

Withdrawing From School

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Research on dropping out of school has focused on characteristics of the individual or institution that correlate with the dropout decision. Many of these characteristics are nonmanipulable, and all are measured at one point in time, late in the youngster's school career. This paper describes two models for understanding dropping out as a developmental process that may begin in the earliest grades. The frustration-self-esteem model has been used for years in the study of juvenile delinquency; it identifies school failure as the starting point in a cycle that may culminate in the student's rejecting, or being rejected by, the school. The participation-identification model focuses on students' "involvement in schooling," with both behavioral and emotional components. According to this formulation, the likelihood that a youngster will successfully complete 12 years of schooling is maximized if he or she maintains multiple, expanding forms of participation in school-relevant activities. The failure of a youngster to participate in school and class activities, or to develop a sense of identification with school, may have significant deleterious consequences. The ability to manipulate modes of participation poses promising avenues for further research as well as for intervention efforts.

The problem of school dropout has become something of a national obsession. While law requires that we educate our youth until age 16, the entire American system of public schooling is organized with the expectation that students will continue through age 17 or 18. Not only do many youngsters choose to leave before their senior year, but a disturbing number does not even remain until age 16 (Hammack, 1986). These "early school leavers" are viewed both as failures of the educational system and as individuals who have failed to achieve a basic requisite for modern American life. It compounds the problem that disproportionate numbers of minorities and children from homes of low socio-economic status (SES) leave school without graduating; these youngsters will be all the more handicapped without a high school diploma or the literacy skills it represents. In the long run, they threaten to place an increased burden on social welfare programs for housing, health care, and employment, if not for further subsidized education (Catterall, 1985). Efforts to raise the academic standards of our nation's schools, if not accompanied by other organizational and instructional changes, may increase the dropout rate still further (Hess, 1986; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1985).

Research on the dropout issue has been largely of two sorts. On one hand,

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empirical studies define and estimate dropout rates with ever-increasing precision and examine the correlates of dropping out, including race, SES, school ability and performance, and stated reasons for dropping out. At the same time, a plethora of reports describes intervention efforts to prevent older students from leaving school or to attract dropouts back into educational programs. Many of these efforts are based on good ideas, not to mention good intentions. Few, however, are based on a systematic understanding of the developmental processes that lead an individual to withdraw completely from schooling.

In particular, a youngster's leaving school before graduation may be just one more event, albeit a conspicuous event, in a chain that may have begun years before. This paper presents two models for viewing dropping out as a developmental process and summarizes research that bears on each. The "frustration-self-esteem model" has been used frequently to explain schools' effects on disruptive behavior and juvenile delinquency; it offers one perspective for understanding dropping out as well. The "participation-identification model" emphasizes the importance of a youngster's "bonding" with school; when this does not occur, the likelihood of problem behavior, including leaving school before graduation, is increased. This perspective is derived from several different lines of research on school process. The components of the participation-identification model are not totally distinct from those of the frustration-esteem paradigm, but offer some new avenues for process-oriented research and for guiding intervention efforts.

While the focus of this paper is on dropping out of school,¹ the discussion draws extensively from scholarly writing about other problem behaviors, including skipping classes and truancy, disruptive behavior in the classroom, and juvenile delinquency. Like dropping out, these problem behaviors are all associated with poor academic performance. For example, the association of high absenteeism with poor school work has been found repeatedly, both in American schools (deJung & Duckworth, 1986; Weitzman et al., 1985) and British (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979). Likewise, there is a disproportionate number of students with poor school performance, specific learning disabilities, and/or poor aptitude profiles among juvenile delinquents (Bernstein & Rulo, 1976; Dunivant, 1982; Elliott & Voss, 1974; Hirschi, 1969; Moffitt, Gabrielli, Mednick, & Shulsinger, 1981; Olczak & Stott, 1976). The educational processes linking school failure to these behavior problems have received very little attention, however, leaving unanswered the question: "What mechanisms cause these two sets of outcomes to co-occur?"

It is a pervasive feature of this research that every discussion of dropping out, attendance problems, disruptive behavior, or delinquency refers to the interdependencies among them. Correlations are demonstrated repeatedly between nonattendance and disruptive behavior with dropout (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Lloyd, 1978; Rumberger, 1987), between nonattendance and disruptive behavior in the classroom (Reid, 1984a), between nonattendance and delinquency (Finn, Stott, & Zarichny, 1988; Reid, 1984a; Rutter et al., 1979), and between dropout and delinquency (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Elliott & Voss, 1974; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984). The statistical association of these behaviors with each other and with school performance is sometimes attributed to a third explanatory variable such as SES (Moffitt et al., 1981), native language other than English

(Steinberg et al., 1984), or undiagnosed learning disabilities (Bernstein & Rulo, 1976).

This research confirms that dropping out, absenteeism and truancy, disruptive behavior in class, and delinquency are frequently exhibited concomitantly by the same individual. The behaviors are problems because they disrupt or vitiate the school routine, especially as it affects the particular youngster. And they may all be seen as outcomes of earlier patterns of withdrawal from the daily classroom and school routine. To this extent, this research can illuminate the processes that lead to complete withdrawal, dropping out.

Frustration-Self-Esteem Model

School failure is frequently cited as a cause of problem behavior. According to one common paradigm, (a) poor school performance is hypothesized to lead to (b) an impaired self-view and, in turn, to (c) the youngster's opposing the context that is seen as responsible. While the measures of these constructs differ from study to study, the three basic components are always the same. Poor school performance is indicated at times by scores on standardized or teacher-made tests, by a *history* of low grades or, whether appropriate or not, by IQ scores. The blame for poor performance is sometimes unspecified but is more commonly attributed to the school's failure to provide an adequate instructional and/or emotional environment. An impaired self-view is seen as resulting from frustration or embarrassment. Self-view is operationalized either as general self-esteem, self-concept, academic self-concept, or "personal agency beliefs." The oppositional behavior may take the form of disrupting the instructional process, skipping class, or even committing delinquent acts.

Bernstein and Rulo (1976) use this line of reasoning to explain the possible consequences of undiagnosed learning problems. As the child becomes embarrassed and frustrated by school failure, he or she may exhibit increasingly inappropriate behavior that becomes more disruptive with age. As more adult attention is paid to controlling the behavior and less to the learning disability, the child "falls farther and farther behind and becomes more of a problem. Eventually, the child is suspended, drops out, or is thrown out of school, and the movement toward delinquency is well under way" (p. 44).

Bloom argues more broadly that mental health—i.e., positive self-regard and ego strength—develops as a child receives continual evidence of his adequacy through school-related success experiences. A history of good grades and positive interactions with teachers may "provide a type of immunization against mental illness for an indefinite period of time" (Bloom, 1976, p. 158). Other students do not attain this immunity:

At the other extreme are the bottom third of the students who have been given consistent evidence of their inadequacy . . . over a period of 5 to 10 years. Such students rarely secure any positive reinforcement in the classroom . . . from teachers or parents. We would expect such students to be infected with emotional difficulties [and to] exhibit symptoms of acute distress and alienation from the world of school and adults. (Bloom, 1976, p. 158)

The chain of events is initiated by failure or anticipated failure, primarily in

school activities. Students are viewed as motivated to achieve school success but cannot, due either to inadequate ability or study behaviors or to deficiencies in instruction. This “aspiration-opportunity disjunction” (Elliott & Voss, 1974, p. 18) may be most severe among low-SES youth, a population highly overrepresented in dropout statistics (Elliott, Voss, & Wendling, 1966).

