. I tried it and look what happened."

- Dropouts feel their peers contributed to their decision to drop out.

Many of the dropouts reported having friends who were older than them. Often these friends were involved in substance abuse. Ed reported, "I was drinking a lot in school. The guys I was hanging out with away from school were all five years older than me so I started going to the bars kind of young." In a lot of cases, dropouts started missing school to be with their friends who weren't in school. Ivan recalled, "Often I wouldn't go to school so I could hang out with my friends."

- Dropouts feel external influences cut off their educational opportunities.

Some dropouts found that their academic difficulties got in the way of their learning experiences. Amy wanted to enroll in a hospitality program, but, as she said, "Because I was behind in Math I never got the chance to take the electives I wanted." For most of the dropout group, the blame was placed on the school. Some felt it was boring, some thought they shouldn't have been asked to leave, and others thought the school didn't keep close enough track of attendance. Ivan summed up the thoughts of many, "I thought the system failed me. It kept me from doing the things I really wanted to do."

E. Future Goals

Data about the future educational and career goals of all of the respondents when they were in elementary school was collected. The respondents were also asked about their future goals at the time of the interview. Respondents reported on the planning process they went through to decide on their goals. All of the respondents considered multiple careers that had very diverse educational requirements. It was not uncommon for a respondent to want to be movie star and a doctor. Where the two groups differed was in planning and matching educational goals with career goals. Data is reported in this section under the headings Plans in Elementary School and Plans After Leaving School.

1. Plans in Elementary School

• Dropouts saw finishing school as graduating from high school, and graduates aimed at university.

When asked how far they had expected to go in school, many of the dropouts said that they felt they would finish school or, as Craig put it, "Go all the way." When asked what that meant to them, most dropouts indicated that grade 12 was "all the way". This is in sharp contrast to the graduates, most of whom expected from a very young age to go to university. "I never thought about it.", said Christopher, "I knew I would go to university, though."

• Graduates remembered having childhood dreams.

Although all of the graduates reported thinking about some traditional careers for themselves, many of them also had dreams of glamorous lives. Florence dreamed of being a dancer, Eric thought about being a police

officer, and Helen envisioned herself in the theater. It was common for one graduate to want to be many things, some traditional and some less so. This tendency was notably absent in the dropout group. Some dropouts did have dreams, but to the exclusion of more traditional careers. For example, the only career Jason ever thought of pursuing was to be a drummer in a rock and roll band. These dreams of fame were not common within the dropout group, however. It was more common for dropouts to express a lack of dreams or future plans. Heather remembered, "Nobody ever has a terrific idea about what you want to be when you're young. You got lots of time to plan what you want to be and stuff, so nobody really had any great ideas about what they wanted to be when they grew up or anything."

- Dropouts are not likely to have discussed their future plans with anyone.

Most of the dropout group were very clear that they didn't talk to anyone about careers or educational plans when they were in elementary school. They expressed that future goals were not important at that time. As Betty recalled, "I didn't talk to anyone about it. It was no big deal." Some of the dropouts did remember discussing their plans with friends. Again, however, the discussion was viewed as unimportant. As Debbie said, "Me and my friends would discuss things like our future plans but not seriously really. Just sort of goofing around." There was as sense that the future was "too far ahead to plan", to use Glen's words.

Graduates, on the other hand, remember talking about their futures with their peers, their parents and their teachers. Their discussions with their parents were most important to them in formulating a plan. Christopher remembers, "I always wanted to be a good doctor. That was what my parents said they wanted me to be actually, the doctor. But I was

real keen on it, too. I remember going like, 'Yeah. I'll be a doctor. Just wait and see.'"

2. Plans After Leaving School

- Dropouts are unsure about their future plans.

Some dropouts would not admit to having any plans at all. Debbie said, "I'm sort of on pause. A lot of things are changing right now. I'm just going to see what happens right now." Others, like Glen, felt that they must "go back and get my education", but most were unclear about where they would get that education and what they would do once they were finished. Again, Glen is typical, "I'll get a trade or something." Many dropouts were clear that school was not for them. Betty was most vehement, "I don't want to go back to school. I do not want to go back to school. No way. Uh Uh." Some of the dropouts expressed career goals that were completely incongruent with their educational plans. Fiona, for example, wanted to be a veterinarian but thought she might get a GED at the college. There were some dropouts who had definite career plans, but these plans were completely different from the plans they had in elementary school. Ed had always planned to go to university and become an architect. Now he will go to the college and become a mechanic. Dropouts' futures are filled with uncertainty.

- Graduates are certain about their career and educational goals.

All of the graduate respondents had established clear goals for the future. Some of them intended to work before pursuing their education. Some were registered at the college and intended to either finish a diploma there or move to a university the following year. All of the graduate

respondents had educational goals that would allow them to pursue their chosen careers, and all of the them intended to attend a post secondary institution. In addition, the graduate group had done research to decide on their plans. Florence's description of her research is not uncommon, "I was thinking of either pharmacy or lab tech. I went and had a tour of the lab at the hospital and decided it wasn't for me, so I'm going into pharmacy. I'd hate to be stuck in the hospital lab. It's so dark and no windows. Pharmacy is a lot of chemistry, too, and that's my favorite science."

F. Outliers

The approach used in this study - individual case study - showed much variety in the experiences of all individuals. The two groups were characteristically different enough from each other to draw some general connections between their stories. There were some individuals in each group, however, who either would not be expected to be members of that respondent group or who appeared, by their stories, to fit with the other respondent group. The only reason they were with their group in this study was that their educational outcome was the same as the other respondents in their group. It is important to examine these outliers more carefully to support or discredit the findings that seem to describe the larger group. The experiences of these respondents may also be an indicator of the relative importance of school experiences in relation to school success. The outliers are reported with information about how the respondent does not fit the group and information about the characteristics the respondent shares with the group.

