



2020

A journey of determination and hope: Returning to high school after dropping out

Ernest Garcia

University of the Pacific, e_garcia5@u.pacific.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uop_etds



Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Garcia, Ernest. (2020). *A journey of determination and hope: Returning to high school after dropping out*. University of the Pacific, Dissertation. https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uop_etds/3672

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of the Pacific Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact mgibney@pacific.edu.

A JOURNEY OF DETERMINATION AND HOPE:
RETURNING TO HIGH SCHOOL AFTER DROPPING OUT

By

Ernest D. Garcia, J.D.

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Benerd School of Education
Educational Administration and Leadership

University of the Pacific
Stockton, California

2020

A JOURNEY OF DETERMINATION AND HOPE:
RETURNING TO HIGH SCHOOL AFTER DROPPING OUT

By

Ernest D. Garcia

APPROVED BY:

Dissertation Advisor: Antonio Serna, Ed.D.

Committee Member: Elizabeth Keithcart, Ed.D.

Committee Member: Dante Alvarez, Ed.D.

Senior Associate Dean of Benerd College: Linda Webster, Ph.D.

A JOURNEY OF DETERMINATION AND HOPE:
RETURNING TO HIGH SCHOOL AFTER DROPPING OUT

Copyright 2020

By

Ernest D. Garcia

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family members who have supported my endeavors for many years and decades. To my Mom and Dad, who although they had no concept of what earning a Doctor of Education meant, nevertheless supported me in my journey. They instilled in me the value of hard work and of never giving up. This dissertation is dedicated to my grandkids, Maxeo, Lilia, Caelen, and Leona. This is for them and all children. Hopefully, my endeavors to change education will filter down for their benefit.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first must acknowledge my committee members who were supportive and helped me complete this dissertation journey. My committee chair, Dr. Antonio Serna, who has assisted me for many years as I matriculated through the administration program and then the doctoral program. I thank him for his time and patience with me. I also acknowledge my committee member, Dr. Elizabeth Keithcart, for her thorough analysis of my work and for her many suggestions. And I acknowledge Dr. Dante Alvarez for his thoughtful insights.

A JOURNEY OF DETERMINATION AND HOPE:
RETURNING TO HIGH SCHOOL AFTER DROPPING OUT

Abstract

By Ernest Garcia

University of the Pacific
2019

This phenomenological study explored the reasons and attitudes of people who dropped out of high school and then later returned to complete their high school educations. In order to gather data for this study, interviews were conducted with eleven students who returned to complete their high school education after having earlier dropped out. An analysis was completed regarding the reasons that led those high school students to drop out of high school, and of the motivations and struggles that led them back to school.

Individuals who return to high school and earn a high school credential avail themselves of additional opportunities, such as college or vocational training. It is undeniable that increasing the high school graduation rate in the United States would be beneficial to the country. Not only would an increase in the graduation rate be good for society in general, but graduation would also benefit each graduate on a personal level, even if he or she graduated a year or more after their initial cohort. Consequently, given the national dropout problem, the purpose of this study was to describe the experiences, motivations, and struggles of individuals who dropped out of high school and then returned to complete their high school education. Hopefully, this study will result in a better understand of their paths and ultimately reduce high school dropout rates.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	10
Introduction.....	10
Background.....	10
Description of the Research Problem.....	10
Purpose of the Study.....	11
Research Questions.....	11
Significance of the Study.....	12
Theoretical or Conceptual Framework.....	13
Description of the Study/Delimitations of the Study.....	16
Chapter Summary.....	16
Definitions.....	16
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature.....	18
Introduction.....	18
Purpose of the Study.....	18
Research Questions.....	18
Consequences of Dropping Out of School.....	18
Reasons for Dropping Out of School.....	22
Reasons for Returning to School.....	27
Conclusion.....	30
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	32
Introduction.....	32
Methodology.....	32

Methods.....	34
Description of Respondents.....	38
Data Collection Strategies.....	38
Data Analysis.....	39
Trustworthiness/Validity.....	42
Role of the Researcher.....	44
Limitations.....	46
Chapter Summary.....	48
Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings.....	49
Introduction.....	49
Participants.....	50
Reasons Students Dropped Out of School.....	58
The Decision to Come Back to Complete High School.....	64
Reasons Why the Participants Wanted to Graduate from High School.....	67
Factors Contributing to Success.....	70
Advice to Others.....	71
Summary.....	72
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	74
Overview of the Study.....	74
Discussion of the Findings Relative to the Literature Review.....	75
Findings.....	75
Recommendations.....	79
Recommendations for Further Research.....	84

Closing Summary.....86

Concluding Remarks.....87

References.....89

Appendices

 A. Student Referral Information.....101

 B. Interview Questions.....102

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This study examined the lives of eleven young adults who have returned to complete their high school education after having previously dropped out. It explored the reasons why the students dropped out of school and their motivations to return to school and complete their high school education.

Background

Today, a high school diploma is vital for survival in the world. Without a high school diploma, a person's life will be bleak in terms of financial health and general wellbeing. Despite this fact, the national average graduation rate for 2014 was just 82.3 percent (GradNation, 2016). Among the students who drop out of school, only 31% will re-enroll in high school and earn a diploma (Barrat, Fong & Shirk, 2008). The more that we learn about students who drop out but later return to school, the more informed administrators and policymakers will be in providing relevant and effective programs for the students who return (Berliner, Barrat, Fong & Shirk, 2008).

Description of the Research Problem

While many studies on the high school dropout problem exist, few have focused on the students themselves. There is a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of students who have dropped out of school and then returned to complete their high school education. (Berliner, Barrat, Fong & Shirk, 2008; Brown, 2010). Whereas there is a wealth of literature regarding dropout prevention, very little has been reported about recovering students who previously dropped out (Catterall, 2011).

Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011) noted that most of the studies on alternative education schools and returning dropouts use quasi-experimental designs. However, few studies have sought the opinions and perceptions of the students themselves through the use of qualitative research methods. According to Morrissette (2018), who reviewed the literature, “it was discovered that the lived experiences of young people who leave school early and eventually return to pursue their high school diploma remained unexplored” (p. 423). According to Martinez (2015), “there is a paucity of research exploring the motivations of dropouts contemplating a return and even more limited research concerning what factors influenced persistence toward graduation” (p. 3).

Rarely are non-graduates contacted for information about their academic histories. (Gallagher, 2002). Little “attention has been given in research to the learners who drop out but later return to the school system and their subsequent experiences in these schools” (Brown, 2010). Further, Brown (2010) stated that “education leaders need to track dropouts and understand their experiences in order to assist them re-integrate with educators and other learners (p. 56).”

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences that motivated individuals who had dropped out of high school to re-enroll and complete their high school education.

Research Questions

What experiences contribute to the decision of a student who has previously dropped out of school to re-enroll in school and complete their high school education? What causes students to abandon high school in the first place? What experiences do such students have during the

period when they are not in school? In what ways are students who have dropped out motivated to re-enroll?

Significance of the Study

According to the National Dropout Prevention Center (2007), students who drop out of school will cost the United States \$200 billion over their lifetimes through the more considerable amounts of public assistance they are likely to require. If the high school graduation rate were to increase to 90%, this country would gain \$7.2 billion in annual earnings and a \$1.1 billion increase in federal tax revenue. Furthermore, it was reported that the national average earnings for high school graduates were \$8,000 more annually than for those who did not complete high school (GradNation, 2016). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2015) report claims that three-quarters of the inmates in state prison did not finish high school and that high school dropouts, when employed, earn \$8,000 less than high school graduates. Rumberger and Lim's (2008) study estimated that the government would save more than \$200,000 for each additional high school graduate. Thus, if the high school dropout rate were cut in half, society at large would save more than 45 billion dollars for each group of students who should have graduated in their given grade. Those who do not earn a high school diploma are much more likely to experience unemployment and are more likely to receive a lower annual wage (Franko & Patel, 2011).

Those who return to school and earn a high school credential are also more likely to avail themselves of additional opportunities, such as college, vocational training, and higher-paying jobs. It is undeniable that increasing the high school graduation rate would be beneficial to the country. The increased graduation rate would have positive social and economic effects even if students graduated many years after their initial cohort. Not only would an increase in the

graduation rate be good for society in general, but graduation would also be beneficial to each graduate on a personal level, again, even if that person graduated a year or more after his or her initial cohort.

Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

This study will utilize the Social Cognitive Learning Theory first articulated by Albert Bandura (Nabavi, 2012). According to Bandura (1974), people as social beings observe the conduct of others and note the occasions when their conduct is rewarded, disregarded, or punished. Bandura (1974) believed that behavior is often influenced by its consequences and that people can learn new information and new behaviors by watching other people. While observing the behaviors of other people, people can develop similar behaviors (Nabavi, 2012). Social learning, imitation, and behavior modeling will occur if a person observes positive desired outcomes as a result of the behaviors of others (Nabavi, 2012; Fryling, Johnston and Hayes, 2011).

Bandura (1999) believed that people learn by experiencing the effects of their actions and by the power of social modeling. People focus almost exclusively on learning from positive and negative response consequences from their actions and behaviors. When people see others achieve desired outcomes by their efforts, those observers will expect to secure similar benefits from comparable performances. To a significant extent, behavior decisions depend on a person's long-term goals (Zimmerman, 1989).

According to the Social Cognitive Learning Theory, behavior is influenced by expectations of future consequences and responses based on a person's current situation or situations. They experience vicariously the experiences of others' consequences and expectations, which impacts their decisions on how to behave (Nabavi, 2012). The phenomena

of the Social Cognitive Learning Theory explains the process whereby individuals acquire the society's norms of thought and action. According to the theory, people regulate their behavior partly by expectations that result from the outcomes of their behavior. In other words, courses of actions that are likely to produce positive outcomes are more likely to be adapted and used. As a result, people weigh their outcomes by those outcomes accruing to others for similar performances (Bandura, 1999).

A central tenant of the social cognitive learning theory is the concept of self-efficacy which states that one's belief that one has the ability or capacity to execute a behavior successfully will impact a person's tendency to engage in activities based on their sense of competence and past successes (Nabavi, 2012). Self-efficacy includes not only a person's estimate of the degree to which his or her effort will pay off, but it also incorporates that person's ability, adaptability, creatively and capacity to perform in the situational context that the person finds himself or herself in (Locke and Latham, 1990). According to Bandura (1999), unless people believe that they can produce the desired result by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. In other words, if people are persuaded that they have what it takes to succeed, they will then exert more effort and will be more perseverant than if they have self-doubts (Bandura, 1999).

In conclusion, Bandura (1999) believed that "social systems that cultivate generalizable competencies, instill a robust sense of efficacy, create opportunity structures, provide aidful resources, and allow room for self-directedness increase the chances that people will realize what they wish to become" (p. 65).

In this study, the social cognitive learning experiences of the participants was explored by using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that is

used to describe how human beings experience a particular phenomenon. A phenomenological study attempts to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings, and responses to a particular situation (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, 2019).

Researchers using the phenomenological methodology attempt to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings, and responses to a particular situation (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, 2019). It allows the researcher to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and feelings of those people who have experienced or lived the phenomenon or situation of interest. Therefore, phenomenology can be defined as the direct investigation and description of events as consciously experienced by people living those experiences (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, 2019; Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological research is typically conducted through the use of in-depth interviews of small samples of participants. By studying the perspectives of multiple participants, a researcher can begin to make generalizations regarding what it is like to experience a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those that have lived the experience (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, 2019; Creswell, 2013).

In this study, students were interviewed in order to understand the circumstances that led them to drop out of high school. Phenomenology was used to explore their lives as they struggled while out of school, and to determine what led them to come back and finish their high school education. According to Creswell (2013), “a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76).

Description of the Study/Delimitations of the Study

This study consists of five chapters. The first chapter includes this introduction. Chapter Two presents a review of the relevant literature dealing with high school dropouts and their return to school. Chapter Three delineates the research design and methodology of this study, including the determination of the sample, the instruments used to gather the data, and the procedures that were followed. An analysis of the data and a discussion of the data are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five includes the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study. Following Chapter Five, references and appendixes can be found.

Chapter Summary

Further research is needed to address the dropout crisis facing this nation. This study will focus on those individuals who have returned to school so that we, as educators and policymakers, can hear the students' experiences in their voices. By listening to their stories, high school administrators can better understand their reasons for leaving school and their motivations to return to complete their high school education. Hearing those voices will hopefully enable educators to entice more students to return and also help administrators develop effective programs to prevent students from leaving school early.

Definitions

Drop-out is a term that refers to a student who leaves school prior to receiving a high school certification or before completing the requirements to earn a high school diploma.

Graduation rate measures the percentage of public-school students who attain a regular high school diploma within four years of starting 9th grade for the first time.

Re-enroll refers to the process used by a district and a dropout to re-enter high school or a GED program.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This study examined the lives of eleven young adults who returned to complete their high school education after having earlier dropped out of school. It explored the reasons why the students dropped out of school and their motivations to return to school and complete their high school education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences that motivated individuals who had dropped out of high school to re-enroll in high school to complete their high school education.

Research Questions

What elements contribute to a student who has dropped out of school deciding to re-enroll in school and complete his or her high school education? What caused that student to drop out of school in the first place? What experiences did that student live through while he or she was not in school? In what ways are students who have dropped out of school motivated to re-enroll?

Consequences of Dropping Out of School

The Dropout Rate

Nearly one-third of public high school students and almost one-half of all minorities do not complete high school (Catterall, 2011; Hall, 2011). According to Catterall (2011), 70% of high school students in the United States do not graduate on time, which is considered to be four years after entering high school. Only 86% of high school students complete high school

(Morse, Anderson, Christenson and Lehr, 2004). In 2011, Hall found that every year, one in five students drop out of high school. Gottlieb (2015) stated that in the United States, nearly one-third of students do not graduate from high school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the adjusted cohort rate of public high school students who graduate on time (i.e., four years after starting the 9th grade for the first time) with a regular diploma during the years 2015-2016 was 84%. For Blacks, the percentage was 72 percent, and Hispanics, 79% (McFarland, Cui, Rathbun & Holmes, 2018).

When the dropout rate is expressed in terms of numbers, it is estimated that 3.5 million to 6 million people between the ages of 16 and 24 are high school dropouts (Catterall, 2011). Hawkins, Jacquard, and Needle, (2013) state that more than one million students drop out every year, with the dropout rate being the highest for Latinos. On a daily basis, over 7,000 students drop out of school (Iachini, Buettner, Anderson-Butcher, & Reno, 2013). Between October 2015 and October 2016, approximately 532,000 15- to 24-year-olds left school without obtaining a high school credential. These event dropouts accounted for 4.8 percent of the 11.2 million 15 to 18 year-olds enrolled in grades 10 through 12 in 2016. The event dropout rate is the percentage of high school students who left school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next school year without earning a high school diploma or an alternative credential. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, “the status dropout rate in 2016 was higher for 16- to 24-year-olds who were American Indian/ Alaska Native (11.0 percent), Hispanic (9.1 percent), Black (7.0 percent), and Pacific Islander (6.9 percent) than for those who were of two or more races (4.8 percent), White (4.5 percent), and Asian (2.0 percent)” (2018, p. 1). Status dropout rates are the percentages of individuals in a given age range who are not in school and have not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential.