Ford and Nichols (1987) provide one framework for explaining how unattainable goals may lead to frustration and withdrawal. The authors list 24 general consequences that an individual may strive to attain at any given time in his or her life. These outcomes are likened to Murray’s needs, but the Ford-Nichols goals are not viewed as basic personality traits. Instead they are desired consequences that are clearly distinct from the behaviors manifested in their pursuit. The broad categories of the Ford-Nichols taxonomy are “affective goals,” “cognitive goals,” “subjective organization goals,” “social relationship goals,” and “task goals.” In these terms, the frustration-esteem model assumes that the cognitive goals “exploration,” “understanding,” and “positive or confirmatory self-evaluations” and the task goal “mastery”—“Meeting a standard of achievement” (p. 295)—are salient for most students.

According to Ford (1987), personal agency beliefs regulate the actual priority given to particular consequences; these are the perceptions that the goal is itself attainable through human effort and that the individual has the competence to achieve it. Problematic patterns of personal agency beliefs may arise, for example, if a student experiences continual frustration in school subjects. This can lead to a “perception of self as ineffective and powerless” (Ford, 1987, p. 214) and would explain why some students withdraw from school, especially in later years.

Pursuant to academic failure, according to the frustration-esteem model, the youngster’s self-view is a central mediator of problem behavior. Consistent patterns of scholastic failure may threaten one’s self-view, resulting in a search for alternate activities that may be less sanctioned socially but through which the youngster can experience success. Gold and Mann (1984) attribute a direct causal role to self-esteem:

Under conditions of low social control, these young people turn to delinquent behavior to raise their self-esteem. . . . It follows that, if these youngsters’ experiences at school were altered sufficiently to raise their self-esteem . . . their disruptive and delinquent behavior would subside. (Gold & Mann, 1984, p. 19)

It is well established that self-concept and self-esteem measures are related to school performance both cross-sectionally (Byrne, 1984; Gold & Mann, 1984; Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Holly, 1987) and over time (Kifer, 1975). Academic self-concept in particular is more highly correlated with achievement and grades than are other aspects of self-concept (Byrne, 1984; Wylie, 1979). The association of achievement with self-esteem is based almost entirely on correlational evidence, however, and does not justify the directional conclusion that poor performance *causes* lowered esteem.

Research on the relationship of self-esteem to problem behavior yields results that are largely consistent, but with some exceptions. In a study of 231 British youngsters, Reid (1984b) found that “Persistent Absentees tended to have lower academic self-concepts and general levels of self-esteem” (p. 66) than their less-absent peers. Kaplan (1980), in a large study of seventh grade American students,

found youngsters low in general self-esteem to be more likely to exhibit 26 of 28 deviant behaviors than youngsters in either mid-range or high-esteem groups. The behaviors ranged from minor acts (e.g., taking part in a social protest) to many with more serious consequences (e.g., cheating on exams, engaging in fights, or theft).

With regard to dropping out, Combs and Cooley (1968) reanalyzed Project Talent data and found that male dropouts rated themselves significantly lower than stay-ins on 7 of 10 self-evaluations, including "Vigor," "Self-confidence," and "Mature personality"; female dropouts rated themselves as lower on 8 of the 10. Bachman, O'Malley, and Johnston (1978) conducted a nine-year study of more than 1,600 males from grade 10 onward. They found the average level of general self-esteem for dropouts to be consistently lower than that of all other educational attainment groups. Also, the correlation of self-concept-of-school-ability in grade 10 with years of education completed was .45, one of the highest of the many correlations obtained in the study.

On the other hand, Ekstrom et al. (1986) analyzed data from a nationwide sample of sophomores who participated in the High School and Beyond (HS&B) survey. Unlike other studies, no significant difference was found on general self-esteem between those who dropped out over the following two years and those who graduated. Differences were found, however, on more specific "self-pride" and "self-satisfaction" questions. Wehlage and Rutter (1986) confirm the negative findings for the HS&B data. They examined the change in average self-esteem from the sophomore year to the end of school two years later. They found an increase in self-esteem for all student groups over the three-year period. Interestingly, "The overall gain in self-esteem by dropouts is exactly the same as for the group with greatest self-esteem, the college bound" (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, p. 387).

The reasons for the inconsistencies can only be a matter of speculation. The HS&B reports, like other studies, assessed self-esteem before and after dropping out occurred. It is possible that "times have changed" and that the HS&B data, the most recent of those reported here, reflect this. If leaving school before graduation is less stigmatized than it was in earlier years—at least within the youngster's immediate peer group—then dropouts' self-esteem may be affected less. In any case, the relationship of self-esteem, with its many facets, to withdrawal behavior is undoubtedly more complex than is delineated in any of these investigations.

According to the traditional frustration-esteem model, as a result of lowered self-esteem, the youngster exhibits problem behavior that "constitutes a way of coping with social stigma and loss of self-esteem associated with failure" (Elliott & Voss, 1974, p. 204). He or she seeks an avenue through which esteem may be renewed. This may be accomplished through success at alternate activities that are less sanctioned socially or by winning the approval of peers who have become nonparticipants in similar ways. It is well documented that dropouts, as well as delinquents, associate with friends with like behavior (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Elliott & Voss, 1974; Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1981). Elliott et al. (1966) draw a strong conclusion about the role of peers: "Through contact with others who have dropped out, one not only *learns* of this alternative, but may receive some group support—perhaps even group pressure—for this action" (p. 183). Thus, this alternative is readily accessible and is one to which the youngster is encouraged to turn to avoid frustration and humiliation due to school failure.

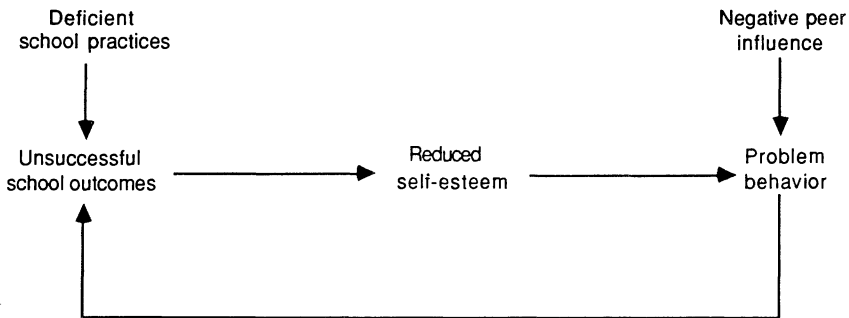


FIGURE 1. *Frustration-self-esteem model.*

The major components of the frustration-esteem model are shown in Figure 1. The cycle is like that described by Bernstein and Rulo (1976), in which the youngster's behavior becomes increasingly the focus of attention, reducing learning opportunities still further. Problem behavior is exacerbated until the youngster withdraws or is removed entirely from participating in the school environment. While instructional practices are not explicitly part of the model, deficiencies in the school program are often blamed for initial academic failure. Support for this position is often speculative (e.g., Bernstein & Rulo's "undiagnosed learning problems") or based largely on correlational evidence. For example, Wehlage and Rutter (1986) compare dropouts and stay-ins in a section entitled "Self-Esteem and Locus of Control: Further Evidence of School Failure" (p. 385). It would be more productive to avoid this kind of attribution and instead to analyze the interactions of students with their school and out-of-school environments in depth; Wehlage, too, calls for this type of analysis (1986, p. 20).