1. Amy

Amy's parents are both professionals with post secondary education. Because of this, I was surprised she was a member of the dropout group. Once I had interviewed her, however, it became apparent that she had some difficulties feeling she belonged within her school. She did have a close group of friends, but she also expressed some major concerns about her physical size. She was much bigger than the other students, both in height and weight, and was picked on by many students, especially boys. Amy fought with her peers because they picked on her. She did not always feel that she belonged in her school.

2. Betty and Ed

Betty and Ed are both extremely bright individuals who were involved with enrichment programs. Since the academic part of school was easy for them, I would have expected them to graduate. Both Betty and Ed experienced difficulties belonging, though. As a result of being removed from their peer group to participate in enrichment activities, these two respondents felt isolated and separate from the rest of their friends. Both respondents had a different peer group at home than they had at school. The peer group at home was markedly different than their classmates in terms of their behavior. Although their school friends were academically talented and well behaved, their neighborhood friends were rowdy and involved with fighting and "partying".

3. Barb

Barb was chosen as a member of the graduate group because she had attended the same elementary school as Betty and, subsequently, graduated from the high school that Betty dropped out of. Throughout her interview, I was astonished that she had graduated. She talked about her parents expecting her to drop out of school. She expressed her own expectation that she would not last past grade 9 or 10. Barb failed a grade and had siblings who dropped out of school. Barb is the only graduate who clearly did not like school from time to time. When reporting the findings of the study, it was not uncommon for Barb's statements to exemplify the feelings of the entire dropout group. Why, then, was she successful in school? I examined her original transcript carefully after completing the report of my findings in order to determine which characteristics she shared with the graduate group.

There are two areas where Barb exemplifies a graduate. First, and most strongly, Barb liked her teachers and had one teacher who she felt very connected to. In grade 4, Barb had a strict but motivating teacher who she spoke very highly of. All of her teachers, especially her grade 4 teacher, encouraged her to do well in school. Although learning was difficult, Barb wanted to learn to please her teachers. Second, Barb credits her friends with her success. Although she describes her peer group as rowdy, which is typical of a dropout, she also acknowledges their contribution to her decision to stay in school.

Finally, Barb's family support is more evident through their actions than the words Barb remembers. As Barb recalled, "Everyone thought I would be the one to drop out." At first glance, Barb appears to have received very little family support for her schooling. However, I found out

in her interview that Barb's parents withdrew her from the public school system after grade 4 and enrolled her in a church-based private school until grade 8. It appears that Barb's parents were concerned enough about what was happening with Barb at school to make a major change in her school path.

4. Eric

Eric was chosen as a member of the graduate group to match Ed in the dropout group. Eric came from a single parent home with his mother being that parent. Eric also attended elementary school outside of the district where this study was conducted and, like Ed, moved to the high school in grade 10. Eric attended eight different elementary schools which I would have expected to put him at risk of leaving school before graduation. During his interview, however, it became obvious that Eric never considered dropping out of school and described school experiences similar to those of other graduates. At one point Eric talked about belonging and described fearing that he might not fit in at his new school. Each time he moved to a new school, though, he made friends right away and felt as if he had been there all of his school life. Eric felt an extremely strong sense of belonging in school.

CHAPTER 5

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDINGS

Finn's model of participation and identification (1989) to create a bond to school is a good starting point for explaining the difference in school experience between the dropouts and the graduates in this study. In its simplest form, the model begins with participation in school activities and, as a result of the positive outcome of that participation, identification with school ensues. A student identifies with school through a sense of belonging and a valuing of the goals of the institution. A student who values school is more likely to participate in its activities in increasingly complex ways. Participation and identification, then, is a developmental cycle that occurs for successful students. (See figure 1) The findings of this study offer support for Finn's model. I follow his lead and discuss first the findings related to the components of the model, then I discuss the findings related to the model as a whole. Finally, I identify some parts of the model which I believe require greater emphasis.

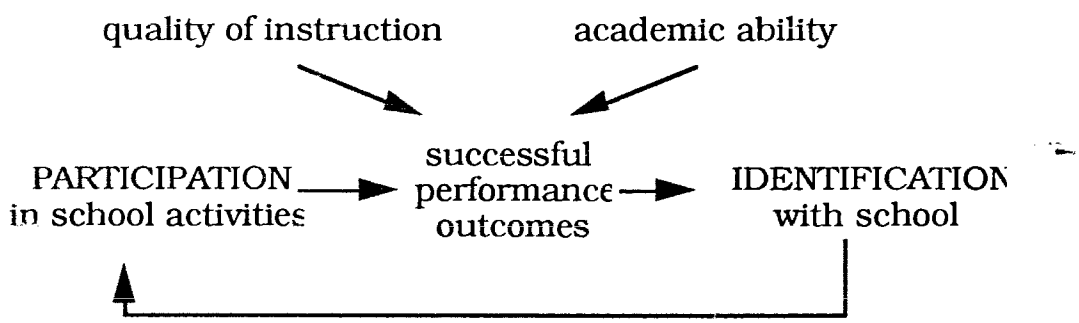


Figure 1: Finn's Participation-Identification Model

The methodology I have followed, a retrospective self-report study, is an exploration and comparison of peoples' memories of their elementary

school experience. The interpretation of the findings is not supported by independent data. As such, the significance of the findings is limited to the generation of hypotheses which require further study. That does not diminish the importance of the study, as the previous research pursued on the issue of dropping out of school has not addressed issues of the elementary school experience (Finn, 1989). This exploration offers intriguing and important issues to be considered, as well as some promising directions for further research.