The dropout rate is even worse for minorities, special education students, and those from lower socioeconomic groups. Students from the lowest-income families were approximately eight times more likely to be dropouts than those from the highest income families (Johnson, 2007) (see also Bickerstaff, 2010; Englund, Egeland, & Collins, 2008; Fryer, 2014). Students with disabilities are twice as likely to drop out compared to those without disabilities (Dunn, Chambers & Rabren, 2004). There is also an overrepresentation of minorities, males, and non-native English speakers among those who drop out of high school (Gallagher, 2002). Overall, Williams (2017) found that “a disproportionate number of dropouts are from economically disadvantaged and minority groups” (p. 1). As these vulnerable populations continue to be impacted, it is especially important to conduct a study that gives them a voice.

According to the statistics available from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09), which surveyed 9th graders in 2009 and again in 2012, 90.5% of students continued to be students in 2012, 2.7% were considered dropouts and 6.8 % were stopouts (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Dropouts were defined as those 2009 ninth-graders who had not completed high school or an alternative program as of Spring 2012, and stopouts were defined as those 2009 9th graders who had experienced a four-week or more protracted absence from high school between Fall 2009 and Spring 2012 but who were enrolled in school as of Spring 2012.

Consequences For the Individual Who Drops Out of School

There are many dire consequences for the individual who drops out of school. In general, high school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, incarcerated, and dependent on the government (Hall, 2011). The earnings of women who drop out of high school are only 65 percent of the earnings of female high school graduates. The incomes of men who drop out are

slightly less than 70 percent of those men who are high school graduates (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). According to data from the Census Bureau's 2016 Current Population Survey, the median earnings of adults ages 25 through 34 who worked fulltime and who had not completed high school was \$25,400. Those full-time workers who had finished high school earned \$31,800 (McFarland et al., 2018).

Lifetime costs due to lower earnings have been estimated at \$243,000 to \$388, 000 per person (Englund et al., 2008; Franklin, Streeter, Kim, & Tripodi, 2007; Fryer, 2014; Hawkins et al., 2013). Catterall (2011) found that the lifetime earning costs for high school dropouts was \$265,000 for males and \$203,000 for females.

Closely related to the consequence of earning fewer wages is that of employment in general. Unemployment is much higher for those who never graduate with a high school diploma (Li, 2007; McCaul, Donaldson, Jr., Coladarci & Davis, 1992). Li (2007) also found that those who drop out are more likely to be on welfare. Those who drop out of school can expect lower wages, higher unemployment, and more dependency on welfare and other social services (Wayman, 2001).

Dropping out of high school has an adverse effect on a person's health (Franklin et al., 2007; Fryer, 2014). Those who drop out have a higher incidence of using illegal drugs (Li, 2007). Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011) found that not only are high school dropouts more likely to use drugs; they are also more to be depressed. Individuals without a high school diploma live nine fewer years than those who graduate from high school (Erwin, 2018).

Consequences to Society Due to High School Dropouts

Society pays a high cost as a result of all of those students who drop out of school. The individual costs add up to a considerable burden for society at large. It has been estimated that in

the U.S., \$9.1 billion per year is lost due to diminished income from dropouts (Futris, Olmstead, Pasley, & Nielsen, 2012). It has been estimated that \$300 billion in future earnings are lost due to students dropping out of school (Iachini et al., 2013). Another way to view the cost is to calculate the cost borne by one year's class. This was found to be \$228 billion in lifetime earnings for each class of non-graduates. (McCaul et al., 1992). Catterall (2011) looked at the lost tax revenue for the government due to dropouts' lower earnings. This was estimated to be \$71,000 per dropout. When calculating the cost benefits or cost reductions attributable to graduation versus non-graduating individuals from high school—including the extra lifetime tax payment contribution, the decreased dependence on public health expenditures, the reduced criminal activity, and the reduced reliance on welfare—the average individual benefit from preventing or recovering high school dropouts to be \$209,200 (Catterall, 2010; Levin, 2009). If all welfare recipients who were high school dropouts were instead high school graduates (and not welfare recipients), the nation would save \$1.8 billion in welfare costs. It has been estimated that if half of the dropouts in the country would have graduated instead of dropping out of high school, the economy would \$45 billion annually (Erwin, 2018).

Another cost to society from dropouts is higher crime rates. Dropouts tend to commit more crimes than those who graduate (Bowers, Spratt, & Taff, 2013; Dunn et al., 2004; Fryer, 2014). Half of the inmates in federal and state prisons and jails never completed high school (Iachini et al., 2013).

Reasons for Dropping Out of School

Many students feel that they did not drop out of school, but rather that they were “pushed out.” Some students dropped out because they felt like they were not welcome. They felt that

their needs were not being addressed by their teachers or staff and that they were not receiving support from the school (Bickerstaff, 2010; Fryer, 2014; Gallagher, 2002).

Another reason often given by students for dropping out was the lack of safety at school. Such students felt fear and discomfort within the physical environment of the school. Rather than viewing their school as a haven, they saw it as a hostile environment. (Bickerstaff, 2010; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Additionally, some students left school because they perceived it as being overly rigid (Gallagher, 2002). Attendance policies and course requirements were strict and rarely flexible. Students felt that if they could have created their own schedules, with flexible attendance arrangements that accommodated their needs, they would have stayed in school (Gallagher, 2002). While in theory, all students should be treated the same out of fairness, in practice, not all students have the same life circumstances or obstacles to overcome (Gallagher, 2002; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Therefore, as the research has suggested, schools should be flexible in accommodating the various needs of their diverse population of students.

In addition, many students dropped out of school because they felt alienated from the school or the schoolwork. Instead of identifying with the school's goals and participating with those goals, the students felt a loss or inability to form bonds with peers and teachers. (Bickerstaff, 2010; Gallagher, 2002; Kortering & Braziel, 1999; Schulz & Rubel, 2011). This alienation, according to Schulz and Rubel (2011), is a long slow process that occurs when the "feelings of disempowerment, disregard, and dissatisfaction overwhelm those of connectedness, belonging, and worth" (p. 2/21). According to Wehlage (2001), the decision to drop out of school results from an accumulation of feelings of alienation that develops through a combination of school experiences and family background.

Another factor in dropping out of school is that many students who dropped out felt that they had no relationship with their teachers (Fryer, 2014; Gallagher, 2002; Hall, 2011; Johnson, 2007; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). In Gallagher's (2002) study of high school dropouts, she found that the lack of caring and trusting relationships between teachers and students contributed significantly to the students dropping out. The students felt that no-one cared about them and did not feel valued. They did not develop relationships of trust with their teachers. Half of the students interviewed by Iachini et al. (2013) believed that the lack of support they received from their teachers contributed to their failures in school. In Knesting's (2008) study, students complained of teachers who were only there to collect a paycheck. One student stated, "some teachers just don't care. They don't care when a student is kicked out of school" (p. 6).

According to Knesting (2008), it is not enough to be caring; teachers and staff must communicate that they care. Students must be aware that their teachers and school staff members care about them and their success. Knesting (2008) states that "most teachers and schools strive to create a climate of respect, caring and high expectations for their students. The breakdown in caring does not come in wanting or not wanting to care, but rather in how faculty members show students that they care" (p. 8).

Failing courses is one of the best indicators that a student is going to drop out altogether from school (Bowers, Spratt, & Taff, 2013). Low or failing grades coupled with low credits, are the best indicators that a student will drop out of school. Such overall poor academic achievement is considered a good indication that a student will drop out. (Bland, Church, Neill, & Terry, 2008; Englund et al., 2008). Finn (1989) described frustration and low self-esteem model that often starts with failure in a class, leading to frustration and low self-esteem, leading to continued failure.

Moreover, Gallagher (2002) found that chronic absenteeism is a good indicator that a student is going to drop out of school. She also stated that dropouts are retained in earlier grades. Students who had bad attendance were more likely to drop out. Dunn et al. (2004) reported in an analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) data that the students with the highest propensity to drop out were those with high absenteeism and course failures. Undoubtedly, course failure is directly related to high absenteeism. Johnson (2007) also found that attendance was a significant factor in student attrition. Further, Catterall (2011) found that a student's general lack of progress toward graduation was a good indication that a student was going to drop out. When a student believes that he or she is not going to progress toward graduating, that student is likely to stop trying and simply stop going to school (Catterall, 2011).

Students who participate in extracurricular activities such as sports or clubs are much more likely to complete high school. One study of high school dropouts found that 96.9% did not participate in a single extracurricular activity (Bowers et al., 2013). Finn (1989) found that students who participated in school would identify with the school and were more likely to stay in school. This was particularly true of those who participated in extracurricular activities.

Some students dropped out because they saw no connection between mandatory coursework and their eventual career path. Such students were seeking real-life relevance in their studies, and they were not convinced that what they were being taught would be relevant to their present and future lives (Gallagher, 2002).

Student behavior has been found to be a factor in some students' failure to complete high school. Goldschmidt & Wang (1999) found when analyzing data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) that misbehavior significantly increased the odds of a student dropping out of high school, even after academic achievement was considered. Englund

et al. (2008) confirmed these findings. Middle school behavior problems plus poverty were found to be strong indicators for a student to eventually drop out of school (Hawkins et al. 2013).

Sometimes life interferes with a student's progress in school and causes that student to take a detour from school. For instance, many students quit school due to pressure caused by family members. Fryer's (2014) research revealed that many of her participants' school problems started with family conflict and, for some of them, extreme family dysfunction and trauma. Some students leave school in order to get out of a bad situation. They feel that they need to get control over their lives (Gallagher, 2002).

Having to work was cited by many dropouts as the reason why they had to drop out of school. One study found that working more than 20 hours was a strong indicator that that student was going to drop out of school (Lee & Staff, 2007). Fryer (2014) found in her study several students who felt that they had to quit school because they needed to get a job to support their family.

Another strong indication that a person is going to drop out of school is drug use, alcohol use, and smoking (Bland et al., 2008; Fryer, 2014). Fryer found a large portion of her participants reported drug and alcohol abuse in particular as reasons for their dropping out of school.

Pregnancy among females is another factor that causes students to drop out of school (Bland et al., 2008; Fryer, 2014). However, becoming a father does not have much of an impact. Furtis et al. (2012) concluded after analyzing data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88) that a majority of males who became fathers while in high school continued with their education and graduated from high school.

Peer influence is another factor in a student's decision to leave school. Some students chose to have peer acceptance rather than academic progress (Fryer, 2014; Schulz, & Rubel, 2011). Lack of family support is another critical factor. Research by Murray and Naranjo (2008) indicated that students who had at least one parent monitoring their progress in school were much more likely to complete high school than those who lacked parental support (Fryer, 2014).

In summary, a student's decision to leave school is based on complex, multifaceted factors. The student sees the decision to leave school as the best decision at that time. Students make a cost-benefit analysis of staying in school versus leaving school, and when they decide it is more beneficial for them to leave, they do so (Zammitt, & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011).

Reasons for Returning to School

Fortunately for some students, the factors that led them to drop out of school change, or at least the student's perceptions of those factors change, and they decide to return to school. A substantial number of students come back and complete high school. Many students who have dropped out change their mind on their own and complete high school (Kolstad & Owings, 1986, 22)

In Wayman's (2001) study of students who had dropped out of school, including those who dropped out as early as 7th grade, 59.2 % returned to school and earned a high school diploma or a GED certificate. Kolstad and Owing's 1986 study, in which data from the High School and Beyond data were analyzed, found that 4 out of 10 (38%) students returned and earned their high school diploma or GED. This data looked at students six years after they were in the 10th grade, which may account for the discrepancies with Wayman's more broadly casted data set.

Some students return to school and become high school graduates because they desire to be good role models. Many of these students have had children, and want to be more financially secure for their children in addition to being a good role model (Fryer, 2014).

One study found that students who come from a higher socioeconomic status are much more likely to return to school and complete their educations (Wayman, 2001). Unfortunately, as Wayman laments, the socioeconomic status of a student who drops out of school is a factor that the school cannot impact.

Many students return to school because they realize they need a high school diploma to advance in their careers or job. A high school degree is necessary for them to advance or meet their future goals. Once they get out in the real world, they realize that without a high school diploma, their income potential is limited. They understand that to do better financially, they need a diploma (Fryer, 2014).

Students also sometimes return after just a couple of years, when they are more mature and have a better attitude towards school (Kortering & Braziel, 1999). Wayman (2001) found out that the older a student is when that student dropped out of school, the more likely that student is to return.

Many students who drop out never consider themselves to be dropouts. They feel they merely stopped school for a while. Once they take care of their problems, they are then able to return to school and complete their education (Bickerstaff, 2010). Students are more likely to return if they always believed they would graduate (Futris et al., 2012). Johnson found that 52% of the students thought they would return to school when they dropped out. It probably is not a coincidence that this figure is relatively close to the statistics cited by Kolstad and Owings (1986) of 38 % and Wayman's 2001) study (59.2 %). Further research needs to be conducted to

see if there is a correlation between a student's belief that they will return and complete their education at the time they dropped out of school and actually doing so.

Some students return to school because they have a desire to attain the status of a high school graduate. They were ashamed to have the status of a dropout (Bickerstaff, 2010; Fryer, 2014). In Iachini et al.'s (2013) study, roughly one-third of the respondents stated their motivation for returning to school was wanting to graduate, trying to change, or wanting to prove something.

Among Black males who returned and finished high school, it was found that they had a caring adult as a critical support system (Watts, 2010). In Watts' study of black males who re-enroll in high school, he found that caring adults were essential contributors to developing Black male resilience. Those caring adults were usually the student's mothers or grandmothers.

Many students returned to school because they found a school program that fit their individual needs. One crucial component of these programs was that the school program was student-centered (Bland, Church, Neill, & Terry, 2008; Franklin, Streeter, Kim, & Tripodi, 2007). According to the authors, student-centered schools are alternative schools that have a caring staff that supports every student's learning. They offer a flexible schedule and reduced rules. They "develop a school culture that enables students to become educationally engaged in relevant, meaningful learning in a caring setting" (Bland et al., 2008, p. 37).

Another critical factor often cited as a factor in influencing a student to return and complete high school is that of a small school setting (Bland et al., 2008; Franklin et al., 2007; Fryer, 2014; Iachini et al., 2013; Shefi, 2015; Wehlage, 2001). According to Wehlage, Rutter, and Turnbaugh (1987), the ideal size is from 25 to 100 students.

Besides a small school setting, it is often helpful if the classes themselves are small with a low teacher-student ratio. The researchers often cite classes of less than 20 students as being most effective at retaining students. With small class-sizes teachers can work one-on-one with the students. Not only will students be able to receive personal attention, but personal relationships are also more likely to be established (Bland et al. 2008; Franklin et al., 2007; Fryer, 2014; Iachini et al., 2013).

A non-competitive environment is another school feature that many former dropouts are looking for to be successful in their return to school (Bland et al., 2008) A flexible schedule is also essential for returning students. Many are working or taking care of children and need the benefit of being able to arrange their school schedule around their other life priorities (Bland et al., 2008; Gallagher, 2002; Fryer, 2014) Flexible attendance policies have been found to be important in allowing students to stay in school (Kortering & Braziel, 1999).

Closely related to the benefits of a flexible schedule is a self-paced curriculum. Students often must take time off from school to take care of other events in their life, and a self-paced curriculum allows them the freedom to do so. (Fryer, 2014; Iachini et al., 2013). In Fryer's 2014 study, the ability to work at one's own pace was the number reason that students selected for attending a dropout recovery school.