To disrupt the cycle, school personnel are left with further responsibility for increasing students' performance, not to mention self-esteem, perhaps against high resistance on the student's part and a host of external influences. In one of the few intervention studies to employ the frustration-esteem paradigm, Gold and Mann (1984) examined disruptive and delinquent adolescents attending three alternative schools. Schools were chosen that provided the two essential ingredients, "increase in the proportion of a youth's successful—versus unsuccessful—experiences, and a warm accepting relationship with one or more adults" (p. 11). When compared with a matched sample attending conventional schools, the alternative-school youngsters improved in their in-school disruptive behavior but not in out-of-school delinquent acts, reading levels, or general self-esteem.

The frustration-esteem model does not identify specific school practices that may be targeted for change, but many have been suggested. These include such diverse aspects as the organization of separate schools for at-risk youngsters, revised disciplinary procedures, curricula tailored to the needs of these students, positive teacher attitudes, and teaching practices that involve students in the learning process more than most traditional approaches. Of course, research on these dimensions is not tied to the frustration-esteem model in particular or, for that matter, to problems unique to at-risk students.

Participation-Identification Model

Recent work highlights the role of a different set of dimensions in mediating school outcomes: students' active *participation* in school and classroom activities and a concomitant feeling of *identification* with school. In the Perry Preschool Project (Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1984), 123 black three- and four-year-olds at risk for school failure were randomly assigned to an intensive preschool program or to a control group receiving no preschool program. The children were followed to age 19, by which point the groups differed significantly on measures of school performance, graduation or dropout rates, employment, personal-social dimensions including teen pregnancies, and detentions and arrests by the police. The Perry findings, perhaps the strongest of any preschool intervention program, are attributed in part to "bonding" of the preschool children with school:

On the basis of these internal and external factors, social bonds develop between persons and settings in the course of human development. Strong social bonds to conventional settings, such as school, are seen as making delinquency less likely, whereas weak social bonds make delinquency more likely. (Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984, p. 3)

The authors identify one important internal factor, "commitment to schooling," and the external factor "student role reinforcement." Differences were found between the preschool and no-preschool groups on measures of both constructs. The broad spectrum of positive outcomes of the Perry project demonstrates that the bonding principle may apply to a range of problem behaviors.

The importance of a student's developing and maintaining some form of attachment to school is not a new idea but one that is identified repeatedly, although in many guises, even within the context of the frustration-self-esteem model. In the following section, research is summarized that relates forms of attachment to outcomes such as dropping out and delinquency. Next, some of the behavioral antecedents of attachment are reviewed, and finally the components are assembled into an alternate developmental model for explaining problem behavior.

Identification With School

The idea that successful students develop a sense of identification with school while less successful students do not, or not to the same extent, has been described in positive terms under such rubrics as "affiliation," "involvement," "attachment," "commitment," and "bonding" and in negative terms such as "alienation" and "withdrawal." These terms denote two ideas in common that constitute a good working definition of identification. First, students who identify with school have an internalized conception of belongingness—that they are discernibly part of the school environment and that school constitutes an important part of their own experience. And second, these individuals value success in school-relevant goals.

Both aspects of identification—under various aliases—have been related theoretically and empirically to the occurrence of problem behavior. For example, "commitment" refers primarily to the valuing aspect. Gold and Mann's (1984) examination of alternative schools for disruptive and delinquent youngsters revealed no reduction in self-esteem. But there was a significant reduction in in-school disruptive behavior and a concomitant increase in students' "optimism

about their chances to succeed at school and their commitment to the academic role of student” (p. 153).

Polk and Halferty (1972) factor-analyzed a long checklist administered to more than 1,800 adolescents; items included home background measures, school participation and performance, and out-of-school activities. One factor that discriminated strongly among individuals comprised a set of school aspirations, activities, and values, as well as delinquent acts. Labeling the factor “commitment,” the authors conclude that

Delinquency among at least some youth may be a function of the lack of commitment to school and adult success. . . . The uncommitted delinquent youth, it would appear, is characterized by behavioral withdrawal from school. He does not study, he receives poor grades, and he does not participate in activities. . . . there is a pattern of psychological discomfort and alienation in the attitudes the delinquent and uncommitted youth exhibits toward the school. (p. 85)

Firestone and Rosenblum (1988) identified two dimensions of commitment in transcripts of interviews with urban high school students: commitment to learning and commitment to “the place.” Students did not talk much about the latter but it was apparent that school “is where students can come to be with their friends or where they find activities other than educational ones to keep them occupied” (p. 10). This use of the term commitment is broadened to encompass a belonging component as well as valuing.

The concept of alienation was popular in the sociological literature of the 1960s as a way to depict noninvolvement or nonattachment. The essential components of alienation, according to Seeman (1975), are powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, self-estrangement, social isolation, and cultural estrangement. Among them, social isolation and normlessness parallel the belonging and valuing aspects of identification most closely. Reid (1981) found significant differences between persistent school absentees and comparison groups on six of nine items reflecting these two aspects of alienation.

Normlessness and social isolation were measured as mediating variables in Elliott and Voss’ (1974) longitudinal study of dropout and delinquency. Following 2,617 students from ninth grade onward, the investigators found academic success to be related to both normlessness (correlations from $-.03$ to $-.32$) and social isolation (correlations from $-.11$ to $-.49$) at school (pp. 212–217). Further, normlessness in school was significantly correlated with delinquent acts, and both normlessness and social isolation were associated with dropping out. The authors conclude that “delinquent behavior and dropout are alternate responses to failure and alienation” (Elliott & Voss, 1974, p. 202).

In a review and integration of the literature on alienation, Newmann (1981) emphasized the need for designing schools to reduce alienation, primarily because “student involvement-engagement is necessary for learning” (p. 548). Six guidelines for reducing alienation are described: voluntary participation for the students, clear and consistent educational goals, small school size, student participation in policy decisions and management, extended and cooperative relationships with school staff, and work that is meaningful to the student. The author evaluates the potential of 13 school reform strategies for affecting these conditions and concludes that “no single reform is likely to be consistent with more than three guidelines” and further

that “most of the salient reform efforts in secondary education are two-edged swords, capable either of reducing or exacerbating student alienation in school, if they affect it at all” (p. 557). Newmann’s conclusions underscore the difficulty of implementing changes that can reduce alienation, not to mention concomitant problem behavior. At the same time, a systematic approach to understanding the development of identification with school, and hence its nondevelopment in other youngsters, may guide more productive interventions.