A. Identification

Identification with school is comprised of both belonging and valuing of school. Graduates in this study linked themselves to school with terms like "easy to fit in". They clearly felt they were "part of the school environment" (Finn, 1989, p. 123). Dropouts talked about friends, but their links to the whole environment were not as clear as the graduates' were. Although all students say they felt they belonged in their school, it appears that graduates felt they were an integral part of the school, but dropouts belonged with their group of friends. Because the students were asked if they felt like they belonged, their responses are an indication of how they define belonging. The graduates belonged because they fit in. The dropouts belonged because they had close friends. This tends to support the notion that an "internalized conception of belongingness" (Finn, 1989, p. 123) develops in graduates but not as strongly, if at all, in dropouts.

In his discussion of identification with school, Finn (1989) draws on evidence relating delinquency to institutional attachment. Since the research shows a strong correlation between dropping out and delinquency (Ekstrom, et.al., 1986), it is reasonable to assume evidence relating to

delinquency could also apply to dropping out. An inverse association of homework and delinquency is noted by Finn. Dropouts in this study reported doing little homework, and they admitted to avoiding homework by leaving it at school or denying it had been assigned. Graduates also reported doing little homework, but they were clear that it had not been assigned by the school. When homework was assigned, it was completed by graduates. The tendency of dropouts to avoid homework is probably a sign of nonattachment to school.

Finn (1989) concludes his discussion of identification with school by citing Liska and Reed's (1985) work which "suggest that parents, not school, are the major institutional sources of delinquency control" (p. 558). There were clear differences between the two groups in this study in terms of perceived parental support. The dropouts believed their parents had tried to encourage them but did not succeed in many ways. Graduates were clear that their parents had a major impact on their school success. In addition, the dropouts reported home situations with little or no communication between family members. It appears that dropouts' families were relatively unattached to each other. It is also interesting to note that not one graduate mentioned family problems. This does not mean that there were no problems in the homes of graduates, but it may be indicative of a larger problem in the homes of dropouts.

Identifying with school, or attachment to school, is an important component of school bonding. If some children, as suggested by Liska & Reed (1985), can be unattached to an institution as fundamental and accepting as the family, the task that faces schools to create attachments to schooling is difficult. It may not be impossible, though, and schools must consider the actions they can take to improve the chances of success for all students.

B. Participation

Student participation in school is the component of the participation identification model that Finn (1989) believes can be manipulated to encourage a deeper identification with schooling. Students must participate in classroom activities by listening, reading, studying, discussing, thinking, completing homework and other activities required in the learning process. Graduates in this study give themselves credit for their success because they actively engaged themselves in these school activities. They listened, worked hard and completed assignments. The dropouts, on the other hand, did not always participate at this minimal level. All of the dropouts had a time when they did not do any school work in or out of class. For the more academically capable students, Betty and Ed, this non-participation occurred later, but it still occurred.

Participation in academic activities out of school is the second level of participation that Finn (1989) outlines. Again, the respondents in this study show differences between dropouts and graduates. Dropouts admit to not doing homework, even when it was assigned. Although graduates do not remember being assigned much homework, they do recall finishing what was assigned.

Perhaps more important as an indication of level two participation is the type of homework the two groups reported doing. Finn (1989) talks about level two participation in terms of extending beyond the normal expectations for school work both at school and at home. It is a demonstrated enthusiasm for academic work. When dropouts did homework, it was more of what they had done in class. Dropouts completed unfinished class work at home. Graduates completed class work in school and, in many cases, asked for more work. For most of the

graduates, extra work was seen as a kind of reward, something they were allowed to do if they completed their work.

The focus on competition in the graduate interviews deserves note here. All of the graduates talked about competing in school work in some way or another. They implied that they were good at school work and liked to test how good they were. This would be easy to explain if all of the graduates had been exceptional students, but they were not. Their reading scores ranged from above average to below average. Their marks ranged from high to average. It should also be noted that the two dropouts who were in enrichment programs had extremely high reading scores and straight A marks until grade 5 or 6. Neither of these respondents discussed competition. There are two possible explanations for this phenomenon. First, the educational outcome of each group biases their memories. A person who loses a race does not often feel the race was good. Dropouts were not successful in school, so did not enjoy the experience. Graduates achieved success and enjoyed the competition. The second explanation links the enjoyment of competition with participation in school activities. Graduates reported listening, working hard and enjoying competition. Perhaps the fact that they did engage in the routine activities in the classroom on a daily basis allowed them to compete more successfully. Their abilities differed, but their actions in the classroom were similar. Dropouts report being disengaged from time to time. The learning they missed out on as a result of their nonparticipation put them in a position that did not allow them to compete successfully in school work.

Level three participation, according to Finn (1989), involves extracurricular activities. Dropouts are not as involved in extracurricular activities in high school as graduates are (Ekstrom, 1986). The dropouts in this study were not as involved as their successful counterparts were in

activities other than sports. All of the respondents in this study reported playing formal sports in elementary school, and all of the respondents felt that this involvement was an important aspect of their school experience. Dropouts, though, did not choose to be involved in many activities beyond sports. Most dropouts were involved in one or two extracurricular activities including their sports participation. Graduates were involved in up to six different extracurricular activities in elementary school, and this formal participation overflowed into participation in formal community activities. One further interesting pattern emerged. Graduates were more likely to include music activities in their extracurricular involvement. It is clear that graduates felt they fit in to their schools and that they were involved with their schools in many ways.

The impact of the family cannot be overlooked here. A child who is involved in community activities must have the encouragement of supporting parents. Parents of community-involved children spend many hours driving, spectating, and supervising practice time. Involvement in community activities is, in essence, an additional learning opportunity for children and very much a part of their education. Some families do not provide the support necessary to maintain ongoing involvement in community activities, which may be an indication of their level of commitment to their children's education.