However, the most critical factor for student re-enrollment, often cited throughout the literature, is having caring teachers and adults at the school site (Fryer, 2014; Iachini et al., 2013.) This caring must also be communicated to the students (Knesting, 2008).

Conclusion

The hope is that by exploring the reasons why some students return to school and complete their high school education, we, as educators, can be more effective in raising the

percentage of students who choose to return. More research is needed as to the reasons why some students return and complete their high school educations. Whereas there have been many studies exploring factors related to the reasons students drop out of high school, there have been few studies examining dropout recovery schools (Brown, 2010; Catterall, 2011; Iachini et al., 2013; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

The motivations for those who drop out to come back to school and finish their high school educations have been studied even more rarely. (Iachini et al., 2013). Little research attention has been given to who these students are, how and why they persist in their educational pursuits, and what their experiences are as they re-enter school and attend alternative schools (Bickerstaff, 2010.) There have been few studies of dropouts obtaining their degrees (Morrisette, 2018; Wayman, 2001; Zammitt, & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011). Hopefully, by listening to students tell their stories, in their own voices, as they journeyed away from school and then managed to make the journey back and complete their high school education, educators will be better able to increase the numbers of students who come back.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The focus of the study was to explore the factors that led students who have dropped out of high school to return and complete their high school educations.

The major research questions are: What experiences lead a student who has dropped out of school to re-enroll in school and complete their high school education? What causes that student to drop out of school in the first place? What experiences does that student live through while he or she is not in school? In what ways are students who have dropped out motivated to re-enroll?

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study, with an explanation as to why the use of a phenomenological methodology was useful. The chapter will also explain the specific methods used in this study, including the respondent selection strategies and data collection procedures. A description of the data analysis procedures will follow. The trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of the data will be described as well as the role of the researcher. The chapter will conclude with a description of the limitations of this study including researcher bias, assumptions, and limitations

Methodology

The focus of this study was on learning the meaning that the participants themselves held about dropping out of and then returning to school. Therefore, this study's approach is qualitative in nature. Since the lived experiences of the participants as they dropped out of high school and then returned was the focus of this study, the study design is phenomenological (Brown, 2010; Husserl, 1962). In order to explore the phenomenon of people dropping out of high school and then returning, there is a need to gain a nuanced and full understanding of the issue by empowering individuals to share their stories (Creswell, 2013).

This study used a phenomenology approach in order to examine the lives of eleven people as they made the decision to drop out of school. It explored how the participants viewed their lives as they were out of school and what factors made them return.

Phenomenology as a research tool commenced in the 20th century based on the works of philosopher Edmund Husserl. Phenomenology involves exploring the world of human experience where the living and experiencing of human phenomena take place. This world moves, changes, and is based on perspective, time, space, and relationships (Vagle, 2018).

“Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that is used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon” (Center in Innovation in Research and Teaching, 2019). In this study, students were interviewed to understand the circumstances which led them to drop out of high school. Phenomenology was also used to explore their lives as they struggled while out of school, and to discover what led them to come back and complete their high school education. A phenomenological study attempts to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings, and responses to a particular situation. It allows the researcher to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and sentiments of those people who have experienced or lived the phenomenon or situation of interest.

Phenomenological research is typically conducted through the use of in-depth interviews of small samples of participants. By studying the perspectives of multiple participants, a researcher can begin to make generalizations regarding what it is like to experience a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those that have lived the experience (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, 2019).

Another main characteristic of phenomenological research is using interview questions that are open-ended to allow the participants to fully describe the experience from their own

point of view. The data collected is qualitative, and analysis includes an attempt to identify themes or make generalizations regarding how a particular phenomenon is perceived or experienced (Center in Innovation in Research and Teaching, 2019).

The research reported the stories of eleven individuals whose struggles led them to drop out of high school. It also examined their lives after dropping out of school and the struggles they encountered, which ultimately led them to re-enroll and complete their high school educations. The study focused on the phenomenon of students re-enrolling in high school after having dropped out of school. The reality of the phenomenon of high school dropouts returning to school was perceived within the meaning of the experiences of those individuals who had done so themselves (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

This type of methodology is vital to this study since it will help educators understand the multitude of factors that can impact a person's eventual decision to drop out of school. "If educators can learn from the students themselves, perhaps they could find a better way to hold on to the many at-risk youths who slip through the cracks and do not complete high school" (Fryer, 2014, p. 8). Student voices are missing from the literature. Youth and their experiences in school should be examined by listening to their stories. They should be more than just outcome statistics (Schulz & Rubel, 2011; Smith, 2000). Gallagher asks the question, "what might dropouts themselves tell us about school that could help us better understand their decision to withdraw despite widespread sentiments of disapproval?" (2009, p. 37). This study will attempt, in part, to answer Gallagher's question.

Methods

Respondent Selection Strategies

The participants were students who met the criteria of returning to school after having dropped out and being willing to articulate their lived experiences. Teachers from various adult schools were asked for permission to address their classes and explain the purpose of the study. These adult schools are designed to offer students who are over eighteen years of age, and who have been out of school for some time, an opportunity to return and complete their high school education. After addressing each class, a request for volunteers was made. Volunteers were then selected and briefly interviewed, and participants were selected based on the criteria described below.

Drawing on Polkinghorne (2005), the researcher selected participants who met a maximum variation to achieve diverse variations of individuals in the study. The participants included members of both sexes and different family statuses. For example, the study included participants who continue to live with their parents, participants who live with a significant other, participants with children of their own, and participants who are homeless. Participants from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and different socio-economic backgrounds were also selected. Creswell (2013) recommends that between three and ten participants be chosen. However, to achieve a broader cross-section of participants, eleven students were selected for this study.

The initial sampling was purposeful in that it was designed to examine the phenomena where it was determined to exist (Coyne, 1997). Participants were selected who had returned to school after having dropped out. A rich source of such data could be found at the local adult schools. Adult schools are schools for students who are 18 years old or older. According to Coyne, “all sampling in qualitative research is purposeful sampling. The sample is always intentionally selected according to the needs of the survey” (1997, p. 625). The concern was not

how much data was gathered or from how many sources but whether the collected data was sufficiently rich to bring refinement and clarity to understanding the experience (Polkinghorne, 2005). Thus, I began this research by going to high schools that accept individuals who have dropped out of school. As noted earlier, a rich source of prospective participants was found in adult schools.

As per Polkinghorne (2005), participants for the qualitative study were selected not because they fulfilled the representative requirements of statistical inference but because they provided substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experiences under investigation. Participants were selected in part based on their willingness to share their experiences and their ability to do so in rich detail.

According to Polkinghorne (2005), researchers should include in their write-ups a description of how and why they selected particular sources. For each individual participant, the factors that went into choosing that particular participant are described.

It has been noted that although much qualitative research involves the use of purposeful sampling, a random approach may negate charges of researcher bias in the selection of participants (Shenton, 2004). However, given the nature of the research, using a random approach would make it difficult to procure the proper participants and even more challenging to acquire a mixed group of participants. A description in detail discussing the selection process on an individual basis for each participant is stated. If any bias was involved, it will at least be out in the open and can be judged by the reader.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected from individuals who have re-enrolled in school after having dropped out. The data were collected via in-depth, taped multiple interviews (Creswell, 2013;

Moustakas, 1994). In-depth interviews were used to discover shared understanding of a particular group. The in-depth interview was meant to be a personal and intimate encounter in which open, direct, verbal questions were used to elicit detailed narratives and stories (Polkinghorne, 2005). The interview protocol followed Rubin and Rubin's (1995) suggestions for a conversational partnership in the form of guided conversations.

The participants were asked two broad questions: 1) What have you experienced in terms of dropping out of high school and then re-enrolling? 2) What context or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences in dropping out of school and re-enrolling? (See appendix B).

All of the students were aged 18 or older, and thus, once their consent was obtained, the initial interviews were commenced. The meetings took place at the participant's schools and were held in a private room. The interviews were limited to one hour to avoid fatigue. Open-ended questions were asked from a scripted questionnaire (See appendix B).

To protect the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms were used, and the school (or schools) that they attended were kept confidential. After the recorded interviews were transcribed, the participants were given an opportunity to review the transcripts and make any adjustments they deemed necessary.

As per the suggestion of Polkinghorne (2015), to obtain interview data of sufficient quality to produce worthwhile findings, I first established a trusting, open relationship with the participant and focused on the meaning of the participant's life experiences rather than on the accuracy of his or her recall.

Developing rapport involves establishing trust and respect for the interviewee and the information he or she shares. It also means establishing a safe and comfortable environment for

sharing the interviewee's personal experiences and attitudes as they occurred. Stages of rapport include apprehension, exploration, co-operation, and participation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). It was the interviewer's intention to move through the stages in order to achieve "participation" by the interviewee.

Description of Respondents

All participants were over 18 years old and were attending high school at the time of their interviews. Participants that met a maximum variation were selected to achieve a diverse variety of individuals. As discussed earlier, participants from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds were selected.

To make the design more concrete, a "sampling frame" was developed, including the criteria for selecting sites and subjects (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Three schools were picked from which the participants were selected. These schools only accept adult students. As such, they were fertile grounds in which to find students who were returning to complete their high school education after having previously dropped out.

The use of purposive sampling was employed since that strategy is designed to enhance understanding of the experiences of selected individuals or groups (Devers & Frankel, 2000). The exact type used was "typical cases," e.g., those who are normal, average, or typical concerning their experiences of dropping out and then returning to school.

Data Collection Strategies

Data was collected in the form of in-depth interviews using a scripted questionnaire (See appendix B). After the meeting was transcribed the interviewees were given an opportunity to review the transcript and make any corrections or additions.

Although an interview is usually equated with confidentiality, informed consent, and privacy, the potential recurrence of “old wounds” and the sharing of secrets necessitated “a balanced research relationship [that] will encourage disclosure, trust, and awareness of potential ethical issues” (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001, p. 94).

The development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations prior to the first data collection is critical (Shenton, 2004). This researcher was employed as a Resource Specialist in a charter school that accepts students up to the age of 24. A Resource Specialist provides special education services to students who have been identified as having an educational disability. Many of the students have dropped out of school and have come back to earn their high school diploma. This researcher is familiar with the culture of the students and the organization.

Data Analysis

Significant statements and themes of the participants were used to write a description of the participants’ experiences in their journey from dropping out of high school to re-enrolling in school. A composite description that presents the “essence” of the participants’ experiences was then written (Creswell, 2013). The explicit structure of the meaning of each of the lived experiences was described by analyzing the data for themes, using different approaches to examine the data. This was done after transcribing and coding the data.

The analysis was focused upon identifying recurrent themes across transcripts. Recurrent themes are responses that include similar ideas, thoughts, images, and accounts. In analyzing the data, the researcher incorporated the suggestions contained in three well-known textbooks on qualitative research methods: Carol Robert’s book, *The Dissertation Journey* (2010), John W.

Creswell's *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (2013) and Moustakas' *Phenomenological Research Methods* (1994).

First, the researcher followed Moustakas' (1994) suggested the first step of describing my personal experiences (as described in the "limitations section") so that those personal experiences could be set aside, thus allowing the study to remain focused on the participants. Further, Moustakas (1994) recommends using the "epoche process," wherein the researcher sets aside his prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about the issue at hand. However, it should be noted that van Manen (2006) warns that the bracketing of the researcher's personal experience may be difficult since the researcher has to bring his or her assumptions and philosophical ideas into the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990).

The next step was to follow what Roberts (2010) describes as her first step, which is to review the data in the transcribed tape-recorded interviews. Next, the researcher followed Creswell's (2013) first step, which is to organize the data by creating files for the data and then reading through the text, making margin notes, and forming initial codes.

As per Creswell (2013), Moustakas (1994) and Roberts (2010), after reviewing the data the researcher identified a list of categories, themes, and patterns. Each theme was given a code. The next step was to sort and group each response by the research question (Roberts, 2010). The pertinent information was highlighted, from which a master coding list was developed.

Next, the master coding list was used to code the full transcript of each participant, making notes when multiple references were made to a response category (Roberts, 2010). Each response was reviewed in light of each research question. The responses were analyzed to reveal the themes, categories, and patterns of the responses for each question. A list of significant

statements about how the participants experienced the topic was developed. Each statement was treated as having equal worth (Moustakas, 1994).

The significant statements were grouped into larger units of information (themes). After doing so, a description of what the participants experienced was written. It was written in the format of a textual description of what happened, including verbatim examples (Moustakas, 1994).

A “structural experience” of how the experience happened, including the setting and the context, was written next. Then, the “essence,” a composite description incorporating both the textual and structural descriptions, was stated. It was explained to the reader “what” the participants experienced and “how” they experienced it (Creswell, 2013). This is what Moustakas (1994) refers to as “phenomenological reduction.” Being phenomenological, the emphasis in the analysis was on the essence and structure of the phenomenon, which is the experiences of the participants in dropping out and then returning to school (Brown, 2010).

The transcript was reviewed a final time to ensure that the main themes and patterns were consistent with the data. These findings were then compared with the literature to ascertain, which findings were supported by the research (Roberts, 2010). The data was represented and visualized by presenting the narration of the “essence” of the experience in tables, figures, or discussion, and by developing a textual description of “what happened” (Creswell, 2013). Next, the data was interpreted by developing a structural description of “how the phenomenon was experienced” and presenting narration of the “essence” of the experience (Creswell, 2012, pp. 190 & 191).

According to Pope, Ziebland and Mays (2000), “Analyzing qualitative data is not a simple or quick task. Done properly, it is systematic, and therefore labor-intensive and time-

consuming” (p. 116). The researcher undertook the analysis of the data in a systemic labor-intensive, time-consuming manner.

Trustworthiness/Validity

Validation is an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Quality concerns should be an integral and explicit part of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). While all research decisions depend to some extent on subjective evaluation and judgment, these elements were made as explicit as possible, making the research process more coherent and convincing (Bergman and Coxon, 2005).

Creswell and Miller (2000) state that researchers should use several validity procedures. According to them, the easiest to use are those inherent in the study design, such as triangulation of methods, prolonged observations in the field, and use of thick, rich descriptions. Researchers should use systematic procedures, employing rigorous standards, and clearly identified procedures. What is most important is that the credibility of the account is conveyed and that it acknowledge the lens being employed and paradigm assumptions of the researchers. This paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed and that it is what the participants perceive it to be. Thus, it is essential to check how accurately the participant’s realities have been represented in the final account (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Lincoln & Guba (1985) also suggest using the lens of the participants, arrived at after collecting data, to establish reliability.

According to Ali and Yusof (2011), to reach the goal of trustworthiness in qualitative research and inquiry, researchers need credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. They note that interpretive research is a chain of interpretations that must be documented in order for others to judge the trustworthiness of the meanings. In regards to external reliability, “to attain reliability in research, there is a need for the qualitative researcher

to document the succession of moves through the stages of data production, analysis, and interpretation” (p. 35). Patton (1999) states that the qualitative researcher has an obligation to be methodical in reporting sufficient details of the data collection and analysis process in order for others to be able to judge the quality of the finished product.

Bergman and Coxon (2005) note that positivist and post-positivist traditions allow researchers to uncover objective and universally valid facts by establishing clear procedures and rules with carefully controlled observations of empirical phenomena, impartial and logical argumentation, and objective analysis. Facts should be reported objectively rather than interpreted. However, observation, analysis, and interpretation are bound to be subjective. According to Bergman and Coxon, “to understand is to interpret” (2005, para 2).