Involvement and alienation have also been analyzed in interesting ways in the context of management research (see Kanungo, 1979, for a synthesis of this work). Rabinowitz and Hall (1977) identify two models of the “job involvement” of employees. One perspective builds entirely on the valuing aspect of identification. By this definition, the person’s self-worth is defined only by the degree of success on the job. It would be rare to find this level of involvement in school among youngsters in the United States. The second model, building on the belongingness aspect, views job involvement as “the degree to which a person is identified psychologically with his work” (Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977, p. 266). The degree of identification, in turn, determines the extent to which success or failure on the job affects the individual’s self-esteem. Thus the correlation of performance with self-esteem may be greater among youngsters highly involved in school than among those less involved. This hypothesis, with components from both the self-esteem and the identification models, is worthy of further testing.

Finally, social control theory hypothesizes “that ties (. . . links, attachments, binds, and bonds) to conventional institutions function to control or inhibit the behavioral expression of deviant motivation” (Liska & Reed, 1985, p. 547). According to Hirschi (1969), these bonds have four elements: attachment, or concern with the opinions of others; commitment, a rational decision to behave in acceptable ways; involvement, the expenditure of time and energy in institutionally encouraged behaviors; and belief, a view that the principles encouraged by the institution are valid. Social control theory emphasizes the importance of bonding to parents and to schools. When these bonds are weakened, the individual is “free” to engage in delinquent behavior.

In a classic test of the theory, Hirschi (1969) administered questionnaires to students entering junior and senior high schools to elicit their attitudes toward school, parents, and peers, as well as self-reports of delinquent acts. Attachment to parents was reflected in items asking, for example, whether the student’s mother or father knew where they were or whom they were with when away from home, and whether they shared their thoughts and feelings with their parents; attachment to school was assessed by asking if the youngster liked school or cared what the teacher thought of him or her. Responses from approximately 1,200 adolescent boys confirmed the inverse relationship of both of these dimensions with self-reported delinquency, as well as a positive association of delinquency with attachment to delinquent friends. Further, delinquency was inversely associated with items reflecting commitment to education and involvement in the one school-related activity studied, homework. The major findings were also confirmed for rural adolescents in New York State (Hindelang, 1973).

Liska and Reed (1985) fit path models to data collected on 1,886 high school boys as part of the youth in transition study (Bachman et al., 1978). Measures included items reflecting attachment to parents, attachment to school, and self-

reported delinquency. The authors conclude that “Parental attachment affects delinquency, which affects school attachment, which in turn feeds back to parental attachment” (p. 554), a cycle that is generally the same for upper class and lower class students. This analysis makes two important contributions to the basic social control perspective. First, the relationship between the formation of bonds and delinquency is not unidirectional, but these behaviors are interconnected in complex ways. Two, the analysis suggests that, contrary to the theory, school attachment does not affect delinquency directly. The authors defend this finding as resulting from their superior “crosslag and simultaneous equation estimates” (p. 558). The data “suggest that parents, not school, are the major institutional sources of delinquency control” (p. 558). This does not imply, however, that school cannot *become* a source of influence over delinquency or associated problem behavior, given the appropriate conditions.

A word about terminology is in order. Social control theory, like the other approaches, encompasses both aspects of identification with school, although its nomenclature does not have a simple correspondence with belonging or valuing. In general, the task of identifying common themes in the various literatures related to identification with school is impeded by this plethora of labels for the same or similar behaviors, and also by the imprecise use of technical terms. For example, Wehlage and Rutter (1986) summarize their major findings from the HS&B survey by concluding, “Three variables can be seen as measures of student alienation and rejection of school—Teacher Interest in Students, Effectiveness of Discipline, and Fairness of Discipline” (p. 382). Dropouts rated these aspects of their schools as being particularly poor. However, these three components do not constitute the main features of any of the usual models of alienation, and it is even difficult to see why the terms connote “rejection” as distinct from, say, “dislike.” The implications of the terms rejection and alienation exceed those of the variables actually measured.

In the same vein, Hawkins, Doueck, and Lishner (1988) describe an experiment to improve bonding among low achievers, among other outcomes. The report is filled with terms such as “commitment,” “social bonds,” and “attachment” and claims to have found a significant impact on attachment to school. Careful reading of the paper reveals that bonding was addressed by asking students eight questions: How well do you like social studies, English, math, your teachers, classes, and school, and what are your educational expectations and aspirations? The questions are traditional liking, expectations, and aspiration items that have been used often in educational research without being called “bonding.” No conceptual model is presented to explain this new terminology. To exacerbate the problem further, only three of the eight items showed significant differences between the experimental and control group. Thus, the authors’ conclusion about a significant impact on school bonding is not justified by the actual measures used or by the statistical findings. In short, we must give substantially more attention to the use of technical language if we are to make progress in understanding the social and affective outcomes of schooling.

Participation

It is clear in the preceding discussion that the extent to which a youngster identifies with school is related to such behaviors as absenteeism, truancy, dropout,

and delinquency. While identification can be seen as an internal state with two components, “belonging” and “valuing,” all of the research cited also describes external manifestations of the presence or absence of identification. The separation of the behavioral from the emotional dimension is important. The two may develop in different ways and are certainly manipulable to different extents. In fact, the ability to manipulate participation in school activities may provide a handle through which increased levels of identification may become accessible.

The literature on participation in schooling is diverse, but distinct forms of participation can be identified that are engaged in, to a greater or lesser degree, by most successful students. In the classroom, active participation is the minimal essential condition for formal learning to occur—the individual must attend to the teacher, read, study, memorize, respond to questions, complete assignments, and so on. To the extent allowed by student ability and instructional methods, performance in class is a direct outcome of student participation. The association of classroom participation with academic performance is supported consistently in empirical research (Anderson, 1975; Australian Council for Educational Research, 1974; Cobb, 1972; Kerr, Zigmond, Schaeffer, & Brown, 1986; Lahaderne, 1968; McKinney, Mason, Perkinson, & Clifford, 1975; Swift & Spivack, 1969).

This work includes several approaches to the measurement of in-class participation. For example, both McKinney et al. (1975) and Kerr et al. (1986) observed students’ activities every 10 seconds, and combined the observations into behavior scales. The McKinney framework, based on a principal components analysis of observations of second-grade students, yielded the most specific scales. The original 27 observational categories were reduced to 12 scales that include participatory measures labeled “attending,” “task-oriented interaction,” “constructive play,” and “constructive self-directed activity” and also “distractibility” and “aggression.” The 12 measures accounted for 39 percent of the variability in standardized achievement scores in the fall semester and 26 percent in the spring; unfortunately, simple correlations were not reported for the individual scales.

In contrast, the Kerr observations yielded just three scales: “class preparedness,” “exhibiting an interest in academic performance,” and “interacting appropriately with teachers.” Each comprised negative as well as positive behaviors; for example “falling asleep” was taken as an indication of less interest. All three scales discriminated among high school students deemed by their teachers to be “‘successful’ or ‘unsuccessful’ in their adjustment to the demands of high school” (Kerr et al., 1986, p. 21).

Anderson (1975) rated students in grades seven through nine as being “on task” or “off task” at each observational point and calculated the percentage of time intervals during which each student was on task. This measure yielded correlations between .59 and .66 with performance in particular mathematics units. The Classroom Process Scale used by Anderson (see Anderson & Scott, 1978a) differs from the other observational approaches in that student activity is not recorded in detail. Instead, the specific type of instruction is recorded for each time interval (i.e., the context, events, and instructional mode) and then whether the student is attending or not. The more global ratings of the type used by Anderson (1975) or Kerr et al. (1986) may be sufficient if the purpose is to identify students whose participation is unacceptably low.