Finn (1989) discusses a fourth level of participation which includes academic goal setting and decision making. The respondents in this study discussed their academic aspirations and how they formulated their future plans. The most critical difference seems to be the goals the respondents set for themselves. Dropouts believed graduation was the end of school and graduates believed very early in their school careers that they would attend university. In addition, the planning process for graduates involved

discussion with others, usually parents, where the dropouts tended to keep their goals to themselves. Since the academic abilities of the respondents varied a great deal in both groups, it is difficult to argue that the graduates were capable of going to university and the dropouts were not. In fact, two of the dropouts were far more capable than many of the graduates. There are two possible explanations. One, the graduates' participation led to early identification with school and a subsequent goal setting that would allow them to stay in the educational system for a long period. Two, the graduates' parents clearly supported education and the graduates knew what their parents' expectations for them were. Good communication at home with plenty of support for schooling made the message clear to the graduate group.

C. The Developmental Cycle

The assumption Finn (1989) makes, and with which I concur, is that "participation in school activities is essential in order for positive outcomes, including the students' sense of belonging and valuing school-related goals, to be realized." (p. 129). A student must be there and be engaged in classroom activities in order to learn the skills which are expected by the teacher and the parents. It is noted that this participation and subsequent identification "occur more readily among children from communicative families who place an explicit emphasis on school-related goals, both in their lives and in those of their children" (Finn, 1989, p. 130) This difference was clear amongst the respondents in this study. The graduates reported significant communication with their parents about school while the dropouts reported the nonexistence of communication and the barriers that they themselves erected.

According to Finn (1989), quality of instruction, as indicated by teaching methods and classroom arrangements, can have an effect on students' participation and on whether a student experiences success. This respondent group does show some of the characteristics identified by Finn. The graduates in this study identified many specific learning activities that they enjoyed in elementary school. Most of the activities they mentioned were activities which required quick or extended thinking, such as learning games or research projects. Many of the activities enjoyed by graduates entailed group work. The dropouts were not able to be as specific about their likes and dislikes. This may be an indication that in elementary school teachers commonly use methods which are appropriate for normal or high achieving students but not low achieving students, or that dropouts were not sufficiently engaged to remember specific learning opportunities. In either case, the learning environment did not hold the attention of dropouts and did not encourage their participation.

Although it is not clear when a student can be called "bonded" to school, or whether the level of bonding remains the same after a certain point, there are some good clues in this study that imply the importance of bonding early. First, the dropouts' feelings about grade 7 indicate that they had become detached from school before that point. They looked forward to high school because they disliked their elementary school. They wanted a new start. Their expectations were unmet by the high school, and that decision was made quite early in the grade 8 year. Graduates, on the other hand, were extremely attached to their elementary schools. They did not want to leave and disturb the success they had enjoyed. When they got to high school, they discovered that they could be successful there and adapted to the new environment quite easily. Secondly, the dropouts' difficulties increased toward the end of elementary school, and several

students mentioned grade 6 as a critical year for them. In particular, Betty, one of the dropouts who had been a high achiever, recalls that grade 6 is the year she stopped working in class.

D. Beyond Participation and Identification

Finn's model makes sense and accounts for many of the findings in this study. It does not, however, give enough credit to the impact of parents' values, as demonstrated by their involvement in their children's schooling. The dropouts and graduates in this study were clearly different in the amount of support for schooling that they felt from their families. In addition, the importance of belonging appears to be much more critical than the participation-identification model assumes.

1. Parent Influence

While the findings of this study support the participation-identification model, it is still not clear at what point a student identifies with school sufficiently to graduate from high school. While there were clear differences in experiences and perceptions between the dropouts and graduates in this sample, there was not a clear indication of when in the school process those differences began to emerge. I believe the family support the graduates talked of is critical in differentiating the two groups, which would suggest that the process of bonding to school starts on day one of kindergarten, or before. The family's values permeate the interactions about learning and school that occur in the home each day, even before the child starts school. The graduates in this group shared the feeling that their parents had been extremely supportive of school. Their parents

expected them to do well and supported their endeavors. Likewise, dropouts felt a lack of support from their families. It is useful to recall the family characteristics identified by each group.

The dropouts' families were characterized by poor relationships and little communication. The dropouts set up communication barriers and felt they should operate independently of their parents. There were many social problems in the homes of the dropouts ranging from poor communication to one parent being incarcerated. The dropouts' parents were involved with their schooling in some areas. All of the dropouts reported getting help with homework and parents attending parent/teacher nights. In addition, some of the dropouts reported that their parents had been their advocates at school, but that support was in the form of confrontation with the the teacher or principal. The dropouts' fathers were not involved with their schooling to any great extent, and their parents were not involved with activities at the school. The dropouts felt that their parents had not been very effective at encouraging them and helping them to do well in school. Often their parents offered extrinsic rewards for good marks and often there was punishment for poor report cards.

The graduates' families were characterized by lots of communication about school work and school activities on a regular basis. Their families attended school functions and helped with homework when necessary. In addition, their parents were involved in activities at the school ranging from hot dog sales to helping with reading groups. Those graduates who lived with both parents received help and support from both parents as well as a clear message that school was important. The graduates' parents had high expectations and made those expectations clear through their words and their actions.

The dropouts and graduates in this study clearly had different family influences throughout their school years. Lightfoot (1981) notes that all parents believe that education is an important component of success in life, but that some parents distrust schools to look after the interests of their children. In this sample, it appears that graduates parents not only believed that education was important, but they also believed that the school was doing good things for their children. They encouraged hard work, respect for teachers, and high standards, and they expected their children to comply. The distrust Lightfoot speaks of is illustrated by the dropouts' parents who confronted the schools about discipline issues. The parent heard the child's story and supported the child's belief that the teacher's actions had been unjustified. The dropout's perception that the school was wrong was supported by the parent's actions. This does not imply that schools are always right in their actions with students, or that parents should never question a teacher. It does seem to be important, however, that the student perceives that the parent respects the teacher and supports the goals of the school.