Angen (2000) asks the question, “What does it mean to do good qualitative research?” (p. 380). She then notes that using explicitly stated procedures is not a guarantee against the taint of subjective bias. Objectivity also depends on the qualities inherent to the researcher. Is the research helpful to the target population? Are there alternative explanations? Are we more sensitized to, or enlightened about, the human condition because of the research?

Finally, Angen (2000) notes that it is crucial to keep a record of one’s own transformations throughout the process. Thus, not only is it important to keep clear, precise records of the process involved in analyzing data, but it is also important for the researcher to keep records of his or her own thoughts and the changes in thinking throughout the process. This researcher was careful to keep such records.

It has been noted that the researcher should focus on the processes of verification during the study rather than at the end of the study (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002). Such

advice was followed carefully: detailed records of the processes of verification were kept throughout the study.

There are several tactics to help ensure the honesty of informants when collecting data. When approached, each person should be given opportunities to refuse to continue participating in the study. This will ensure that only those who are genuinely interested in taking part in the study, and who are prepared to offer data freely, will participate (Shenton, 2004). Participants should also be encouraged to be frank from the outset of each session. This researcher offered multiple opportunities for the participants to discontinue the study and aimed to establish a rapport in the opening moments of the discussions. It was also indicated that there are no right answers to the questions they were about to be asked. It was made clear to the participants that they have a right to withdraw from the study at any point. Furthermore, they were informed that they would not be required to disclose their reason for withdrawal (Shenton, 2004).

Role of the Researcher

The purpose of the researcher in this study was to serve as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). The researcher needs to be open to the thoughts and opinions of the participants and to set aside their own background and expectations to objectively understand the participants' opinions and recollections.

Characteristics of the investigator are essential in establishing reliability and validity since the investigator must be responsive and adaptable to changing circumstances. Further, they must take a holistic viewpoint and demonstrate professional immediacy, sensitivity, and the ability to clarify and summarize (Morse et al., 2002)

This researcher is currently employed in a charter school that is considered a credit recovery school. A majority of the students attending the school have dropped out of school and

are now returning to complete their education. This researcher was mindful of what Glesne and Peshkin (1992) state are the perils of conducting research in “your own back yard,” as some of the participants attended the school where this researcher is employed. Any such perils were offset by this researcher’s detailed knowledge of these students and the ability to observe them over a long period of time.

This researcher used his experience, knowledge of the students’ stories, and relevant literature to assist in framing the basic research and questions asked in this study. However, the researcher was careful to bracket those experiences to gain a fresh perspective on the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Husserl, 1962).

Interviews were structured according to an interview guide made by the investigator, which outlines themes to be covered during the interview. Questions were open-ended to encourage the respondents to give long, elaborate answers. Field notes were taken as a supplement to the recordings in order to recall the respondent's bodily expressions, the interaction between interviewer and respondent, the atmosphere during the interview. While interviewing, the interviewer used his personal empathy to make respondents feel more at ease and, therefore, more willing to tell their story (Fink, 2000).

Reflexivity is the active acknowledgment by the researcher that his own actions and decisions will inevitably impact the meaning and context of the experience under investigation. (Horsburgh, 2003). This researcher realizes that he is an integral part of the world that he studies and that neutrality and detachment in relation to data collection, analysis, and interpretation are impossible. As stated by one researcher, “given that the researcher is intimately involved in both the process and product of the research enterprise, it is necessary for the reader to evaluate the extent to which an author identifies and explicates their involvement and its potential or actual

effect upon the findings” (Horsburgh, 2003, p. 309). Thus, once again, it is noted that it is important that this researcher clearly states his identity and his involvement with students who have dropped out of school and are now back in school, earning their diplomas.

“Because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry, a qualitative report must include information about the researcher. What experience, training, and perspective does the researcher bring to the field?” (Patton, 1999, p. 1,198). “Research is only as good as the investigator. It is the researcher’s creativity, sensitivity, flexibility, and skill in using the verification strategies that determine the reliability and validity of the evolving study” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 17) According to Patton (1999), qualitative analysis is a creative process which depends on the insights and conceptual capabilities of the person doing the analyzing. Angen (2000) refers to the researcher as a craftsman who needs time, training, and practice in order to study the art of valid, interpretive research.

Limitations

Researcher Bias

This researcher is a doctoral student who has had many years of higher education, including having earned a Juris Doctorate degree. In addition, the researcher’s children both have advanced degrees. Thus, the researcher has a bias in favor of education in general and higher education in particular.

This researcher is employed at a school that targets at-risk youth. The school takes part in a nationally recognized program that is known for accepting students who have dropped out of school, re-enrolling them, and assisting them to graduate with a high school diploma. The researcher took steps to remain objective and unbiased regarding a type of school whose primary mission is to graduate students who have previously dropped out.

The researcher's role at the charter school is as an education specialist working with special education students. The charter school is a place where students can earn a regular high school diploma up to the age of 24. Other than adult schools, it is the only school in the county where people can enroll after the age of 18. As a consequence, many of the students at the charter school have returned to school after having dropped out. The researcher has an affinity for these students, and in particular for those who are enrolled in special education. The researcher takes immense pride in graduating these students. The researcher was careful to bracket these feelings and emotions and concentrate on collecting and analyzing the recollection of the subjects' lived experiences as they dropped out of high school and then returned.

This researcher grew up in a poor Hispanic neighborhood. Most of the inhabitants of the neighborhood worked in the agricultural sector as field-hands. I personally viewed the impact among my neighbors and relatives of dropping out of school and not earning a high school diploma. This experience, too, was bracketed off so as not to impact the analysis.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that the study participants were truthful in answering the questions about why they decided to return to school and why they left school in the first place. The researcher also assumed that the participants correctly recalled the circumstances and their thoughts as they left school. Gathering participants from other schools that were unfamiliar to me may have diminished this potential for error.

The researcher also assumed that it is in everyone's best interest to graduate from high school and furthermore that the participants all believed that it is in their best interest to do so. The researcher thus explored the reasons that they quit school despite their knowledge that it was best to graduate from school.

Limitations of This Study

This study was limited to the participants' self-reported recollections and perceptions of their experiences in dropping out of high school and then returning to school. The individual results were based on volunteer participants and may not necessarily be reflective of the population of those who have returned to school after dropping out. The study is limited in scope in that the participants were all over 18 years of age. Minors who dropped out of school and then returned before their 18th birthday were not included.

Chapter Summary

For this study, eleven participants who were at that time attending local adult schools were chosen. The study was phenomenological and explored the students' experiences in dropping out of school and then coming back to school. Data was gathered in the form of interviews using open-ended questions (See appendix B). The data was then analyzed and compared to the findings in the literature.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This phenomenology study focused on the lived experience of eleven students who re-enrolled in high school and are attempting to complete their high school education after having earlier dropped out of school. Participants were chosen from three schools located in one county located in the central valley of California. The median household income of this county is \$58,764.00 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a). The population consists of 59.3 % of those identified as White, 7.4 % of those identified as Black, 14.4% of those identified as Asian, and 38.3% of those identified as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b).

For the sake of confidentiality, students were renamed in Spanish according to their order of participation. Thus, the first student is *Primero*, the second (a female) is *Segunda*, and so forth. A description of each student is given using these assigned names. Data was taken in the form of individual interviews of 30 to 45 minutes.

Collection and analysis of the data were guided by the research questions identified in Chapter One: What experiences contribute to a student who has dropped out of school to re-enroll back in school and complete their high school education? What caused that student to drop out of school in the first place? What experiences did each student live through while he or she wasn't in school? In what ways are students who have dropped out motivated to re-enroll?

After each interview was completed, the digital voice recordings were transcribed. Each participant was given a chance to review the transcript. All but one declined this opportunity. The transcripts were then analyzed by coding the responses.

Participants

The participants in this study ranged in age from 19 years to 54 years, with the vast majority being in their twenties. They consisted of five males and six females. Four of the females had children of their own. None of the males had children. They each voluntarily shared their experiences in school and their experiences while they were out of school, as well as what motivated them to come back and finish their high school education.

Primero is a 20-year-old white male who is currently living with his dad. He attended three elementary schools, two middle schools, and two different high schools. He first dropped out of school in the 8th grade and then dropped out again in 9th grade and once again 10th grade. At age 14 he was living on his own and was homeless. *Primero* was out of school for five years before returning to complete his high school education. After graduating from high school, he plans on going to the local community college and then joining the military. It was *Primero's* belief that he was capable of finishing school, but his living circumstances had gotten in the way. At the time of the interview, he was now living with his dad in a reasonably stable environment. He believed that he would progress academically with little help.

Primero is thin in build with light brown hair. His eyes sparkled as he spoke. He appeared tense at first. As this was my first interview, I thought that perhaps my manner might have made him uncomfortable. I spoke with him in general terms about his current school in order to attempt to make him comfortable. I then asked him if he would prefer to continue the interview on another day, and he stated that he wanted to do it right then. *Primero* felt that other people should hear his story as to why he stopped going to school and why he returned to complete his high school education. He believed that participating in the interview process

would be an excellent way to spread his story. He was selected for this study to gain a perspective from a white male.

Segunda is a fifty-four- year old Hispanic female. She had wavy brown shoulder-length hair and a round face. She smiled a lot throughout the interview and spoke with a slight Spanish accent. She often giggled and, at times, would blush. *Segunda* attended high school in Mexico but had to drop out in the eighth grade since her family could not afford to pay for her to attend school. Her mom had no education, and her dad was an alcoholic. *Segunda*'s mother believed that women need to stay home. She believed that women do not need education. Her parents paid for her brother's education, but not for her education. In 1984 *Segunda* and her husband came to the United States. *Segunda*'s husband thought she was crazy for wanting to go back to school, and therefore she did not return to school while she remained married.

Segunda had six children before she got divorced. She currently lives alone in a rented room. She cleans houses for a living, getting up early, 3:30 a.m. each morning to exercise and to study English. She also babysits her grandchildren. In the afternoon, *Segunda* attends an adult school where she is earning her credits towards graduation. She is concerned that she has no retirement plan. She wants to go on to the local community college and get a career. When *Segunda* graduates, she wants to be the commencement speaker so that she can proudly proclaim the struggles she had to overcome to get to the point of earning her high school diploma. *Segunda* believed that her current teacher, along with the use of the electronic equipment at the school, were important elements in assisting in completing her high school education.

Segunda was different from the other participants in that she is much older and had to wait many years before returning to finish her high school education. She was selected for this

study because she could give a different perspective than the other participants, the perspective of someone who had to overcome many barriers before completing her high school education.

Tercero is a 30-year old male student of mixed descent, Hispanic and white. He had an average built with black hair. He tended to stutter slightly. *Tercero* was placed in a continuation high school because he had missed a lot of schools. In his senior year, he transferred back to a regular comprehensive school even though he knew he would not have enough credits to graduate. When he turned 18 years of age, he dropped out of school to work. *Tercero* has worked several minimum wage jobs since he dropped out of school. After twelve years of doing so, he is now back in school. *Tercero* is currently not working and living rent-free with his grandparents. They live close to the school where he attends, and he can walk to school as he does not have a car. *Tercero* now wants to acquire a career in the restaurant business as a chef. Once he graduates from high school, he plans on attending the Culinary Institute of America. *Tercero* believes that he is capable of finishing high school now that he is living with his grandparents. *Tercero* is a classic example of someone who dropped out of high school in order to work who is now returning to complete his high school diploma because now he can afford to do so.

Cuatro is a twenty-old African American male currently living with his mom. He was small in stature and had closely cropped black hair. He seemed eager to answer questions and would often start to answer a question before I was able to finish delivering it. *Cuatro* works part-time to help with the bills. He was out of school for four years, having dropped out at the age of sixteen. He is very quiet and often is under the radar. *Cuatro* attended two elementary schools and three high schools. He would get expelled from schools because of poor attendance. *Cuatro* stated that he did not like to get up in the morning and that often he did not have

transportation to get to school. Now he lives close enough to walk to school and back.

Cuatro believes that he could do the academic work in order to graduate from high school. It was only due to his transportation difficulties that he was not able to do so in the past.

Cuatro currently needs 120 credits to graduate. *Cuatro* is another example of someone who is now completing his high school education because his change in circumstances allows him to do so.

Cinco is a twenty-four-year-old Hispanic male who is currently living with his uncle and his cousins. He has medium-length black hair, a hawkish nose, and walks with a slight hunch back. Earlier, he was enrolled in special education student with a learning disability. However, since he was over 22 years of age, he no longer qualifies for special education services. He attended multiple elementary schools as his mother was constantly moving. He does not even recall how many elementary schools he attended, only saying, “a lot.” *Cinco* attended four high schools, including his current adult school. *Cinco* used to fight a lot at school, which would result in him getting expelled from school. He last attended school when he was eighteen years old. He enrolled in the present school at the age of 22. *Cinco*, like *Cuatro*, believes that he has the capability to do the academic work necessary for him to graduate. He only needed the opportunity to do so.

Cinco was eager to tell why he dropped out of school and was chosen to participate in this study due to his eagerness to explain why he dropped out of school initially and why he is determined to complete his high school education at this time. Currently, *Cinco* is very social and is often seen volunteering to help teachers and staff at school. Two years after returning to high school, he earned a regular high school diploma and “walked” the graduation ceremony in May 2018.

Sexto is a twenty-one-year-old Hispanic male living with his mom and dad, along with two brothers. He is very quiet, shy, and reserved. Like a shadow, he slips into a classroom, sits down without saying a word. When the class is over, he quietly slips out of the room, hoping no one even knowing that he was there. *Sexto* is slightly over six feet tall, with straight black hair reaching down below his shoulders. He went to six different elementary schools due to his family always moving to be near his grandparents. *Sexto* went to two different high schools before dropping out of school. He stated that the main reason he wants to earn his high school diploma is that he wants his mother to be proud. He started crying quietly as he was talking about making his mom proud of him.

Sexto was out of school for two years before he decided to go back and earn his high school diploma. He had moved to Oregon and got a job picking cherries. He had planned on returning to school in Oregon, but he got a ticket while visiting family in California. He only enrolled in a Central Valley school because he received a parking ticket and was told he had to stay in the area until he took care of it. *Sexto* never considered himself a high school dropout. He always believed that not being in school was only temporary and that eventually, he would return to school and earn his high school diploma. He was chosen for this study since he was a student who, at twenty-one years of age, was still living with his parents. *Sexto* was another one of those students in this study who believed that they could graduate if they just got the opportunity to do so.

Septima is an African American female raising her four-year-old son on her own. She survives on public assistance. She is slightly chubby and always dresses impeccably. Not unsurprisingly, *Septima* states that shopping is one of her favorite pastimes. She changes her hairstyle and color almost on a weekly basis.

Septima is very determined and serious about her schoolwork. She left school at seventeen years of age and returned six years later. She dropped out of school because she felt hopelessly behind in her academic credits. She felt that no-one at the school cared and that no one at the school would help her. Six years later, she returned to complete her high school education for two reasons. She realized that she was stuck in a life of working minimal wage jobs. She also wanted to be a better role model for her son and be able to better provide for him. She was picked for this study to give an African American perspective as a single parent raising her child on her own. *Septima* was a very hard-working student, having earned four A-pluses in her first semester back. She graduated in May 2018. Perhaps if she would have received more support at school she would have graduated much earlier.