Swift and Spivack (1969) demonstrated that broad participation measures can

also be obtained reliably from teachers' ratings. The researchers asked teachers to rate more than 1,500 12- to 19-year-old students in regular classes and classes for emotionally disturbed students, on 45 behaviors including "the amount and quality of verbal participation, social behavior with peers, negative behavior, attentiveness, anxiety or worry, and reaction to and relationship with the teacher" (p. 677). A factor analysis of the responses yielded 13 factors, 12 of which were significantly correlated with school performance. Five of these, representing 18 original items, are clearly in the participation domain: "verbal interaction," "rapport with teacher," "disturbance-restlessness," "quiet-withdrawn," and "poor work habits." This approach has the advantage of providing an assessment for every student in the class, a task that can only be accomplished through observation at great expense.

Participation in the primary grades may be little more than youngsters' acquiescing to the need to attend, be prepared, and respond to directions or questions initiated by the teacher; even this *level-one participation* may be resisted by some. As children mature, they may take more active roles, above and beyond the degree of involvement that is required.

At a second level of participation, students initiate questions and dialogue with the teacher and display enthusiasm by their expenditure of extra time in the classroom before, during, or after school, or by doing more classwork or homework than is required. For some students, this enthusiasm eventually expands into participation in subject-related clubs, community activities (such as science fairs, summer jobs, and internships), and the like. While there is little formal research on the ways in which academic work carries into out-of-school endeavors, both dropouts (Ekstrom et al., 1986) and delinquents (Hirschi, 1969) do less nonrequired reading and less homework than their peers.

Both the youngster's autonomy and the opportunity for participation in the school environment outside of coursework—a third level of participation—increase with age. Many students participate in the social, extracurricular, and athletic aspects of school life in addition to, or at times in place of, extensive participation in academic work. Dropouts (Ekstrom et al., 1986) and delinquents (Landers & Landers, 1978; Schafer, 1972) have been found to participate less in extracurricular activities and sports than their nondropout or nondelinquent peers. Holland and Andre (1987) recently reviewed research on participation in extracurricular activities. They concluded that participation is correlated with a range of desirable outcomes including higher levels of self-esteem and feelings of control over one's life, higher educational aspirations, higher academic ability and grades among males, lower delinquency rates, and greater involvement in political and social activity as young adults. While the correlational nature of most of this research does not permit causal inferences, Holland and Andre assert:

We believe that participation has effects because of what happens as a result of participation. . . . [P]articipation may lead adolescents to acquire new skills (organizational, planning, time-management, etc.), to develop or strengthen particular attitudes (discipline, motivation), or to receive social rewards that influence personality characteristics. (p. 447)

It is also noteworthy that "an inverse relationship between school size and participation has been demonstrated in numerous studies" (Holland & Andre, 1987, p. 446), both in urban and rural areas and particularly among lower SES students.

Extracurricular activities may have the potential for contributing to the student's sense of identification with school (Miller, Leinhardt, & Zigmond, 1987; Rutter et al. 1979; Schafer, 1972; Spady, 1971). At the least, youngsters' spending extra time in the school environment increases the likelihood of their internalizing a feeling of belongingness. Also, extracurricular and social activities may remain as the primary source of attachment to school for students whose academic work is weak. Some form of institutional encouragement may be important in maintaining this type of participation.

A fourth level of participation has been advocated, particularly for youngsters at risk: participation in governance of the school, at least as it affects the individual student. This may involve academic goal-setting and decision-making and a role in regulating the school's disciplinary system (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Reid, 1981; Schafer & Polk, 1972; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). It is clear that students who exhibit problem behavior feel alienated by a curriculum that is irrelevant to their needs and by a disciplinary system that is unfair and ineffective. Schafer and Polk (1972) propound a general principle by which student involvement in roles of power may counteract these adverse reactions:

When those in positions of superiority . . . impose their demands and authority on those in positions of inferiority without involvement of the latter in the formulation of the organization's policy, policies, objectives, or norms or in their implementation, negative orientations are likely to develop. But when involvement . . . is high, attitudes toward the organization and its objectives, demands, and norms are likely to be more positive . . . This general principle has been found to operate in schools as well as in . . . other kinds of organizations. (pp. 214–215)

To date, there is no research that documents the effects of this kind of empowerment among students at risk, without confounding "empowerment" by other simultaneous interventions.

The Developmental Cycle

The constructs "identification" and "participation" are basic components for an alternative model of dropping out. The model is described first in positive terms, i.e., as it affects successful students who do not exhibit problem behavior (see Figure 2) and then in terms of students who do not attain these goals. The basic premise for both groups 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.

On the positive side, most children begin school at age five or six as willing participants, and are drawn to participate initially by encouragement from home and by classroom activities. Over time, first-level participatory behavior continues as long as the individual has the minimal ability level needed to perform the required tasks, and as long as the instruction is clear and appropriate. That is, there must be a reasonable probability that the child will experience some degree of academic success. As the youngster progresses through the grades and autonomy increases, participation and success may be experienced in an increasing variety of ways, both within and outside the classroom. These experiences promote the youngster's sense of identification with school and still further participation. Frustration and less-than-successful experiences are inevitable for all students, but under

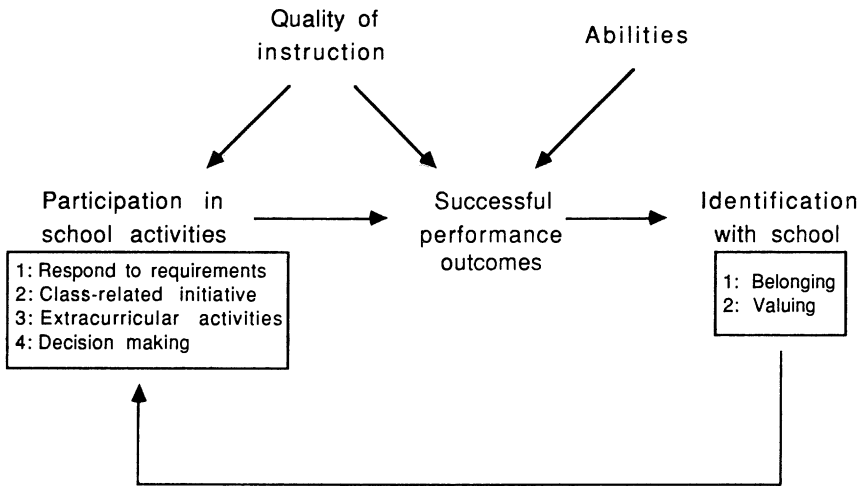


FIGURE 2. *Participation-identification model.*

ideal circumstances should not be sufficient to interrupt the self-reinforcing nature of the cycle. Students whose development follows this pattern meet the basic requisites for a successful, complete school career. Those who do not are at increased risk for emotional or physical withdrawal.