If all parents believe school is important, why do some parents explicitly support education and put emphasis on school related goals while other parents fail to encourage and support their children enough to ensure graduation? I believe the developmental process of attachment and nonattachment to school occurs across generations. Parents of dropouts were likely dropouts (Macdonald, 1989). Their bonds with school were tenuous, and they pass their perceptions of schooling on to their children prior to kindergarten. The practice of offering money or presents for good marks may indicate that parents of dropouts, while believing school is important, may not believe it is intrinsically rewarding. Their children need to be paid for their effort in some way beyond a pat on the back.

Through their actions they unknowingly pass their negative experiences on to their children.

2. Belonging

In the participation-identification model, belonging in school is a component of the larger construct labelled "identification". A student feels a sense of belongingness which leads to stronger attachments which indicate valuing of school. An examination of the experiences of the outliers in this study indicates that belonging may be critical to the bonding process. In particular, the two dropouts who participated in enrichment classes noted a lack of belonging, a sense of not fitting in, because they were part of the enrichment class. They were participating in activities that did not match their concept of where they belonged in school. Their neighborhood friends were not with them in the enrichment classes and they felt isolated from the rest of the school body. Students need to feel that they are in a place which is comfortable for them.

Peer group is not the only measure of belonging. Students' perceptions of their teachers play an important role in the bonding process. The teacher, through interaction with the student, helps the student create a place in the school that is comfortable. Barb's experience is instructive here. Barb had strong attachments to her teachers, and one teacher in particular stands out in Barb's memory. That teacher helped Barb find a worthwhile place in school despite Barb's perception that her family did not support her. Teachers can mediate the effects of family influence to some degree. It is important to note that Barb's family probably did value education, but their actions rather than Barb's perceptions are the

indicator. Barb's parents registered her in a religious private school in grade 5, which indicates a concern for the child's education.

Belonging seems to go beyond having friends at school. Belonging may be a function of interactions with teachers, peers, and parents resulting in a sense that the school's beliefs, goals and values are aligned with the student's. Students are comfortable in school when the other people there share their values. (see figures 2a and 2b)

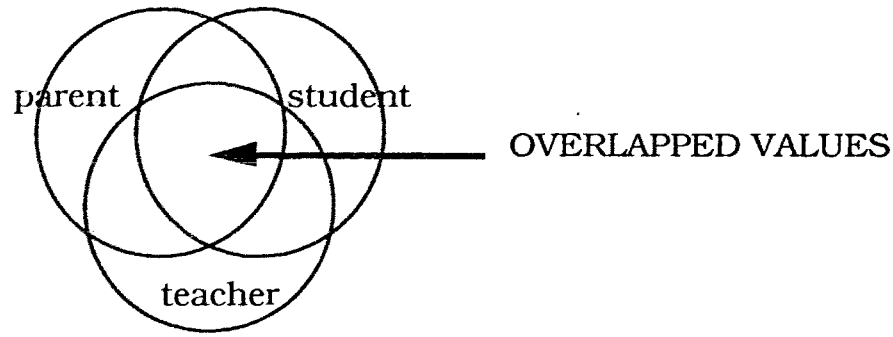


FIGURE 2a: Strong School Bonds Likely

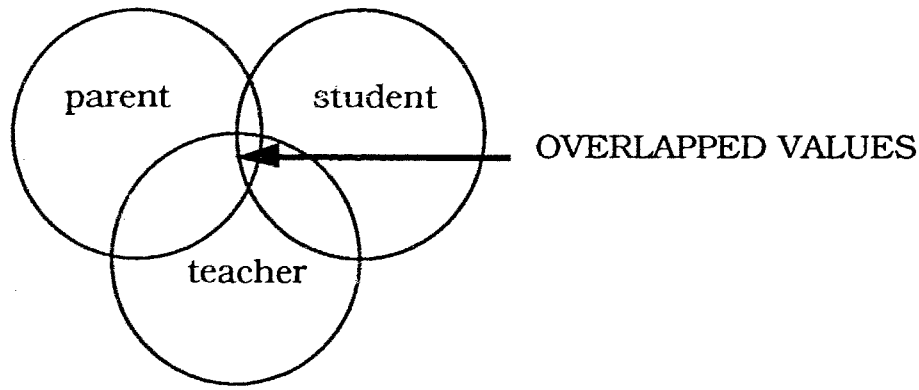


FIGURE 2b: Weak School Bonds Likely

Identification with school can usefully be seen as an overlap in values between the teacher, the student, and the parents. The greater the overlap, the greater the sense of identification for the student. This construct allows for complementary and contradictory values and belief systems to exist in each individual, but the notion of overlap being greater

or lesser is helpful in understanding why it is easy for some students to identify with school and not so easy for others. A student who withdraws from school probably has very little value overlap with teachers and parents. Parents who had weak bonds with school in their own experience probably have little overlap with teachers, and their children are not likely to have much overlap either.

It seems reasonable that improved communication between the school and the home would serve to improve the understanding of values between parents and teachers and lead to greater overlap in educational goals. The Coproduction of Learning project, of which this study is an independent subset, is finding that the tendency for parents to rate a school positively is linked to parent perceptions of the teacher's attitude toward parent involvement (Coleman, Collinge & Tabin, 1992). Parents who feel teachers invite parent involvement are more likely to trust that those teachers are looking after the best interests of their children and have a positive attitude toward the school. Improved understanding is a good first step toward building positive parent/teacher relationships and, most importantly, strong support structures for students. I believe that parents who had weak bonds to school are unlikely to reach out to teachers, so it appears to be necessary for teachers to initiate the process of building trust and collaboration very early in the child's school career - day one or before. Once parents feel positive about school, it may be easier to improve students' attitudes toward school by working together as a triad to increase participation and improve achievement. Students whose families identify with school have a greater chance of successful participation and a greater chance of beginning a positive cycle of participation and identification.