Ocha is a twenty-three- year old Hispanic female who is raising her two-year-old son on her own. She also currently receives public assistance. She dresses rather plainly and wears very little makeup. Her hair is not a priority. She was out of school for four years before coming back and commencing her coursework to earn her diploma. *Ocha* dropped out of high school because she did not like it. She felt that the teachers did not care to teach. She would wake up depressed because she was failing her classes and would refuse to go to school. She felt that there was no one at school who would care to help her. After working as a cashier for Cosco for several years and having a son, she decided to return to school and earn her diploma so that she could provide for a better life for her son. She is very mature and often volunteers to help out the teachers and staff with various projects throughout the school. She can also be seen helping other students with their classwork. *Ocha* always has a smile on her face.

Ocha agreed to be interviewed because she believes that her story means something to her and hopes that her story will mean something to other people. She is excited about her future

and believes that having dropped out of school made her more determined when she returned to complete her school. She plans on continuing her education and becoming a speech therapist. *Ocha* graduated in May 2018 and even gave the commencement speech at the graduation ceremony.

Novena is the youngest participant of the group, being at the time of the interview, only nineteen years old. She had straight should-length brown hair. She had a tendency to giggle throughout the conversation, which this researcher first believed that her giggles were due to her being nervous about being interviewed. Later, it was noted that giggling was a natural part of her expression. She often giggled when talking. *Novena* is short in stature with shoulder-length dark brown hair with bangs.

Novena was out of school for one year. She currently works part-time and lives with her boyfriend while raising her three- year daughter and eight-month-old son. In her early years, she lived a relatively stable life, having only gone to two different elementary schools. However, when her grandmother died, she had to move in with her cousin. He was very unstable, often moving, causing *Novena* to change high schools six different times. Her cousin told her when she turned eighteen; she had to quit school and get a job. She did leave school during her senior year, but she always felt that someday she would return to school and earn her diploma. When *Novena* got pregnant, she moved in with her boyfriend and, after a couple of years, was able to return to school. She desires to continue to college and get a career in the medical field. She stated, "I want to get a career. Not just a temporary job." *Novena* is a female example of someone who returned to earn a high school diploma when the circumstances allowed her to do so. *Novena* graduated from high school in May of 2019. She had begun the enrollment process

in a local community college and plans on starting class in the fall and working towards a career in nursing.

Decima is a nineteen-old-African American female who is living with her boyfriend and two sons. When she had her first son, at seventeen years of age, she dropped out of school in order to help support him. However, she did so with the intention of eventually coming back to finish her high-school education. She works part-time at a warehouse to help support her family. She attended three different high schools, not including her present school. She was chosen for this study to give an African American perspective of someone who had to drop out of high school due to becoming pregnant and having to work to support her child. Similar to several other participants in this study, she returned to complete her high school diploma when her economic circumstances changed. In her case, her grandmother agreed to watch her child while she went to school, and her fiancé decided to help support her and her child while she attended school. *Decima* is rather tall and often wears her hair up, which gives her the appearance of being even more towering. She has a loud booming voice and can often be heard from several hallways away.

Undécima is a twenty-three-year-old Hispanic female, living with her parents and has no children. She is very short in stature with wavy long brown hair. She wears glasses, which gives her the appearance of being very studious. She seemed to enjoy the interview process as she was constantly smiling and asking follow-up questions to my questions. While in class, *Undécima* is often smiling and conversing with her peers. She was eager to complete her classroom assignments.

During our interview, she expressed her opinion that her father does not support her completing high school, stating that it is a waste of time and will not lead to a decent job.

Undécima was a special education student and dropped out of school in her senior year when she was told that the classes that she had been taking would not lead to a diploma, but instead to a certification of completion. She had a learning disability that interfered with her reading and mathematical calculation ability. In particular, her fluency rates in both areas was very slow, about that of a third-grader.

Undécima was out of school for approximately six months before she found a school that would accept students who were over eighteen years of age. The researcher was able to attend *Undécima's* graduation, where he was able to meet both her mom and dad. In contrast to *Undécima's* earlier statements, her dad appeared to be very proud and supportive of her. *Undécima* plans on going to college and becoming either a teacher or a counselor. She realizes that it is going to be difficult going to college due to her learning disability. However, she believes as long as she tries hard and doesn't give up that she should eventually realize her dreams. *Undécima* was chosen for this study to give a perspective from someone with a learning disability.

Reasons Students Dropped Out of School

Researchers found that many students felt that they did not receive adequate support while in school from teachers and staff (Bickerstaff, 2010; Fryer, 2014; Gallagher 2002). Concerning the question of support by the school, there was a general belief among the participants that the school and teachers offered support--however, to a large extent of the participants, they did not receive support. Several stated that they were too shy to ask for assistance.

Primero believed he had no support at school, except for one teacher who did offer support. *Segunda* stated that in Mexico, they didn't care if you went to school or not. She felt she had no help from the school.

Tercero stated that a good teacher would see a student struggling and want to help that student. However, although he felt he needed some support, only one teacher tried to help him. He, therefore, felt that there was not much support from the school staff.

Cuatro stated that there was one counselor who was always there to support him but received no support from the teachers. *Sexto* felt some teachers were supportive. However, later he stated, “no school helped me.” He was aware that some teachers would have helped him but was too shy and didn’t ask for any help.

Septima felt she had no support from her teachers or school staff. She attributed the lack of support due to there being too many students in the room. However, she did state that “some teachers that were genuinely there to help you.” She, like *Cuatro*, was too shy to ask for help.

Octavia believed “there could have been programs (to support me), but I didn’t know about them” She felt like less of a person since she could not do the schoolwork. *Novena* was aware of the programs at the school, which offered support for the students. However, she, like a lot of the participants, never asked availed herself of those programs.

Decima felt supported but felt that the support offered did not help towards her graduation. “The teachers really didn’t know to try to help you or anything.” She believed there was support at the school, but never asked about it. *Undécima* felt there was support from the school and the teachers. However, she felt that she had no help toward her graduating.

Another reason cited by researchers often giving for dropping out of the school was that they felt that they were not safe in school (Bickerstaff, 2010; Lagana-Riorden et al., 2011). However, all of the participants in this study felt that they were safe in school. *Septima* did state that a lot of things were going on in a large campus and added, “You’re always thinking that something is going to happen. *Tercero* was picked on a lot while in school, but he never felt

threatened. None of the participants stated that their safety was a factor in deciding to leave school.

Primero said in answer to the question about safety in the schools, stated that it depends. It can be safe or not safe. *Cinco* was constantly fighting in school. But, despite this felt he himself was safe. All of the other participants felt safe while in school and that their safety was not a factor in their decision to drop from school.

There were several other reasons given by the participants for dropping out of school. *Cinco* didn't like the teachers and didn't like the time school started. *Sexto* didn't like doing schoolwork, saying his difficulty in doing schoolwork made him feel less as a person. Perhaps if teachers created a climate of respect and communicated that they cared about their students, *Cinco* and *Sexto* would not have dropped out of school in the first place (Knesting (2008).

Some participants had multiple reasons why they left high school. *Primero* was one of those participants that had many varied reasons why he dropped out of school. First, his family lost their home, and then he could not focus on school. He cited not having a ride to get to school as one reason. Being homeless was stated as another reason why he stopped going to school. The main reason was that he did not care at all that much about going to school. "I was being loud and a knucklehead, and I was homeless. "I really didn't care at the time." *Primero* thought that he was going to be famous for performing music. "I always thought everything was just going to come to me. So, I stopped" (going to school).

Segunda initially dropped out of school because her family could not afford to pay the costs of her going to school in Mexico. After migrating to the United States, she did not take advantage of the educational opportunities here because she needed to work to support her six

children. “Nobody told me it's better, keep going (to school). You keep going on. No, I have to work,” she stated. *Segunda* was raised and continues to reside in a culture which stated that women need to stay home. She was told that “men need an education--not women” by her family while growing up and later by her husband while she lived in the United States.

Tercero hated the people in school. “Everyone kind of made me feel stupid” referring to the teachers, staff as well as his peers, He didn't have enough credits to graduate so when he turned eighteen years of age, he decided to quit school to work full time. “I figured if I can start working, why finish school? I was more interested in money than in education. And it was so stupid because if you really want money, you need an education.”

Cuatro was attending a school across town from where he lived. He did not have a ride and found it difficult to get to school. When asked about using public transportation, he stated that he is not a morning person and could not get up in time to avail himself of public transportation to get to school on time. Eventually, he was dropped from school due to poor attendance. Poor attendance was found by Dunn et al. (2004) to have the highest propensity to drop out. Johnson (2007) also found that the lack of attendance was a significant factor in student attrition.

Cinco, like *Tercero*, dropped going to school and instead went to work, stating I “didn't think I need school no more to get a job.” The literature finds a correlation between dropping out of school and working, particularly when a student works over twenty hours a week (Fryer, 2014; Lee & Staff, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). *Sexto* got suspended from school after he had a confrontation with one of his teachers. His mom enrolled him in adult school. However, since he was over eighteen years of age, he quit school to work.

Septima dropped out of school because she felt that she was failing. She stated that she would wake up depressed, I “don't want to get up to go to school, and be there all day knowing that I was failing some of my classes.” She further stated, “I felt like I was so stuck in a hole that I couldn't get out, and no one was trying to help, or no one was trying to see what I can do to get my grade up. So, knowing that I was failing just kept me away.” *Septima's* statement is consistent with Catterall's (2011) findings that when a student believes that he or she may not progress towards graduation, that student would likely give-up trying to progress and drop out of school.

Novena was living with her cousin, who was also her guardian. He felt that *Novena* didn't have to go to school since she was working. He convinced her to drop out. She later got pregnant. *Decima* gave birth to a baby while she was seventeen years old. She had to quit school and go to work in order to support her child. Pregnancy among females was found to be a factor causing students to drop out of school (Bland et al., 2008; Fryer, 2014).

Undécima was a special education student who was placed in Special Day classes by her school. She was told at the beginning of her senior year that the Special Day classes would not count as credits towards her graduation requirements. Since she was not going to earn a diploma, she dropped out of school.

Some students felt terrible about themselves for dropping out of school. *Septima* felt embarrassed. She stated, “when my friends graduated the year I was supposed to graduate, they all invited me, and I didn't want to because I knew that was supposed to be me.” *Novena* did not feel good about herself for not finishing school. She stated regarding graduating, “I'd feel a lot better getting it done.” *Undécima* thought she was dumb because she was not a high school graduate.

Some of the participants felt that when they dropped out that it would only be a temporary situation--that eventually they would return and earn their high school diploma. According to Gallagher (2002), some students leave school to get out of a bad situation. They leave school to gain control over their lives. They return to school once they have gained control, and they are out of the bad situation.

Sexto thought dropping out was temporary. He always believed that eventually, he would complete his high school education and earn a diploma. *Novena* was told by her guardian/cousin to quit school and go to work. After doing so, she got pregnant and then felt she had no choice but to continue working. Eventually, she moved in with her baby's father, who supported her decision to return to school. When *Decima* got pregnant, she dropped out of school to care for her child. Like *Novena*, she moved in with the baby's father and then returned to school to complete her high school education. When she initially dropped out of school, she always had the intention of returning to school.

Undécima always wanted to earn a diploma. She dropped out when she found out that she would not be receiving a diploma at her present school. Catterall (2011) found that when a student believes she is not going to progress towards graduation, that student is likely to give up trying to graduate and simply drop out of school. When *Undécima* discovered that she could attend a different school and earn a diploma, she decided to return.

Other participants made the decision to return to school sometime after they dropped out. When *Primero* dropped out of school, he was not planning on coming back, at least not at first. He changed his mind after getting tired of working in low-wage jobs. *Tercero's* situation was very similar to that of *Primero*. He stated, "I didn't think I was going to go back. I didn't think

it was important. No one really instilled in me how important it was. I realized well, I gotta (sic) go to school if I want to do anything.”

Cinco stated, “I never thought that I would come back and then I met this dude” who told him about a school he could attend and earn his high school diploma even though he was over eighteen years of age. *Septima* reported, “I didn't think that I was going to go back to school. I just figured I'll get a job, get money, you know all that fun, cool stuff.”

The Decision to Come Back to Complete High School

To a large extent, many of the participants decided to return to school and earn their diploma because they realized that their futures would be brighter, making more money. *Primero* thought that he didn't need to finish high school because he was going to be big and famous in the music industry. He said that when he dropped out of school, he thought that he would, “be famous or like live the life, the dream. But that didn't happen.” He believed that by earning his diploma, he would have “more like job opportunities, like life opportunities.” *Primero* further stated, “Once I turned eighteen. I wanna (sic) be good. But nothing really changes. Like, I had to learn that from myself. I had to self-motivate myself. There is (sic) people my age doing better stuff.”

Primero's observation that other people are doing better than him due to having earned a diploma is a perfect example of Bandura's (1974) conviction that people observe the conduct of others and the occasions on which such behavior is awarded. Furthermore, people through the power of social modeling focus on learning from positive and negative response consequences (Bandura, 1999). *Primero* perceived that those who earned their high school diplomas were “doing better stuff” than he. He learned that by following their model and earning his high school diploma; he would have positive consequences. By seeing others like himself succeed by

sustained efforts, installed in by *Primero* the expectation that he too could secure similar benefits as those who graduated from high school with a diploma (Bandura, 1999).

Segunda needed to improve her life. She stated, “I need to get a better job to make it. I need to do something for my life.” *Segunda* was tired of renting one-bedroom and didn't want to live forever in just one bedroom. She was also worried about not having any type of retirement plan, working cleaning houses. *Segunda* adopted society's norms of thought and action in her realization that she had to improve her educational status to improve her long-term expectations for her future (Nabavi, 2012). She, like many others, made a decision that depended on her long-term goals (Zimmerman, 1989).

Tercero also wanted to improve his life. “I kind of convinced myself, like I really need to go to school. There is so much I still want to do and going on out there and whatever, and I can't do it without school...I just realized like an epiphany a bit.” He further stated, “I want a better future, and the only real way to get that would be just to go to school and get a diploma.” *Cuatro* wanted to get a better job. He was tired of picking cherries for a living. Both *Tercero* and *Cuatro*, like *Primero*, observed the experiences of others and the consequences of those experiences vicariously and made the decision to earn their high school diploma based on the expectations of positive results (Nabavi, 2012).

Cinco wasn't allowed to see his child by the mother of the child and her family. He used that as his motivation to return to school and graduate. *Cinco* wants to show the baby's mom and family that he could do it. He stated, “so I came back to school because I want to make a difference and I want to walk” (across the graduation stage). *Sexto*'s motivation to achieve his high school graduation was also motivated by a desire to prove himself to somebody. *Sexto* wanted to finish his high school education for his mom. “There wasn't really that much

for her to be proud of me.” He wanted to make his mom proud of him by graduating from high school.

Septima desired to complete her high school education because she wanted to be a better role model and a better example to others. “Just trying to be better and set a better example,” she stated.” She also wanted to improve her position in life.” To get me where I want to be so that I’m able to live comfortably instead of always working minimum wage jobs or jobs that are miserable,” *Septima*’s main goal was to provide for a better life for her son. She wants to be able to afford college funds for her son to be able to attend Harvard University. Being a role model for her son is also very important as well as a role model for other people. “It’s for him mentally, emotionally so that he can know that I did it. I definitely want to go to school for myself, for my son, and to be a role model for other people so that when they hear my background and my story, they could say, well, if she did it, then I can do it.”