Research has shown that participation and 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 (Clyne, 1966; Reiss, 1951; Schreiber, 1964). Cervantes (1966) studied the family dynamics of a sample of 300 dropouts and graduates matched on sex, age, IQ, school, and SES. The dropouts were experiencing academic difficulty when they terminated their education but, significantly, had been involved only slightly in any school-related activities throughout their academic careers. The families of the dropouts had less intrafamily communication and fewer friends. The dropouts themselves frequently reported that there was no one in the family in whom they could confide or who accepted them as “complete persons.”

More recent work examines specific encouragements or discouragements that the youngster may receive at home (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Liska & Reed, 1985; Steinberg et al., 1984). The findings are summarized well by Ekstrom et al. (1986). From an analysis of the HS&B data, the authors found that dropouts’ homes had substantially less educational support than stayers’ did. The groups differed significantly in terms of the number of study aids available at home, opportunity for non-school-related learning, and parents’ educational expectations, interest, and amount of attention to their children’s school activities.

Youngsters lacking the necessary encouragement at home may arrive at school predisposed to nonparticipation and nonidentification; they do not fully enter the cycle depicted in Figure 2. While exceptional teachers may engage the interest of some of these children, others may begin to resist first-level participation, becoming restless or distracted, avoiding the teachers’ attention or failing to respond appro-

priately to questions. In later years, as opportunities for participation increase, these youngsters may remain withdrawn. Not only are they less likely than their peers to manifest second-level participatory behavior, but minimal compliance or total noncompliance with basic course requirements may persist. Students may refuse to participate in class discussions, turn in assignments late, or arrive late or unprepared for class. As academic requirements become more extensive and school more evaluative, this behavior can only result in course grades that are marginal or failing. These youngsters, unlike their more successful peers, do not have the encouragement to continue participating that is provided by positive outcomes. If this pattern is allowed to continue, identification with school becomes increasingly unlikely.

By high school, with the youngster's greater autonomy, other factors contribute to the movement away from school. For one, extreme forms of withdrawal may come to constitute behavior problems, such as skipping classes, getting stoned, or being disruptive. The attention of school personnel must of course be directed to these concerns, perhaps in lieu of the student's academic work. Also, the school may "reject" the student, either because of his or her behavior or grades, or both. Policies that exclude the youngster from extracurricular participation, detentions that don't involve school-related work, and suspensions all make it more difficult for the individual to maintain regular contact with the school environment. For a student in this situation, dropping out may seem to be a very small step.

Not all students who drop out experience this debilitating sequence of events. Some individuals make carefully reasoned decisions that the alternative—work, family care, and so on—is the best course to pursue at this time in their lives. Others may begin school participating fully but encounter incidents along the way that cause them to withdraw. Elliott, Ageton, and Canter (1979) emphasize that only a developmental perspective is able to distinguish "youths with strong bonds which subsequently become attenuated. . . from those who never developed strong bonds" (p. 9). Nevertheless, without a consistent pattern of participation in school activities, and possibly without the reinforcement provided by academic success experiences, it is unlikely that the youngster will come to identify with school. The emotional ingredient needed to maintain the student's involvement, and even to overcome the occasional adversity, is then lacking.

It is essential that nonparticipation be recognized in the earliest grade possible and that some form of institutional encouragement be provided. There is evidence that early school experiences are related to behavior problems in later years. Lloyd (1978) collected third-grade information for 788 boys and 744 girls, of whom 24.8 percent and 18.5 percent, respectively, eventually left school without graduating. Dropouts and graduates were already significantly different in third grade in terms of course grades, grade retentions, and standardized achievement scores.

Spivack and Cianci (1987), reporting on a longitudinal study of 611 inner-city school children, found significant relationships between behavior ratings in kindergarten through grade three and misconduct in the classroom at ages 14 and 15, school disciplinary measures, and police contacts by age 17. The more significant early ratings included "classroom disturbance," "impatience," "disrespect-defiance," "irrelevant responsiveness," and "inattentive-withdrawn." The longer diagnosis and intervention are delayed, the greater the barriers to change are likely to become.

The model depicted in Figure 2 does not provide specific remedies to prevent

students from dropping out, but it does identify a principle: Intervention efforts at all ages should be directed toward increasing and maintaining students' participation levels. Existing research suggests some important starting points. Preschool education such as that exemplified by the Perry Project (Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984) can be seen as facilitating extra participation during the youngest years that evolved into other forms at later ages, e.g., better attendance records, more homework, talking with parents about school, and sports. Also, by age 19, the preschool group exhibited greater commitment to schooling by giving more positive answers to 14 of 16 questions that cover both the belonging and valuing aspects of identification. A more detailed analysis of students' participation during the project's elementary years would have been desirable.

Anderson and Scott (1978b) have documented that different teaching methods in themselves produce different levels of student involvement. In an observational study of seven 9th through 12th grade classes, the authors recorded the type of teaching method that was used in each time segment (lecture, classroom discourse, seatwork, group work, or audiovisual) and the proportion of time segments in which subjects were engaged in task-relevant behavior. The major conclusion to emerge was that

Students who have low aptitude and low academic self-concepts seem to be most affected by variations in teaching method. Teachers working with this type of student should consider emphasizing classroom discourse and seatwork methods. (p. 56)

Teaching methods can be evaluated in terms of the number of students in a class who are participating, as well as the typical or average mode of participation. Students who are not as involved in classroom process may not be as likely to be noticed by the teacher or an observer as those who are more active. Adams and Biddle (1970) note that there is a T-shaped "action zone" of seats that account for virtually all pupil-initiated verbal responses: "The 'fringe dwellers' on the outskirts of the room are not directly involved in the educational transaction" (p. 51).

Kashti, Arieli, and Harel (1984), making ethnographic observations of interactions in three classrooms, describe seating arrangements as a type of negotiated agreement between students and their teacher. "The pupils are seated to create differentiation and separation between good and weak pupils. . . the strong pupils gain most benefit and the 'contract' includes a rule whereby the weaker pupils allow the teacher to teach the good ones" (p. 177). As a first step to increasing level-one participation, classroom arrangements and teaching practices must be reorganized so that even students with little self-motivation are required to become actively involved.

Participation in social activities, extracurricular activities, athletics, and student government offer alternative routes through which a student having academic difficulty can maintain contact with the school environment. Punitive policies such as declaring youngsters "ineligible" because of grades, or subjecting them to "no-pass-no-play" rules, may be counterproductive. Miller et al. (1987), in an ethnographic study of social and academic participation among high school students, describe "dropping out as a process of gradual disengagement from school" (p. 12). The authors conclude it is likely that "the student's engagement in at least one subcomponent . . . is necessary (and may be sufficient) for keeping at-risk students

in school” (pp. 5–6). Nevertheless, there is little research to help us design interventions to increase participation at levels two, three, or four. This is an important area for further work.