3. A Revised Model

Further research needs to be driven by a different model that clearly identifies dropping out as a developmental process. Finn's model outlines a bonding model for students that considers teachers only in terms of instructional quality and does not include parental influence on students' attitudes. These factors are clearly important in student bonding to school, and must be included in a new model of participation and identification of students with school (see figure 3).

Constructed from findings of this study, previous research findings, and findings from the Coproduction of Learning project, this model closely parallels Finn's participation-identification model in that it assumes students must participate in school in order to be successful and therefore identify with schooling. This model also assumes that participation and identification reinforce each other, making the process circular. This model, though, pays much closer attention to the influence of relationships on the student's likelihood to judge participation as successful. Three factors are considered to be key in promoting a positive bonding cycle: parent values, student academic efficacy, and teacher/student relationships. This model speculates that the choice of peers may have some effect on a student's perceived success in school through the type of participation the peer group practices, but also speculates that parent values are strong enough to affect peer choice.

Parent values appear to be the most important influence in determining whether students judge their participation in school activities as successful. This study clearly identified different family supports for dropouts and graduates. Although the parents of dropouts helped with

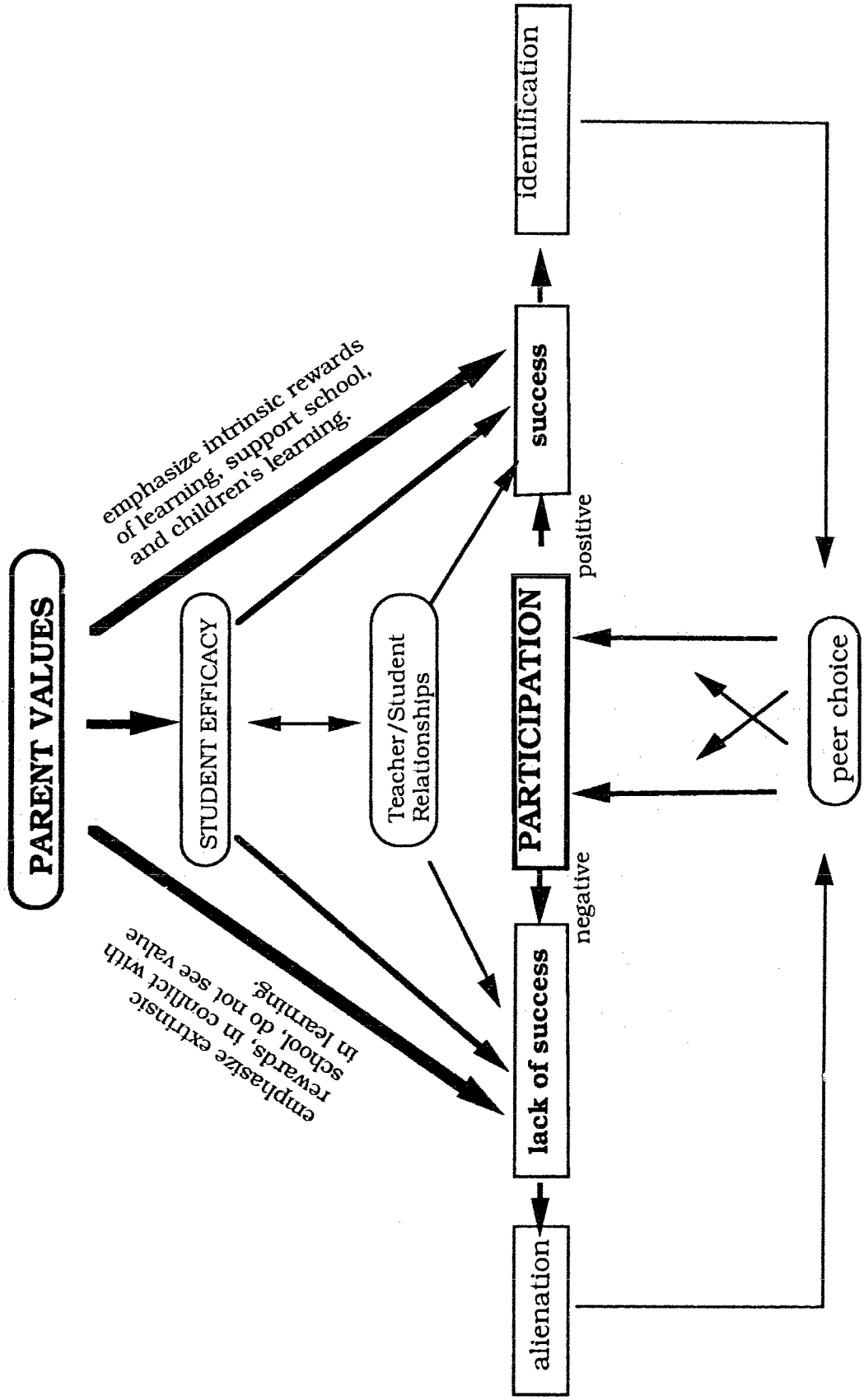


Figure 3: A Revised Model of Student Bonding to School

homework and visited the school for parent-teacher interviews, the dropouts did not feel they had received the support they needed to succeed. Their homes were characterized by extrinsic rewards, conflicts with the school, and little opportunity for extended learning. Dropouts' homes clearly placed little real value on education and communicated that message to the students from those homes. In support of the importance of parent values, Coleman, Collinge and Tabin (1992) found that students who gave their school a positive rating also felt positive about their communication with their parents about school. Parents who talked with their children about school fostered a positive attitude in their children. Oakes and Lipton (1990) identify parent values as the central factor in determining school success. They write that "what really matters is the values you communicate and the consistent encouragement you provide your child." (p. 233)