Septima’s desire to improve her position in life by graduating from high school most likely arose after watching others accomplish the same goal by also graduating from high school. According to Nabavi (2012), social learning, imitation, and behavior modeling will occur if a person observes positive, desired outcomes. *Septima*’s desire to be a role model for her son indicates that although she most likely has never heard of Bandura or the Social Cognitive Learning theory, she understands that she can be a model for her son and thus be an agent in shaping his behavior (Bandura,1999; Nabavi, 2012); Fryling, Johnson, and Hayes, 2011).

Octavia wanted her mom to be proud of her. “There isn’t much else for her to be proud of. I want her to be proud of me,” she stated. *Octavia* further noted that her mom doesn’t want her to spend my life working in a factory. *Novena* was working in a warehouse when a coworker told her that she could go to her school and earn her high school diploma. She was out of school

for approximately two years and decided to come to school when she found out that she could do so. *Decima* wanted to return to school and earn her diploma so she could make more money. All three participants had expectations of future consequences in that they believed that by returning to high school and earning their diplomas that their lives would be improved by the ability to obtain a higher income. This expectation affected their decisions to change their behavior and return to a complete high school (Nabavi, 2012).

Undécima lamented, “I want my diploma to show that I am capable of doing what other people did. I do not want to feel dumb.” She further stated, “My diploma shall help my future in a lot of ways. It should help me with employment and with going to college, with a long career.” She, like many of the other participants, changed her behavior based on her expectation that earning a diploma would help her future. In that she was thinking long-term, *Undécima* illustrated Zimmerman’s (1989) premise that metacognitive decision making, in no small degree, depends on a person’s long-term goals.

Reasons Why the Participants Wanted to Graduate from High School

The primary reason that the participants wanted to earn their high school diploma is that they could then go on to college and get a better paying job. The literature states that those that have at least some college will be much more successful, financially (Carnevale., Jayasundera, & Gulish, 2015). *Primero* planned on going to the local community college to learn about computers. He planned to go then join the army where he could put his computer knowledge to use. *Segunda* also planned on going to the local community college. She hasn't decided on what career she was going to target. She just wanted to get a job where she would have a retirement plan. *Tercero* planned to earn a high school diploma so that he could then go to a culinary school.

Cinco was one of the few participants that wanted to earn a high school diploma for reasons other than going on to college and making a better life. He stated, I want “to show people that I’m not the same person I was back then, that I’m different...As I got older, I wanna (sic) walk (the graduation stage), and I want to graduate and make people that I have made sad before, happy.” He also stated, “I want to go to college, get a house. Have my family once again.” In the sense that the equates graduating from high school and going to college to buying a house, *Cinco* does believe that completing high school is a step towards earning more income.

Novena wanted to graduate so that she could then go to college so that she could then have a career in the medical field. *Undécima* mainly wanted a diploma as a symbol that she was capable of achieving. She stated that she wanted to “show that I am capable of doing what other people did.” She later did say that she planned on going on to community college, getting a career in early childhood education.

The general feeling among the participants is that they encouraged themselves to return to school and finish their high school education. *Primero*, *Segunda*, *Tercero*, *Cuatro*, and *Cinco* all directly stated that no-one encouraged them to return to school, other than themselves. *Cinco* said, “I couldn’t be that little boy no more.” *Sexto*’s mom encouraged him. *Decima*’s grandmother and fiancé encouraged her to return to school, and they both agreed to watch her children while she was in school. *Undécima* said that she encouraged herself to return to school and that she did so because she wanted to “show that I am capable of doing what other people did.”

The primary reason cited for returning to school and completing their high school education was that of economics. They wanted to get better jobs. *Segunda* needed a better job. She was working cleaning houses and going to school in the late afternoon. She was also

concerned because she doesn't have a retirement plan. "I don't have a life, retirement plan, or nothing," she stated. *Tercero* stated, "I wanted to have a career instead of just a job." He also wanted to be able to depend on himself rather than have to depend on others. *Cuatro* stated, "I'm trying to get that (diploma), so I could get a better job. To get a job, they always ask for a high school diploma." *Sexto* also wanted to secure a better job. to get a better job. His mom encouraged him to return to school by telling him that she doesn't want him to be working in a factory for the rest of his life. Like many of the others, *Novena* stated, "I want a career instead of just a temporary job." *Decima* asserted that she needed to graduate so that she could make more money. *Undécima* felt, "my diploma will help me in a lot of ways. It should help me with employment."

There was some disagreement on whether the school could have done anything to prevent the participants from dropping out in the first place. *Primero* stated, "in high school, they should have definitely made sure everybody knew what they were doing." He went on to say that the school has to "contribute enough motivation and hope" so that students would stay in school. *Tercero* felt that there wasn't anything the school could have done, stating, "no, it's like a personal thing." "I'm just a little disappointed in myself that it took me this long to finally decide" (to come back to school).

Novena stated that my family "were basically making me drop out of school. So, I don't think it was like the school's fault or anything." The rest of the participants did not have any opinion on whether or not the school could have done anything to keep them from dropping out of school in the first place.

Factors Contributing to Success

The participants revealed several different factors that they believed contributed to their success once they decided to come back to school and complete their high school education.

Primero believed that the significant factor was himself. He had to push himself to come back and to finish. He felt that it was a growing process. *Segunda*, on the other hand, believed that the school was a major factor. She cited that she had a lot of support in her present school in the form of books and computers. She also noted that the teacher was really nice. *Tercero* also believed that he had a lot of support from his current school. Fryer (2014) stated that a school could protect students from dropping out if the staff were caring, persistent, and provided ongoing involvement and support.

Cuatro had a simple factor--the school was within walking distance.

Sexto, like *Primero*, believed that the significant factor contributing to his success was himself. He stated that it was one hundred percent on him to finish.

Septima gave the current school's love and support credit for her success. "There was (sic) times where I didn't want to come to school, but knowing that I had love and support here is what brought me in and knowing that they were going to help me get to my next change, in my next mountain that I was going to have to face." Knesting (2008) found that not only school staff need to create a climate of respect and caring, but faculty members must also be able to show that they care.

Decima was the only participant who credited someone other than school personnel or herself as being the force for her current success. She credited the support of her fiancé and her grandmother for watching her kids while she went to school, and while she did her homework.

All of those participants who identified their future plans, after graduating from high school, planned on continuing their education. *Primero* planned to go to the local community college and study computer basics. After he did so, he was going to join the army and put his computer skills to work. *Tercero* planned on going to culinary school and then becoming a chef.

Sexto, like *Primero*, planned on going to the local community college and then joining the army. *Novena* planned on enrolling in the local community college in the area of nursing. She was interested in becoming a nursing assistant or registered nurse or perhaps an ultrasound technician. *Decima* also planned on going to the local community college. Afterward, he planned on getting into law enforcement. *Undécima* desired to become a nurse assistant or becoming employed in the field of child development. She also planned on going to the local community college.

Advice to Others

The parting question to the participants was, “what advice would you give to others who are contemplating dropping out of high school?”

Primero replied, “they should graduate because it's way better than trying to catch up later on...There's way more opportunities once you get that diploma. There's more, more to the world.”

Cuatro stated, “I would just tell them you have to get up, finish up with your school, so you can get a job and be independent.”

Septima said she would tell them to “evaluate or write the pros and cons of what happens if you drop out, what happens if you don't drop out...think honestly, sit down and think about if they drop out today, where am I am going to be in five years from now? And if I stay in school today, where am I going to be in five years from now?”

Ocha thought about the question for a few seconds and then stated that for herself dropping out and then returning made her more determined to finish. “It just makes me more passionate about me finishing the race,” she stated.

Cinco was the only other participant to provide an answer to the question. He stated, “I would tell them to grow up and finish. And if you hate your school, find another one, like the one here, that treats your right and helps you.”

Summary

After examining the participants’ lived experiences, there were several themes that emerged as a result of the analysis of the participant’s decisions to leave school and to return to complete their education. Many of the participants felt that they were not receiving adequate support while in school before they initially dropped out. Unlike the literature, most participants believed that their safety was not an issue on causing them to leave school.

There were many different varied reasons for students to leave school. Several of the participants believed that their decision to quit school was only a temporary one and that they would eventually return. Most of the participants returned to complete their high school because they realized that their future would be much brighter once they had a high school diploma. None of the participants had issues with their own beliefs in their academic ability to finish school. They all believed that if they were given the opportunity, they could have finished high school

Most of the participants planned on going on to higher education once they earned their high school diploma. Economics played a major role in the participant’s leaving school in the first place and in their decision to return to school. According to Bandura (1974), it is well documented that behavior is influenced by its consequences. Once these participants realized

that the consequences of dropping out of high school were going to be dire, they changed their behavior and returned to high school in order to improve their outcomes.

Knowing what these participants believe and feel about their high school education should have an impact on all of us who interact with high school students and on those who are responsible for their education. There are several recommendations that teachers, staff, and administrators can undertake in the classroom to prevent their students from dropping out of high school and also ensuring their success once they come back. These recommendations will be presented in Chapter Five.

At the state level, there are several recommendations as to what state legislators could do to help students to stay in high school and to help them once they do decide to come back and complete their high school education. These recommendations will also be presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter begins by reviewing the purpose of the study and includes a discussion of the research findings, which were presented in chapter four. The chapter is presented in three sections, consisting of an overview of the study, a discussion of the research findings relative to the literature review, and the concluding section, which includes recommendations for further research and a closing summary.

Overview of the Study

In order to gather data for this study, interviews were conducted with eleven students who returned to complete their high school education after having earlier dropped out. An analysis was completed regarding the reasons that led those high school students to drop out of high school and of the motivations and struggles that led them back to school to complete their high school education. Eleven participants were interviewed, each for a period of 30 to 45 minutes. Their responses were recorded on an electronic audio recorder and then transcribed. The transcripts were then analyzed and coded into themes that answered the research questions. The next section describes the participant's perceptions of why they dropped out of high school as well as why they returned to complete their high school education.

Individuals who return to high school and earn a high school credential avail themselves to additional opportunities, such as college or vocational training. It is undeniable that increasing the high school graduation rate would be beneficial to the country in general. Not only would an increase in the graduation rate be good for society in general, but graduation would also be advantageous to each graduate on a personal level, even if that graduate graduated a year or more

after his or her initial cohort. Consequently, based on this national dropout problem, the purpose of this study was to describe the experiences, motivations, and struggles of individuals who dropped out of high school and then returned to complete their high school education.

Discussion of the Conclusions Relative to the Literature Review

This section consists of critical analysis and description of the lived experiences of students who dropped out of high school and later returned to complete their high school education. The literature review demonstrates that there are many varied reasons why high school students drop out of school (Doll, Eslami & Water, 2013). Many varied reasons cause them to come back to school and complete their high school education (Haley, 2006). However, in this study, economic reasons dominated the reasons participants left school in the first place. Economic reasons also dominated the reasons that they returned to school. The conclusions developed in this section have meaningful inferences for educators, policymakers, students, and stakeholders.

Findings

Finding One: Many students feel that they were not receiving adequate support while in high school.

Many students who dropped out of high school felt that they were not receiving adequate support from the school. (Bickerstaff 2010; Fryer, 2014; Gallagher, 2002). In Gallagher's study, every single one of her four participants believed that their school was not a hospitable setting and believed that they would not be missed if they dropped out of school. Martinez (2006) found that students would leave high school due to their belief that they had an absence of supportive connections with the adults in the school. Half of the students interviewed in the Iachin et al.

(2013) study believed that the lack of support that they received from their teachers contributed to their failure in school.

Similar to previous literature, the past study found that a majority of students in this study who dropped out of high school believed that there was no support in school. Some students, such as *Octavia* and *Novena*, believed that there was support in the form of after school tutoring but did not avail themselves of it. Two students (*Septima* and *Sexto*) were aware of programs designed to support them to succeed in school but were too shy to ask for help.

Finding Two: Safety was not an issue causing students to leave high school.

According to the literature, many students dropped out of high school because they did not feel safe in school (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Bickerstaff (2010) found that students viewed their school as a hostile environment rather than a safe haven.

However, in this study, none of the participants stated that they dropped out of school because they felt fear for their safety. Two students stated that school could be unsafe, but they felt safe. They believed that they were not going to be assaulted by another student or students. One student, *Cinco*, frequently engaged in fighting behavior while in school. However, he himself felt safe--perhaps those around him did not.

Finding Three: Some students believed that their decision to quit high school was only a temporary one and that they would eventually return.

According to Gallagher (2002), some students leave high school to get themselves out of a bad situation. When they leave school, they do so intending to eventually come back, when their situation improves. Many students believed that once they took care of their problems, they would be able to return to school and complete their high school education (Bickerstaff, 2010).

According to Johnson (2007), 52% of the students who dropped out of high school believed that they would return to school at the time they dropped out.

Sexto and *Decima* both left school with the intention of coming back and completing their high school education when they had the opportunity of doing so. *Sexto* had moved out of state and planned on finishing high school while there, but a traffic ticket forced him to stay in California, where he returned to school. *Decima* dropped out of school to care for and to support her son. Later, when her fiancé and her grandmother offered to help watch and support her child, she returned to complete her high school education. *Novena* was forced out of school because of her pregnancy. As soon as she had a chance, she re-enrolled and completed her high school education.

Finding Four: Many students returned to complete their high school once they realized that their future would be brighter once they had a high school diploma.

After dropping out of high school, many students find out that a high school diploma is necessary to help them to advance and meet their future goals. They realize that to do better financially, they need a high school diploma (Fryer, 2014). *Primero* dropped out of school, believing that he did not need a high school diploma because he was going to make big money in the music industry. When he realized that that was not going to happen, he realized that he needed a high school diploma to have more job and life opportunities. Many of the participants would most likely agree with *Tercero* when he stated, “I want a better future, and the only real way to get that would be just to go to school and get a diploma.”

Segunda, *Tercero*, *Sexto*, and *Cuatro* all comprehended that in order to improve their lives, economically, they needed to complete their high school education and earn a diploma. They all believed as *Tercero* articulated, “I want a better future, and the only real way to get that

would be just to go to school and get a diploma.” These participants observed the conduct and behavior of others around them and the occasions when the behavior and conduct were rewarded or punished (Bandura, 1974). They chose to modify their behavior by returning to high school once they observed the consequences which ensued to those who did not complete their high school education.

Finding Five: Many students planned on going on to higher education after they earned their high school diplomas.

For many students, their plans on going on to college was a significant factor for them returning to high school and earning their diploma. Out of the eleven participants that were interviewed, six stated that they planned on going to college after that have earned their high school diploma. *Primero* planned on going to college to learn about computers and then join the army. *Segunda* wanted to go to college to get a career with a retirement plan. *Tercero* wanted to earn his high school diploma so that he could then go to culinary school. *Cinco* planned on going to college so that he could have a career that would allow him to buy a house. *Novena* dreamed of entering a career in the medical field necessitating her to finish high school before she could start her medical training. *Undecima* planned on going to college so that she could enter a career in early childhood education.

Finding Six: Economics played a major role in the students leaving high school in the first place and later in their decision to return to complete their high school education.