Comparison of Models

In a recent review of the status of research on dropping out, Rumberger (1987) emphasizes the importance of studying the long-term processes that culminate in a youngster’s leaving school, rather than “structural characteristics” such as SES or race. The author suggests, “In fact, dropping out itself might better be viewed as a process of disengagement from school, perhaps for either social or academic reasons” (p. 111). The participation-identification model offers one such perspective for understanding dropping out, and for guiding further process-oriented research. It explains dropout in terms of a behavioral antecedent—participation—and a psychological condition—identification with school. Active participation in school may take many forms, both within and outside the classroom. Four levels of participation are identified, of which the first—responding to teacher-initiated directions and class requirements—is fundamental. Other forms are likely to be seen as students’ autonomy increases with age. Identification with school, comprising both a sense of belongingness and valuing school-related outcomes, develops gradually. It predisposes the youngster to continue to participate, even if the outcomes are not always evaluated positively. Nonidentification predisposes the individual not to continue to participate in school-related activities, leading to less successful outcomes and to emotional and physical withdrawal.

While the model does not explain all instances in which youngsters leave school before graduation, it does portray the total withdrawal of some individuals as a “process of disengagement” over time, and not as a phenomenon that occurs in a single day or even a single school year. The same paradigm may be useful in understanding other problem behaviors that are seen, to varying degrees, as forms of withdrawal from school, i.e., absenteeism, truancy, disruptive behavior, or juvenile delinquency (Hawkins & Lam, 1987). It may also call attention to forms of nonparticipation—among students from all grades, SES, and ability levels—that do *not* necessarily culminate in behavior problems. Some individuals endure most or all 12 years of schooling at minimal participation levels, taking the minimally required courses and electives, and settling for just those grades necessary to keep them in school. The cost in terms of reduced educational benefit is difficult to assess but is also worthy of further research.

There are some similarities and some important differences between the participation-identification paradigm and the classic frustration-esteem model. The similarities become more apparent if the positively worded model in Figure 2 is portrayed in terms of negative behaviors and consequences. Figure 3 is much like Figure 1 except for the implied starting point—school failure in the esteem model and nonparticipation in the participation-identification model. Both models identify poor school performance as an important antecedent of dropping out, and both models have a behavioral component. In the frustration-esteem paradigm, it is the specific act of leaving school. In the participation-identification model, it is varying degrees of nonparticipation, of which leaving school altogether is the extreme.

The analysis of participation is also a distinguishing characteristic of the newer model. Behavioral dimensions are identified that can be manipulated directly in

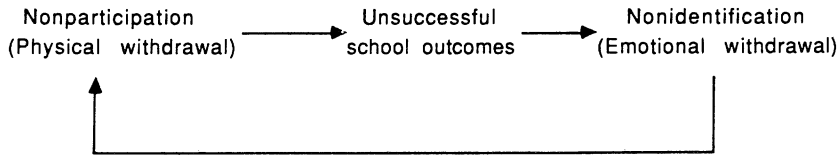


FIGURE 3. *Participation-identification model: Withdrawal cycle.*

intervention efforts; the model is formulated in positive terms (Figure 2) to facilitate such efforts further. The frustration-esteem model, formulated as a set of negative experiences—failure, lowered esteem, dropout—gives limited guidance for research into the questions, “How can we prevent failure or raise youngsters’ esteem levels?” or “What dimensions of student behavior or school process should we examine next?”

In fact, researchers addressing these questions are giving increased attention to students’ emotional and physical involvement with, rather than withdrawal from, school. For example, referring to at-risk students in general, Wehlage (1986) asserts, “The school must find curricular experiences that can both retain student interest and engagement on the one hand, and result in worthwhile learning and development on the other” (p. 25). The author emphasizes that the same curriculum and organizational structure that is effective with more engaged, successful students may not be equally appropriate for those at risk.

Finally, both models recognize the importance of the individual’s psychological response to events at school, in the form of self-esteem in one and identification in the other. These have been found to be intercorrelated in the few studies that assessed both. Gold and Mann (1984) obtained a correlation of .28 ($p < .01$) between students’ optimism about their academic prospects and commitment to the role of student; the optimism scale contains items very much like measures of academic self-concept. Cohen (1974) studied 244 youngsters in the fourth year of a British secondary school and obtained a correlation of $-.38$ ($p < .01$) between measures of alienation and academic self-concept and $-.27$ ($p < .01$) between alienation and general self-esteem.

The two constructs also differ in important ways, beginning with the nature of an individual’s self-perceptions. “Self-esteem is a *personal* judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself” (Coopersmith, 1981, p. 5). The focus is on “self,” whether it is “self” seen globally or with regard to specific abilities. General self-esteem is closely linked to other affective states, including total expressed affect, happiness, anxiety, and depression (Coopersmith, 1981; Rosenberg, 1979). Referent-specific self-esteem undoubtedly shares some of these same linkages. Thus, attempts to increase academic self-esteem, especially by manipulating circumstances external to the individual, may face resistance from a number of other internal forces.

Identification, in contrast, denotes perceptions of congruence of the self with an external object (e.g. parents, a social group, or institution) in the form of shared values or sense of belonging. The absence of such perceptions could clearly cause an individual to withdraw from school. Institutional changes or changes in the nature of the individual’s involvement, however, should directly affect the extent of student-school congruence and, subsequently, his or her perceptions.

Research on general self-esteem suggests a different role for this variable in the context of the participation-identification model—as a secondary outcome related to “Successful performance outcomes” and “Identification with school.” Both Byrne’s (1984) review of self-concept research and the large-scale empirical analysis by Pottebaum, Keith, and Ehly (1986) conclude that the relationship of self-concept with academic achievement is mediated by other, yet undiscovered, variables. The valuing aspect of identification with school may be one important mediator.

Data obtained from deviant and nondeviant youngsters support the premise that referent-specific self-esteem is realized only when the referent is valued by the individual (Coopersmith, 1981; Kaplan, 1980; Rosenberg, 1979). Rosenberg (1979) asserts: “One cannot appreciate the significance of a specific self-concept component for global self-esteem if one fails to recognize the importance or centrality of that component to the individual” (p. 73). The association of performance outcomes and school identification with academic self-esteem remains to be examined. It is not a necessary assumption of the participation model, however, that reduced self-esteem follows from poor school performance or that it is necessary to modify an individual’s esteem level in order to prevent him or her from dropping out.

A Research Agenda

The participation-identification formulation raises a number of significant issues for further research.

1. *How can problematic levels of nonparticipation and nonidentification with school be assessed?* Observational measures and teacher ratings of level-one participation are described in an earlier section. Similar methods have been used in the study of “time on task” or “engaged time” (Denham & Lieberman, 1980), although the focus here is on particular assignments rather than the students’ usual patterns of behavior. An elegant conceptual analysis to further this work has been available for years but has not been recognized for the role it can play in explaining learning outcomes. Handbook II of the *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1956) lists as its most elemental behaviors: “Awareness” of material to be learned, “Willingness to receive” course content and teacher direction, “Controlled or selected attention,” “Acquiescence in responding,” “Willingness to respond,” and “Satisfaction in response.” This analysis, plus the measurement examples given in the *Taxonomy*, form a basis for further development of both paper-and-pencil and observational instruments.

Additional methods of assessment are needed that include measures of time and effort devoted to school-related activities more globally. These may include attendance information, extra time spent in school, and school-related time spent at home and elsewhere, as well as participation in extracurricular activities, athletics, and school governance. The literature reviewed for this paper does not include any systematic discussion of participatory behavior defined this broadly.