The previous research and findings from this study with respect to the relative influence of the peer group is not clear. This model makes some tentative inferences from the findings in this study. In terms of peer choice, parent values may be a mediating factor. This study included some students who, in terms of ability, should have been very successful in school. It also included students whose success was amazing, given their profiles. Parent influence over the choice of peer group offers one explanation of these outliers. Barb, whose parents enrolled her in a private school, was completely removed from her peer group by her parents' decision to change her school. Betty and Ed, both high ability dropouts, had different peers at home than at school. The peers at home did not have the same values as the peers at school. It is possible that the choice of peers was influenced by the values demonstrated by the parents. Neighborhood friends come from similar social backgrounds, as do their parents. The

congruence of values is difficult to go against. A gifted student may be placed with other bright students while in school, but the neighborhood friends talk about the same things and their parents have similar interests in daily life. The neighborhood friends are a better reflection of the family's values. In Barb's case, the family's values are reflected by the church peers in the religious private school. The family's religion and beliefs match those of the other students in the school, and the neighborhood friends become secondary. What is important is that the parent's values are similar to values of the peers and their families.

Peers are also chosen based on common interests. Students who identify with school, due to strong parental support for schooling, are likely to choose peers who feel the same and vice versa. Students who participate in disruptive classroom activities are likely to choose peers who support those activities. A student with low ability may not experience academic success in school but can still choose peers who identify with school. Parent values, again, may influence this choice, as may the student/teacher relationship. Even though academic work may not go well, success can be experienced in other arenas, particularly if that success is supported by parents and teachers. Peer choice may be a pivotal point for some students, influencing the type of participation the student engages in and, in turn, the messages of success received from parents and teachers.

Parent values, in addition to influencing a student's perception of school success and possibly the choice of peers, directly influence a student's sense of academic efficacy. Parents who do not or cannot recognize the academic strengths of the child do little to build the child's ability conceptions. The dropouts in this study often spoke of parents who "tried to help" but were somehow unable. It is not difficult to argue that the parents' perceived inability to give academic assistance sends a message

that perhaps the work is not doable. In addition, it is arguably difficult for these parents to sincerely encourage their children to do the work that they themselves find frustrating. Students translate their perceived inability or lack of control over the outcome of their effort into perceptions of success or lack of success and, in turn, perceptions about how well they academically "fit in" to school.

Student academic efficacy has a direct effect on the teacher/student relationship. Students who do not feel they have the ability to do the work often do not try. The dropouts in this study all spoke of avoiding work and being uninvolved in the classroom. Students who do not put effort into learning are difficult for teachers. It is easy for the teacher/student relationship to become quite negative when the student and the teacher have different perceptions of what the student is capable of doing. The teacher/student relationship also affects the student's sense of efficacy. A teacher who works hard to develop positive ability conceptions and encourages students through positive success messages can influence students' feelings about their ability to do the work. The opposite is also true. A teacher can lead students to believe they are less capable. Coleman, Collinge, and Tabin (1992) identify good schools as those who develop a positive sense of belonging in many students. In good schools, students feel they count for something. Attention to the student/teacher relationship is essential in the development of a positive attitude toward and responsibility for learning.

Much of this model is conjecture based predominantly on the findings of this study. Much more work needs to be done in order to identify those factors which have the greatest impact on school success and which can be directly influenced by educators. Parent/teacher/student collaboration appears to be promising as a means of increasing the successful

experiences of most students. This model is meant simply to guide future research endeavors in the hope that means can be found for more students to find their school years rewarding.

E. Further Research

Differences in perceived school experience were identified between dropouts and graduates, and those differences seemed to be most crucial in terms of relationships with others. Parents and teachers are critical support systems for students. Although the recommendations of this study are limited to hypotheses that require more study, some potentially fruitful research topics emerge.

- Student perceptions of belonging

The concept of "fitting in" to the school, as opposed to having lots of friends, needs further exploration. It appears that belonging for successful students may include links to teachers and the process of learning in addition to the expected links to peers. Studies that compare how students define belonging may help us to determine how to change belonging for students with weak bonds to school.

- Longitudinal studies of school experiences

Memories are often clouded by intervening experiences. Qualitative studies which assess students' school experience as it is occurring, as well as after, would be useful in determining how the educational outcome affects the students' memory of their school experience.

- Triad collaboration

A close examination of parent/teacher communication would help clarify areas of mistrust and allow us to start toward more effective home/school communication. Interventions in triad collaboration between parents, teachers and students would help to clarify how teachers can reach out to parents and students and if reaching out has an impact on student valuing school.

- Family values

It may be useful to interview parents of dropouts about their own school experience to determine their bonds to school and understand parent attitudes toward schooling. Studies of family influence and school influence would help to clarify the relative impact the school has on student decisions. It may also be instructive to help determine the type of school action that has a tendency to pull family values and school values closer together.

- Elementary school focus

It is important that future studies focus on the elementary school as the place where bonding starts. It seems most productive, in terms of dropout prevention, to examine ways to help students begin a positive cycle of participation and identification very early in their school careers. Studies to pinpoint critical years in the bonding process would be useful.

I do not believe that there will ever be a time when all students graduate from school, but I do hope that those who drop out do so because they got a better offer, not because they felt rejected by schooling.

APPENDIX A INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

DROPOUTS AND BONDING: INTERVIEW

number Drop/Stay

I am involved with a research project regarding people's learning experiences and the effects that those experiences have had on their school lives. I would like to explore your memories of elementary school. Answer the following questions as completely as possible, recalling specific examples as often as possible. If you do not understand a question, please ask me to repeat it.

TOPIC 1: REMEMBERING YOUR SCHOOL

1. How many elementary schools can you remember going to?
   How did they differ? How were they the same? Choose the one you remember best. What did it look like? Describe the outside of the building...the playground...the door you walked in through...the hallways...the office...the gym...a classroom you remember...anything else...