Fryer (2014), in her study, found several students who had to quit going to school to go to work to support themselves or their families. Another study found that if a student was working more than 20 hours per week that that was a reliable indicator that the student was likely to drop out of school (Lee & Staff, 2007). In this study, both *Tercero* and *Cinco* quit going to high

school so that they could go to work. *Tercero* worked in several minimum wage jobs in the fast-food industry, which led him to the belief that he could do much better as a high-quality chef. *Cinco* went to work in a warehouse, which although the job paid more than minimum wage, it was hard physical work.

In this study, the first four participants all stated that they returned to complete their high school education to improve their financial lives. As *Tercero* stated, “I want a better future, and the only real way to get that would be just to go to school and get a diploma.” *Cinco* and *Sexto* wanted to earn a high school diploma to prove to other people that they could do so. *Septima* wanted to be able to live comfortably instead of always working minimum wage jobs. *Ocha* returned to school because she did not want to spend the rest of her life working in a factory. *Decima* returned to finish her high school education because she wanted to go on to college and have a long career.

These participants regulated their behavior by their expectations of the outcome probabilities. They chose the course of action that was most likely to produce positive outcomes (Nabavi, 2012). They looked around them and made a choice to return to high school as they viewed this course of action as producing positive outcomes for others that were in a similar situation as themselves (Bandura, 1999). Through the phenomena of the Social Cognitive Learning Theory, the participants acquired society’s norms of thought and action (Nabavi, 2012). They decided that it was in their best interest to return to school and earn their high school diploma.

Recommendations

These first recommendations are regarding approaches to prevent students from dropping out of high school in the first place. One proposal is for schools to place more emphasis on job

conditions and the pay that students will earn if they drop out of school and enter the job market without a high school diploma. Teachers and staff could implement this recommendation and many of the others in their classrooms. School administrators could ensure that their teachers implement this recommendation and others to follow in their classroom. District administrators and superintendents could make policies that ensure their site administrators implement these policies. At the state level, legislatures and the Department of Education could pass legislation or policies to ensure that these recommendations are followed throughout the state.

Many of the participants in this study left high school to go to work. Some (*Decima, Novena*) were forced to go to work to support themselves and their families. Others, such as *Tercero, Cinco, and Septima*, choose to drop out of high school and go to work. They returned to school when they discovered that the work environment “out there” was not what they believed it would be. *Primero, Septima, Novena, Decima, and Undecima*, found that they could not maintain their lifestyle and move forward as they had envisioned. They found that life was harder than they thought it would be. The only way they could achieve the lifestyle that they desired was to improve their working opportunities. They determined that if they wanted more money, they would have to get a better job. To get a better job, they would have to graduate from high school.

Perhaps if students were told and taught the reality of life “out there” without a high school diploma, they would not have dropped out of school in the first place. One idea is that schools could bring in guest speakers who had dropped out of high school to explain what life was like for them without a high school diploma. This analogous to the “scared straight” programs wherein teenagers visit incarcerated prisoners who then tell them the realities of a life of crime. “Programs, such as ‘Scared Straight ‘involve organized visits to prison facilities by

juvenile delinquents or children at risk for becoming delinquent. The programs are designed to deter participants from future offenders by providing firsthand observations of prison life and interaction with adult inmates....Program advocates and others believe that realistic depictions of life in prison and presentations by inmates will deter juvenile offenders or children at risk for becoming delinquent from future involvement with a crime” (Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, Hollis-Peel, & Lavenberg, 2013, p. 3.). The recommendation herein is that the diploma-less former students would visit the current students in their schools, making the proposal more likely to succeed in convincing the current students to finish their high school education.

The students would have the opportunity to learn by watching what others have done (Fryling, 2011; Nabavi, 2012). Their behavior in regards to completing their high school education would be influenced by observing the negative consequences of those who did not complete their high school education (Bandura, 1974; Bandura, 1999). According to Fryling, Johnston, and Hayes (2011), modeling is a “significant factor in the acquisition of the moral judgment repertoire” (p. 192). Students who observe the model of those who did not complete their high school education would make the moral judgment to not follow in their footsteps.

Another recommendation is that schools should require the passing of a college and career class as a requirement for graduation. Students should be required to explore various job and career opportunities. More importantly, they would explore what it takes to get into those jobs and careers. They could then prepare while still in high school to undertake the requirements to get into those careers. Such classes have been described as “an appropriate education and experiences needed by high school students to prepare them concomitantly to enter employment upon graduation and/or to continue studying in post-secondary institutions at that time or at some later period in their lives” (Lynch, 2000, p. 5). According to Lynch (2000)

and DiBenedetto & Myers (2016), students who study career tech are more likely to stay in school.

One component of high school career and technical education is to improve student's motivation. "Effective tech-prep programs that will result in improved student achievement" increased college attendance by more high school graduates." (Lynch, 2000, p. 27). Students are more likely to do their schoolwork when seeing relevance (Bottoms, Presson & Johnson, 1992). Students such as *Cuatro* felt that the classes he took in high school were not relevant to his future. His point of view is consistent with Lynch's (2000) findings that, "students will be much more committed to achievement if they see a connection between what they are expected to do in school and in their lives now and in the future" (p. 25).

An additional recommendation is that high schools should teach students about budgeting for their future expenses after they leave high school. They should be instructed on how far minimum or low-wage jobs would go. They would learn what it takes to support themselves and their families. How much money to pay rent, car payment, groceries. They could then compare how they can afford those expenses while working at minimum wage, such as in a fast-food restaurant or a warehouse.

A recommendation that would have to be implemented at the state level would be to consider assisting high school students with financial aid. Financial aid is available for high school students who attend private high schools (College Scholarships, 2019). Many students, such as *Decima* and *Novena*, would have stayed in school if they could have afforded to do so. *Cinco*, *Tercero*, and *Sexto* also dropped out of high school due to needing to go to work because of financial hardship. Chen and DesJardins (2010) found that among minority students, their receipt of larger Pell grants significantly lowered their dropout rates from college. Terkla (1985)

also found that “there is a significant relationship between college completion and receiving financial aid” (p. 16). Perna (1998) also found that college students who received financial grants were more likely to persist in obtaining their bachelor’s degree than those that don’t receive such grants. Whereas these studies involved college students, there is no reason to believe that these findings would also not apply to high school students.

For those students who have dropped out of high school, there are two recommendations: let it be known that they can come back to school and lower their graduation requirements so that they can graduate sooner. Some students, such as *Cinco* and *Novena*, were unaware that they could return to school and earn their high school diplomas. *Cinco* only found out that he could return when a friend told him so.

In addition, the recommendations made above regarding keeping a student from dropping out in the first place would help lure a student into re-enrolling back into high school and completing his or her high school education. Knowing that financial aid is available and that there would be relevant courses geared to helping them succeed in their future would be powerful incentives to return to school.

Another state-level recommendation is to lower graduation requirements for those that drop out of high school. The State of California has reduced the graduation requirements for those students who are or were foster students, homeless, former juvenile court students, a child of a military family, or a migrant family. (California Education Code Section 51225.1). These students are exempt “from high school district requirements that exceed state graduation requirements if the pupil transfers to the district, or transfers from one high school to another within a district in the 11th or 12th grade if the pupil would not be reasonably able to complete the additional district requirements” (California Foster Youth Education Task Force, 2010).

Foster, homeless, students of migrants and of military families and probation youth who have had multiple school placements during their high school career during their 11th and 12th grade are able to use the state minimum requirement of 130 credits in order to be able to graduate from high school. (JEFM, 2016; California Education Code 511225.3, 2016). In California, each district can set its graduation requirements as long as such requirements are at or above the state minimum. Typically, the school districts require 200 to 240 credits to graduate (Public Policy Institute of California, 2019). By allowing students who have dropped out of high school to return and then graduate with only 130 credits would significantly reduce the number of classes and credits that are required by their school district.

Obviously, there would have to be certain restrictions when applying this proposal. Otherwise, some students may drop out of school purposely so that they would then earn a lower graduation requirement. However, those that do drop out of school for a certain amount of time should be allowed, when they do return to high school, to be allowed to graduate from high school with the same minimum requires that foster youth, homeless youth, and those who have been incarcerated have.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study analyzed the reasons that compelled high school dropouts to return to school and complete their high school education. The findings of this research could be the basis for further research.

This study took place in a county located in the northern portion of the Central Valley of California. It should be replicated in different areas of the country with different populations and different social-economic environments. For example, the American Indian high school dropout rate is much higher than the dropout rate for the rest of America (Willeto, 2019). In 1989 the

National Center for Educational Statistics reported that the American Indian and Alaska students' dropout rate was twice the national average (Reyhner, 2001). Replicating this study on an Indian reservation could provide interesting and vital results.

A study could be done of those students who dropped out of high school and didn't return to complete their high school education. Further knowledge would be gained about their lives and circumstances. As there are many studies regarding the percentages of persons who did not graduate or the percentages of those on welfare, this proposed study should delve into the lives of nongraduates using a phenomenology method of study. The participants in this proposed study could explain in detail their lives as non-high school graduates.

A study could be done on the results for students who have taken college and career courses, and budget course. It would be interesting to see the result of these types of classes. It would be interesting to find out how many of these students who take these types of courses do drop out and how many continue with their high school education and graduate with a diploma.

A longitudinal study should be completed following students who returned to complete their high school education and their lives thereafter. They could be compared to those who dropped and did not return to high school.

As noted earlier, many students dropped out of school because they felt that their teachers and school staff did not care about their success (Gallagher, 2002; Knesting, 2008). Several of the participants in this study stated that they were too shy to avail themselves of help. A study could be done researching this issue in more detail. All of the participants in this study who did not ask for help were of ethnic minorities. It is unknown what the racial make-up of their teachers was prior to them dropping out of school and whether or not the racial makeup had any impact on the students dropping out. There has been little research on this matter (Dee, 2005).

One study concluded that there is little unambiguous empirical evidence that a stronger degree of ethnic match of teachers and students with the same ethnic background results in positive results (Driessen, 2015). However, a study that concentrates on comparing students seeking help from teachers of the same racial background and those who are not may show surprising results.

Closing Summary

By exploring the lives and struggles of eleven students who dropped out of high school, and then returned to complete their high school education, highlighted that like the rest of the population, they make major decisions based on financial necessity. The participants in this study, for the most part, dropped out of high school because of financial need. They returned to complete their high school to a large extent also because of financial need. They were able to look about them and view the success of others who have completed high school, which motivated them to change their behavior and complete high school themselves (Bandura, 1974; Bandura, 1999; Nabavi, 2012).

There were some other reasons why some of the participants dropped out of high school. For example, some felt that financially they did not have to finish high school. However, in no small extent, they all returned to complete their high school education due to a need to increase their financial outlook. It became evident that if students were to be able to foresee their future in life without a high school diploma that they would not have voluntarily dropped out of school.

Others felt that they had no choice. “Life” forced the decision upon them. Perhaps if making it easier for them to graduate after they returned, such as lower graduation requirements or making it easier for them to stay in school in the first place (financial aid), many of the high school dropouts would instead become high school graduates. Not only will their lives be better for having graduated, but society itself will also be enriched.

Concluding Remarks

What I learned from doing this study is that a vast majority of high school students leave school because of their financial situation. Conversely, a vast majority returned to complete their high school education once they realized if they really wanted to earn a decent living they needed to earn a high school diploma. Many students left high school because they felt that they had to. Most of these students delayed their graduation and returned to complete their high school education when they believed that they then had the opportunity to do so.

As an educator working with this student population, I believe that I need to Impress upon the students that I work with to look forward to their long-term futures. I should endeavor to convince students to continue with their education—even if only part time. Their long-term gains will be worth their short-term sacrifices.

As I was studying these students I was inspired by the perseverance that some of them displayed. Many went through circumstances that I could not personally have gone through. As a parent and a grandparent, I am glad that my children and grandchildren did not have to go through what these students did. As a grandparent I will do what I must so that my grandchildren won't have to go through some of the tribulations that some of the students in this study had to go through.

I found that Bandura's theory helped me understand the responses from these students. After dropping out of school, they looked about, at their friends, at people they knew, people they heard about, at public perceptions in general, and based on what they perceived, they informed themselves and make the choice to complete high school.

If I were to do this study again I would focus more questions on how and from whom did these participants learn the lesson that it would be best for them to return to high school. Did they learn these lessons from television or from friends? Did they learn from parents? When did they first realize that they had to complete high school? Why did it take some so long to learn?

What could I, as a teacher involved with these students have done to keep them from dropping out of school in the first place? What can educators or society in general do to ensure that students complete their high school education?

REFERENCES

- Ali, A. M., & Yusof, H. (2011). Quality in qualitative studies: The case of validity, reliability, and generalizability. *Issues in Social and Environmental Accounting*, 5(1/2), 25-64.
- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2015). The Graduation Effect: The Economic Impact of a High School Diploma. Retrieved from <http://impact.all4ed.org/#ntional/increased-investment/all-students>.
- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2016). The high costs of high school dropouts: The economic case for reducing the high school dropout rate. Retrieved from <http://all4ed.org/take-action/action-academy/the-economic-case-for-reducing-the-high-school-dropout-rate>
- Angen, M. J. (2000). Evaluating interpretive inquiry: Reviewing the validity debate and opening the dialogue. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10(3), 378-395.
doi: 10.1177/104973230001000308
- Bandura, A. (1974). Behavior theory and the models of man. *American psychologist*, 29(12), 859.
- Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of personality. *Handbook of personality*, 2, 154-196.
- Barrat, V. X., Fong, A. B., & Shirk, P. B. (2008). *Reenrollment of high school dropouts in a large, urban school district*. US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.
- Bergman, M. M., & Coxon, A. P. (2005). The quality in qualitative methods. *In Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 6, No. 2).

- Berliner, B. Barrat, V. X., Fong, A.B. & Shirk, P. (2008). *Re-enrollment of high school dropouts in a large, urban school district*. National Center for Education Evaluation REL Issues and Answers. Retrieved from:
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=REL2008056>.
- Bickerstaff, S. (2010). "I feel untraditional": High school leavers negotiating dominant discourses on "dropout". *Journal of Education*, 190(3), 37-45.
- Bland, P., Church, E., Neill, S., & Terry, P. (2008). Lessons from successful alternative education: A guide for secondary school reform. *Eastern Education Journal*, 37(1), 29-42.
- Bottoms, G., Presson, A. & Johnson, M. (1992). Making high schools work through integration of academic and vocational education. *Southern Regional Educational Board*.
- Bowers, A. J., Sprott, R. & Taff, S. A. (2013). Do you know who will drop out? A review of the predictors of dropping out of high school: Precision, sensitivity, and specificity. *The High School Journal*, 96(2), 77-100.
- Brown, B. A. (2010). Social hostility and the "dropout" syndrome: leadership assisting youths' re-entry into school? *Educational Review*, 62(1), 53-67. doi:
10.1080/00131910903469577.
- California Foster Youth Education Task Force, (2016). Retrieved from:
http://www.cfyetf.org/publications_6_2687671508.pdf
- Carnevale, A. P., Jayasundera, T., & Gulish, A. (2016). America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots. *Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce*.