Finally, improved measures of both aspects of identification with school are essential. The instruments described in an earlier section to measure commitment, alienation, and social bonds form a foundation from which refined measures can be derived. Additional direction is found in the extensive management-related literature on “job involvement.” For example, Lodahl and Kejner (1965) developed a self-report measure of job involvement, beginning with 110 potentially relevant “agree-disagree” statements. After an extensive process of item elimination, the 40

statements that remained were administered to a sample of 137 nursing personnel in a large hospital. Factor analysis of the responses yielded five factors, four of which reflect the presence or absence of identification: "Indifference," "High involvement with work," "Duty," and "Avoidance." The fifth factor contains items that are largely participatory, such as "I enjoy discussing my work with people outside the company" (p. 28).

Edwards and Waters (1980) adapted some of the Lodahl-Kejner items to "academic job involvement" and administered these plus a semantic differential scale to 223 college students. The students were asked to respond to the stimulus phrase, "Your course at Ohio University." A factor analysis of the semantic differential yielded three factors, of which the first reflected "psychological identification with courses." The adjective pairs that contributed to this factor were "serious-frivolous," "concerned-unconcerned," "involved-uninvolved," and "identify with-detached from" (p. 1264). Due to their complexity, items such as these could only be used with older students, however.

Kanungo (1982) reviewed the psychometric properties of these approaches to the measurement of job involvement—the questionnaire and semantic differential techniques, plus a graphic technique that might be used with younger children. In this, the subject is shown multiple pictures of a person and a work object such as a desk; the distance between the person and the desk vary from one picture to the next, from no overlap to total overlap. The respondent chooses the picture that represents his or her own feelings most appropriately. The author concludes, "Results reveal that questionnaire and graphic measures pass the tests of reliability and validity" (p. 341).

2. *What are the developmental patterns in participation and identification that are common to students who do, or do not, exhibit behavior problems such as dropping out?* To date, there has been no developmental study of participation in learning or of identification with school. Cross-sectional and longitudinal research is needed to document (a) the form and extent of participation among students as they mature through the grades, (b) the ways in which participation and school outcomes are translated into levels of identification with school, (c) the role of successful outcomes and identification in mediating further participation, and (d) the relationship of these two central constructs to other correlates of school performance, including educational aspirations, expectations, attitudes toward school and school subjects, and academic self-concept. This research will benefit from a comparison of successful and unsuccessful students in particular.

It may be tempting to conceive of participation as a matter of degree—i.e., more or less—and to correlate this with school outcomes. It is recommended that this temptation be resisted, however, in favor of a search for threshold levels of participation below which positive outcomes and identification are unlikely to occur.

3. *What institutional experiences increase the likelihood that identification will take place among students at risk for withdrawal?* Rates of dropping out, like other problem behaviors, vary dramatically from school to school (Hammack, 1986). It is likely, however, that efforts to reduce these outcomes will have to operate in the face of constraints that cannot be easily altered or removed. The populations attending some schools will always present greater challenges than those at others,

and the strong association of dropout or delinquency with that of one's peers is likely to continue as a pervasive influence. Also, students who disrupt or leave school may not share a common achievement orientation with their more successful peers, even in the early grades.

Glasser (1986) asserts that student behavior is directed toward satisfying five needs: life and reproduction, belonging or love, power, freedom, and fun. Elliott et al. (1966), describing intellectually capable dropouts, suggest "that the beliefs and values of lower-class culture are focused upon such things as: avoidance of trouble . . . development of physical prowess . . . skill in duping or outsmarting others . . . a philosophy which emphasizes . . . a minimum of personal control over one's destiny" (p. 181). School activities such as reading, studying and completing assignments or tests do not present themselves inherently as means for satisfying these needs!

For youngsters who are not involved, it is essential that schooling come to be seen as important to survival and a way to achieve some degree of belonging and power. Increasing participation and developing school-related goals among younger children are likely to be mutually reinforcing processes. Among adolescents, demonstrating that school has something desirable to offer may require different curricular offerings and reward structures than the usual high school program.

The literature on interventions for at-risk students is largely of two sorts. On the one hand, many dimensions thought to be important in maintaining youngsters' participation in school have been suggested, often with little or no supporting evidence. In the classroom, these include (a) positive teacher attitudes regarding the potential for success among marginal students (Elliott et al., 1966; Rutter et al., 1979; Schafer & Polk, 1972; Steinberg et al., 1984; Wehlage, 1986); (b) teaching practices that involve students in the learning process, more than traditional approaches that tend to isolate those at risk (Hamilton, 1986; Kelly, 1974; Schafer, Olexa, & Polk, 1972; Wehlage, 1986), with the possibility that cooperative learning strategies may be promising here (Slavin, 1983); and (c) a diversified curriculum with objectives that are relevant to the needs of these students and that are neither too easy nor too difficult to master; a vocational component may be particularly important (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1987; Gold & Mann, 1984; Hamilton, 1986; Rutter et al., 1979; Wehlage, 1983). Positive faculty attitudes and teaching practices that maximize student participation are among the major characteristics of "effective schools" in both urban and suburban setting (Rogus, 1983). At the same time, the effective-schools research emphasizes the importance of students' achieving basic mathematics and reading skills, quite in contrast to the more divergent set of outcomes recommended here. These two views need to be reconciled.

At the institutional level, strong arguments have been made for the importance of (d) small and perhaps separate schools for students at risk, to increase participation rates (Holland & Andre, 1987; Newmann, 1981; Wehlage, 1986); (e) flexible school rules that do not alienate students and disciplinary procedures that are seen as fair and effective (Gold & Mann, 1984; Newmann, 1981; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986); (f) an evaluation and reward structure that is compatible with the abilities and interests of the students (Natriello, 1984); and (g) positions of responsibility for students—i.e., participation in decision making (Newmann, 1981; Reid, 1981; Rutter et al., 1979; Schafer & Polk, 1972).

These seven processes are intended both to facilitate participation among an increased number of students and to reduce the barriers—perceived or real—between the school and students who become alienated.

Other intervention literature describes the many programs that have been tried with students who drop out or exhibit other problem behavior. Reviews of multiple programs are given in Bickel, Bond, and LeMahieu (1986); Gottfredson (1988); Hamilton (1986); Lotto (1982); Natriello, Pallas, McDill, McPartland, and Royster (1988); and Slavin and Madden (1987), among others. It is unfortunate for scientific purposes that most interventions encompass multiple manipulations, that the manipulations are not always described clearly, and that programs are not usually evaluated in a manner that allows a conclusion about any single dimension that may have been tried. These features make it difficult, at best, to replicate even the most effective of programs, and impossible to isolate those factors that were responsible for positive outcomes.²

At the same time, there are now sufficient published reports to undertake an extensive assessment of the *multiple features* of each program, from reports in which they are comprehensible, and to categorize them using a taxonomy such as the seven-part outline above. Even a global meta-analysis such as this should reveal the organizational, instructional, and interpersonal processes that are most likely to increase students' participation and identification levels and to decrease the chance that they will leave school early.

Notes

¹ Because of the scope of this paper, the many issues germane to the definition of dropout are not reviewed. In terms of Pallas and Verdugo's (1986) typology, we refer only to the generic use of the term; i.e., a dropout is an individual who stops attending school, whether or not he or she reenters at a later time.

² To give examples would serve no constructive purpose.

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