2. When you think back to elementary school, what comes to mind?
   What was your best school experience? What was your worst school experience?

3. Did you ever fail a grade? Which one? Why? How did you feel?

4. Did you feel like you belonged in your school? Class?
   What made you feel that way?

5. Did you stay away from school very often?
   For what reasons?

TOPIC 2: LEARNING

6. What was your school like as a place to learn?
   What kinds of learning activities did you enjoy? Why? What kinds of learning activities did you dislike? Why?

7. Did anyone encourage you to do well in school? Who? How?

TOPIC 3: HOMEWORK

8. Tell me what you remember about homework in elementary school.

   Was homework easy for you? Did you understand the assignments? What kinds of homework activities did you do? Who helped you with homework? How often? How?

TOPIC 4: TEACHERS

9. Tell me about the teachers you remember from elementary school.
   Is there one teacher that you enjoyed more than the others? Why? Is there one that you disliked more than the others? Why? In what ways did your teachers help you with school and school work?

10. What do you remember about your school principal?

TOPIC 5: PEERS

11. Tell me about your friends in elementary school.
    What were they like? Were some different than others? How so?

TOPIC 6: PARENTS

12. Did you talk to your parents about the things that happened at elementary school?
    What kinds of things? Describe the ways your parents were involved with your schooling.

TOPIC 7: OTHER ACTIVITIES

13. What kinds of activities were you involved with at school?
    Were they important to you? Why? How did you decide which activities to join?

TOPIC 8: GOALS

14. When you were in elementary school, what were your plans for the future?
    How far did you expect to go in school? What career did you think you might like? Did you talk with anyone about those goals?

15. What are your future plans today?
    How long have you had this plan? How did you come up with it?

TOPIC 9: TRANSITION

16. Tell me about grade 7.
    How did you feel about moving to grade 8? Scared? Excited? Why?

17. Was high school what you expected it to be? Why?

18. THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO TELL ME ABOUT YOUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES?

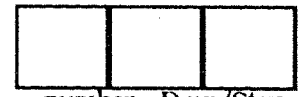
Name of elementary school •

Parent occupations •

Home situation •

APPENDIX B SURVEY QUESTIONS

DROPOUTS AND BONDING: SURVEY



Please answer the following questions about yourself and your elementary school experience by circling the appropriate response.

1.	Sex	Male	Female		
2.	Last grade completed	8	9	10	11	12
3.	Father's education level	Did not graduate	Graduated High School	Some College	University Degree
4.	Mother's education level	Did not graduate	Graduated High School	Some College	University Degree
5.	Number of elementary schools attended	1	2	3	4 or more	
6.	In elementary school, learning was easy for me.	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
7.	Going to elementary school was a great experience.	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
8.	I talked to my parents about school.	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
9.	I did homework in elementary school.	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
10.	I asked my parents for help with school work.	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
11.	As a child, I read books in my spare time.	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
12.	Teachers were helpful to me in elementary school.	Always	Often	Seldom	Never

13.	My friends helped me with school work.	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
14.	I had a quiet place to do homework.	Yes	No		
15.	My parents and I worked well together on homework.	Yes	No		
16.	I repeated a grade in elementary school.	Yes	No		
17.	My parents encouraged me to do well in school.	A lot	A little	Not at all	
18.	My parents liked my elementary school.	A lot	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
19.	My teachers cared about my success in school.	A lot	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
20.	My friends liked elementary school.	A lot	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
21.	My parents visited my elementary school.	Often	Seldom	Never	Don't Know
22.	My parents had contact with my teachers.	Often	Seldom	Never	Don't Know

APPENDIX C ANNOTATED LIST OF CODES

TEACHER	statements about teachers
PEER	statements about peers
PARENTS	statements about parents
SIBLINGS	statements about siblings
/ENCOURAGE	if and how respondent was encouraged or helped
/COMMUNICATION	if and what respondent talked to others about
/SPECIAL	indications of a special relationship such as a role model - beyond usual attachments
FUTURE	statements about the future
/THEN	plans held in elementary school
/NOW	plans at the time of the interview
/CAREER	specific mention of career
/EDUCATION	level of education achieved or strived for
/PLAN	how plan made, who influenced plan, length of time plan has existed
BELONGING	statements about belonging in the school or classroom or group
/+ or -	positive or negative belonging statements
/membership	requirements to belong to a group
/gr 7	qualities of belonging in grade 7
ACTIVITIES	extracurricular activities in and out of school
/IMPORTANCE	how or why an activity was important
/CHOICE	how or why an activity was chosen
/OUTSIDE	activities or events outside of school
COMPETITION	statements about competition
LEARNING	statements about learning

/ENCOURAGE	encouraged by learning or awards
/ENVIRONMENT	school as a place to learn
/ACTIVITIES	specific learning activities including homework
/ACTIONS	individual approaches to learning activities
ATTENDANCE	amount of school missed and why
INDEPENDENCE	indicating growing independence or internal locus of control
SELF CONCEPT	statements about abilities
FAIL	statements about failing grades or assignments
QUITTING	statements about quitting school
SCHOOL	last elementary school attended
HIGH SCHOOL	statements about high school including expectations of, feelings about, and experiences in

APPENDIX D CONSENT FORM

CO-PRODUCTION OF LEARNING

DROPOUTS AND BONDING PROJECT

CONSENT FORM

I understand that the information I provide by completing this interview and survey will be used exclusively for the research project entitled CO-PRODUCTION OF LEARNING, about which I have received verbal communication, and in which I agree to participate.

The terms upon which I provide the information sought here are that the information will be given an identifying code to ensure anonymity. No-one at the school or in the school district will ever be able to identify the information provided through this interview and survey by me as an individual.

Print
Name:_____

Signature:
_____

Parent signature (if living with parent):_____

Telephone No.:
_____

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