- Catterall, J. S. (2011). The societal benefits and costs of school dropout recovery. *Education Research International*, 2011. doi: 10.1155/2011/957303
- Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching. (2019). Retrieved from:
https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/phenomenology/strengths_limits
- Chen, R., & DesJardins, S. L. (2010). Investigating the impact of financial aid on student dropout risks: Racial and ethnic differences. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 81(2), 179-208.
- Cherry, K. (2019) How psychology explains the role of accommodation in learning. *Verywellmind*. Retrieved from: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-accommodation-2795218>
- College Scholarships, (2019), Private High School Loans, retrieved from:
<http://www.collegescholarships.org/loans/private-high-school.htm>
- Coyne, I. T. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research. Purposeful and theoretical sampling; merging or clear boundaries? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26(3), 623-630.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd Ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Dee, T. S. (2005). A teacher like me: Does race, ethnicity, or gender matter?. *American Economic Review*, 95(2), 158-165.
- Devers, K. J., & Frankel, R. M. (2000). Study design in qualitative research--2: Sampling and data collection strategies. *Education for Health*, 13(2), 263.

- DiBenedetto, C. A., & Myers, B. E. (2016). A Conceptual Model for the Study of Student Readiness in the 21st Century 1. *NACTA Journal*, 60(1a), 28.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40(4), 314-321.
- Doll, J. J., Eslami, Z., & Walters, L. (2013). Understanding why students drop out of high school, according to their own reports: Are they pushed or pulled, or do they fall out? A comparative analysis of seven nationally representative studies. *Sage Open*, 3(4), 2158244013503834.
- Driessen, G. (2015). Teacher ethnicity, student ethnicity, and student outcomes. *Intercultural Education*, 26(3), 179-191.
- Dunn, C., Chambers, D. & Rabren, K. (2004). Variables affecting students' decisions to drop out of school. *Remedial and Special Education*, 25(5), 314-323.
- Englund, M. M., Egeland, B. & Collins, W. A. (2008). Exceptions to high school dropout predictions in a low-income sample: Do adults make a difference? *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(1), 77-93.
- Erwin, A. S. (2018). *Creating a strong school culture to prevent high school dropouts*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Portland, Portland.
<https://pilotscholars.up.edu/etd/43>
- Fink, A. S. (2000). The role of the researcher in the qualitative research process. A potential barrier to archiving qualitative data. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, (1)3.
- Finn, J. D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. *Review of Educational Research*, 59 (2), 117-142.

- Franco, M. S., & Patel, N. H. (2011). An interim report on a pilot credit recovery program in a large, suburban midwestern high school. *Education, 132*(1), 15.
- Franklin, C., Streeter, C. L., Kim, J. S., & Tripodi, S. J. (2007). The effectiveness of a solution-focused, public alternative school for dropout prevention and retrieval. *Children & Schools, 29*(3), 133-144.
- Fryer, L. (2014). *In the face of adversity: factors affecting dropout, re-engagement and resilience among at-risk youth at an alternative high school*. (Doctoral dissertation, Vancouver Island University). Retrieved from <https://viuspace.viu.ca/handle/10613/2015>
- Fryling, M. J., Johnston, C., & Hayes, L. J. (2011). Understanding observational learning: An interbehavioral approach. *The Analysis of Verbal Behavior, 27*(1), 191-203.
- Futris, T. G., Olmstead, S. B., Pasley, K., & Nielsen, R. B. (2012). A fork in the road to high school completion: Exploring adolescent fathers' educational paths. *Fathering, 10* (3), 291-313.
- Gallagher, C. J. (2002). Stories from the strays: What dropouts can teach us about school. *American Secondary Education, 30*(3), 36-60.
- Glense, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Goldsmith, P. & Wang, J. (1999). When can schools affect dropout behavior? A longitudinal multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 36*(4), 715-738.
- Gottlieb, A. M. (2015). *Factors That Contribute to High School Drop-outs Earning Their High School Diploma*. (Doctoral dissertation). National Louis University, Chicago.
<https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss/128>
- GradNation (2016). High school graduation facts: Ending the dropout crisis. Retrieved from:

<http://www.americas Promise.org/high-school-graduation-facts-ending-dropout-crises>.

- Haley, S. A. (2006). *Dropping out of high school: A focus group approach to examining why students leave and return* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Hall, T. J. (2011). *Allowing drop-outs to drop-in: A case study of West Bladen High School*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina Wilmington).
- Harlow, C. (2003). *Education and correctional populations. Bureau of justice statistics special report* (Report No. NCJ-195670). U.S. Department of Justice, Washington DC.
- Hawkins, R. L., Jacquard, J., & Needle, E. (2013). Nonacademic factors associated with dropping out of high school: Adolescent problem behaviors, *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 4 (2), 58-75. doi: 10.5243/jsswr.2013.5
- Horsburgh, D. (2003). Evaluation of qualitative research. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 12(2), 307-312.
- Husserl, E. (1962). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology*, (Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson). London, New York: Collier, Macmillan.
- Iachini, A. L., Buettner, C., Anderson-Butcher, D. & Reno, R. (2013). Exploring students' perceptions of academic disengagement and reengagement in a dropout recovery charter school setting. *Children & Schools*, 35(2), 113-120. doi: 10.1093/cs/cdt005
- JEFM, C., (2016), Recent court decisions and legislation affecting juveniles.
- Johnson, J. L. (2007). *Evaluation of student attrition in an alternative school setting*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/?id=ED499102>.
- Knesting, K. (2008). Students at risk for school dropout: Supporting their persistence. *Preventing School Failure*, 52(4), 3-10.

- Kolstad A. J., & Owings, J. A. (1986). High school dropouts who change their minds about school. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 275 800).
- Kortering, L. J. & Braziel, P. M. (1999). School dropout from the perspective of former students: Implications for secondary special education programs. *Remedial and Special Education, 20*(2), 78-83.
- Lagana-Riordan, C., Aguilar, J. P., Franklin, C., Streeter, C. L., Kim, J. S., Tripodi, S. J., & Hopson, L. M. (2011). At-risk students' perceptions of traditional schools and a solution-focused public alternative school. *Preventing School Failure, 55*(3), 105-114. doi: 10.1080/10459880903472843.
- LaFromboise, T. D. (1988). American Indian mental health policy. *American Psychologist, 43*(5), 388.
- Lee, J. & Staff, J. (2007). When work matters: the varying impact of work intensity on high school dropout. *Sociology of Education, 80*(2), 158-178.
- Levin, H. M. (2017). The economic payoff to investing in educational justice. In *Schools in Transition* (pp. 161-188). Brill Sense. doi: 10.3102/0013189X08331192
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalist inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Li, M. (2007). Bayesian proportional hazard analysis of the timing of high school dropout decisions. *Economic Reviews, 26* (5), 529-556. doi:10.1080/07474930701509416
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (1990). Work motivation and satisfaction: Light at the end of the tunnel. *Psychological science, 1*(4), 240-246.
- Lynch, R. (2000). High school career and technical education for the first decade of the 21st century. *Journal of vocational education research, 25*(2), 155-198.

- McCaslin, M. L. & Scott, K. W. (2003). The five-question method for framing a qualitative research study, *The Qualitative Report*, 8(3), 447-461.
- McCaul, E. J., Donaldson, Jr., Coladarci, T. & Davis, W. E. (1992). Consequences of dropping out of school: Findings from high school and beyond. *Journal of Educational Research*, 85(4), 198-207.
- McFarland, J., Cui, J., Rathbun, A., & Holmes, J. (2018). Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2018. Compendium Report. NCES 2019-117. *National Center for Education Statistics*.
- Martinez, H. (2015). *Instructional and structural factors related to successful dropout prevention and recovery programs* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Morrisette, P. (2018). Pursuing a Dream: The Lived Experiences of Early Leavers and Their Return to Alternative High School. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(2), 422-438. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss2/10>
- Morse, A. B., Anderson, A. R., Christenson, S. L. & Lehr, C. A. (2004). Promoting school completion. *Principal Leadership Magazine*, 4(5). Retrieved from http://www.naspcenter.org/principals/nassp_completion.html.
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 13-22.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Murray, C. & Naranjo, J. (2008). Poor, black, learning disabled, and graduating. *Remedial and Special Education*, 29(3), 145-160. doi:10.1177/0741932508315052

Nabavi, R. T. (2012). Bandura's social learning theory & social cognitive learning theory. *Theory of Developmental Psychology*, 1-24.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *Dropout rates in the United States: 2005* (US Department of Education Publication No. NCES 2007-059). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

National Center for Educational Statistics (2018). *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2018*. Retrieved from:
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019117.pdf>

National Dropout Prevention Center. (2019). *Economic impacts of dropouts*. Retrieved from:
<http://dropoutprevention.org/resources/statistics/quick-facts/economic-impacts-of-dropouts>.

Nielsen, H. B. (1995). Seductive texts with serious intentions. *Educational Researcher*, 24(1), 4-12.

Orb, A, Eisenhauer, L. & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 33(1), 93-96.

Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research* 34(5), 1189-1208.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage. *Thousand Oaks, CA*, 688.

Perna, L. W. (1998). The contribution of financial aid to undergraduate persistence. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 28(3), 2.

- Petrosino, A., Turpin-Petrosino, C., Hollis-Peel, M. E., & Lavenberg, J. G. (2013). 'Scared Straight' and other juvenile awareness programs for preventing juvenile delinquency. *Cochrane database of systematic reviews*, (4). DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD002796.pub2
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 137.
- Pope, C., Ziebland, S., & Mays, N. (2000). Analyzing qualitative data. *British Medical Journal*, 320(7227), 114-116.
- Public Policy Institute of California. (2019). Retrieved from:
<https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-high-school-graduation-requirements/>
- Reyhner, J. (1991). Plans for Dropout Prevention and Special School Support Services for American Indian and Alaska Native Students.
- Roberts, C. M. (2010). *The Dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation*. (2nd Ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rumberger, R. W., & Lim, S. A. (2008). *Why students drop out of school: A review of 25 years of research* (Vol. 15, pp. 1-130). California Dropout Research Project Report. Press. Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schulz, L. & Rubel, D. J. (2011). A phenomenology of alienation in high school: The experiences of five male non-completers, *Professional School Counseling*, 14 (5), 286-298

- Shefi, Y. (2015). The contribution of teacher-student relationships to perseverance, dropout prevention and motivation for change in students' attitudes in "second chance" high school. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Science*, 209, 470-475. doi:10:1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.255.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63-75.
- Smith, B. J. (2000). Marginalized youth, delinquency, and education: The need for critical-interpretive research. *The Urban Review*, 32(3), 293-312.
- Terkla, D. G. (1985). Does financial aid enhance undergraduate persistence? *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 15(3), 2.
- Tyler, J. H., & Lofstrom, M. (2009). Finishing high school: Alternative pathways and dropout recovery. *The future of children*, 19(1), 77-103.
- United States Census Bureau. (2010). *Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010" 2010 Census Summary File 2*.
- U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Educational Sciences, National Center for Educational Statistics. (2015). High school dropouts and stopouts: Demographic backgrounds, academic experiences, engagement, and school characteristics. (NCES publication 2015-064). Retrieved from <http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2015064>.
- Vagle, M. D. (2018). *Crafting phenomenological research*. Routledge.
- van Manen, M. (2006). Writing qualitatively, or the demands of writing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(5), 713-722

- Watts, J. (2010). Resilience factors that influence black males to re-enroll in high school or a general equivalency diploma program. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://www.fisherpu.sjfc.edu/education_etd/35.
- Wayman, J. C. (2001). Factors influencing GED and diploma attainment of high school dropouts. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 9(4) 1-20.
- Wehlage, G. G, Rutter, R. A. & Turnbaugh, A. (1987). A program model for at-risk high school students. *Educational Leadership*, 44(6), 70-73.
- Wehlage, G. G. (2001). At-risk students and the need for high school reform. *Education*, 107(1), 18-28.
- Willeto, A. A., & Goodluck, C. (2019). Economic, social, and demographic losses and gains among American Indians. *Population*, 28, 35-3.
- Williams, P. (2017). Standardizing school dropout measures.
- Zammit, K. A. & Anderson-Ketchmark, C. (2011). Understanding dropout recovery. *Children & Schools*, 33(4), 249-251.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (1989). A social cognitive view of self-regulated academic learning. *Journal of educational psychology*, 81(3), 329.

APPENDIX A: STUDENT REFERRAL INFORMATION

STUDENT'S NAME _____ AGE _____

STUDENT'S PHONE NUMBER _____

STUDENT'S E-MAIL _____

MALE FEMALE ETHNICITY _____

HOW LONG WAS STUDENT OUT OF SCHOOL? _____

DOES THE STUDENT HAVE CHILDREN OF THEIR OWN? YES NO

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Hi, my name is Ernie Garcia. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project.

The purpose of this project is to explore the reasons why students who have dropped out of high school return to school to complete their high school education.

Before we do anything else, I must go over this “Participant consent” form and get your signature, if you agree. You do not have to sign this form if you do not agree. Also, remember that you can change your mind at any time and cancel your participation in this study at any time with no questions asked. *I will then go over the “Participant Consent” form and get the signature of the participant.*

The next step is to fill out the “Participant Questionnaire.” I am attempting to get a broad, diverse group of students. I will be using this form to choose who is going to participate. *I will then fill out the form along with the student,*

If you are selected, you will be involved in three interview sessions. This is the first one. The next one will consist of a series of questions, exploring the reasons that you left school and the reasons why you came back. It will be audio-recorded, and I might write notes. At the last interview, you will be given a copy of the transcript of the second interview and will be able to

make any corrections and additions that you may desire. The third and last interview will be audio recorded.

I will be contacting you soon to arrange the second interview or to let you know that you were not selected to further participate.

Do you have any questions?

MAIN QUESTIONS

Thank you for your participation in this research. I have several questions to ask you related to your education. As I informed you earlier, this interview will be audio recorded. Do I still have your consent to record this interview?

First, tell me why you decided to participate in this study?

A. While in High School

1. How many schools did you attend?
In elementary school?
In middle school?
In High School?
2. What was positive about going to high school?
3. What was negative about going to high school?
4. Were you in any programs in high school to support you?
Please tell me about them.
5. Did you feel that you were supported by your teachers?

6. Did you feel safe while at school?
7. Did you feel that your classes were relevant?
8. What classes did you enjoy the most? Why?
9. What classes were difficult?

B. The decision to Leave High School

1. Tell me about the reasons that led you to drop out of school.
2. How long were you out of school? *Explain, tell me more.*
3. What were you doing while you were out of school?
4. How did you feel about yourself after dropping out of school?
5. How did those closest to you feel?
6. When you dropped out of school were you thinking that it was a temporary period? that someday you would return and get your diploma? Please explain

C. The decision to Come Back to Adult School to Complete Your High School Education

1. Tell me about the reasons that led you to return to school.
2. Why did you want to graduate?
3. Did anyone encourage you to return to school? Who?
4. What importance did someone else place on having you to return to school?
5. Was it family, friends or other circumstances that encouraged you to return to school?

6. Were there any economic or financial reasons for you returned to school? Why was this important to you?
7. What more could the school have done to prevent you from dropping out?
8. What factors contributed to your success once you returned to school?
9. What are your plans after you graduate?
10. Do you have any advice for someone who is thinking of dropping out of school?

CONCLUSION

Thank you very much for participating in these interviews. I wish you much success in your future.

Thank you for meeting with me today. I will type up my questions and your answers into a transcript. You will have an opportunity to read the transcript of what was said in this interview. You may make any corrections or additions as you see fit. If there is anything that you now recall, which you didn't remember the last time please feel free to let me know.

Any questions?