

Dropout Prevention Among Urban Minority Adolescents: Program Evaluation and Practical Implications

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ABSTRACT

Statistics show that the dropout rates in the United States have been on the decline. A 1996 National Center for Education statistics stipulates that while 17 percent of all 14-34 year olds were high school dropouts in 1970, only 11.2 percent of all 14-34 year olds were high school dropouts in 1994. Nevertheless, it is clear that the results of leaving high school without a diploma are disastrous. Those who dropout risk not finding jobs that provide adequate pay. Studies by Dryfoos (1990) and Duper (1993) have found that high school dropouts are more likely to be involved in crime, drug use, and health and marital problems compared to those who graduate. Studies of early school leaving have described dropout population and pinpointed ways to stop dropout.

Introduction

Which family, peer relationship, work, psychological, and behavioral variables relate most strongly to school dropout while controlling for other variables? How do gender, race, family, income, and parent education interact with these factors to better predict the probability of a student leaving school early? Answering these questions will add to our understanding of school dropout and dropout groups and help us to develop more appropriate and effective dropout prevention retrieval efforts. The authors attempt to answer these questions by examining the high school predictors of students dropping out of school during the tenth and twelfth grades.

The purpose of this article is to broaden people's understanding of dropouts by taking into consideration psychological, behavioral risk, and protective factors associated with school dropout. The article will take into consideration the fact that different social context and developmental processes contribute to individual outcomes. Though dropout can be viewed as a personal decision, it should not be forgotten that other contributing factors such as family, peer relationship, work, school and individual, psychological processes must be taken into consideration.

From a historical standpoint, research has shown a one sided view as to why students drop out of school. According to Gary Whelage et al (1990), it is the characteristics of students, along with their families and cultural backgrounds that are responsible for their dropping out. Whelage further added that a more complex and balanced picture addressing the causes of dropping out of school has been identified. There is strong evidence that course failure and school disciplinary problems, in combination with chaotic personal, social, and family background conditions, contribute to dropping out.

Factors Associated With School Dropout

There is no one particular reason why students drop out of school. Many factors are connected with dropping out. Risk factors begin to add up even before students enroll in school. They include: the low educational level of parents, the broken family structure, the establish pattern of sibling school failure, and the lack of pre-school experiences. These factors create a home environment which negatively affects on the value of education. Additionally, at risk factors also play into the student's academic success with the passing of time thereby polarizing the student's dropout status.

Students drop out of school as a result of a multitude of school factors which include family backgrounds and personal problems. When students experience school failure, they become frustrated with the lack of achievement and end up alienated. They drop out as a result of this alienation. Ultimately, they choose a less desirable path to life, which in most cases include drugs, and theft.

Poor academic performance has been pinpointed as one of the most important predictors of school dropout. When students earn low grades in basic skills, perform below grade level, and are older than the rest of their classmates, they tend to drop out of school. Cutting classes, misbehaving, and household responsibilities result in students' poor academic performance. According to Newton (1956), absenteeism is mostly caused by frustration, not only limited to traditional curriculum, but poor academic performance because of reading levels at the elementary grade. To deal with this frustration, the student decides to drop out of school, venturing into the unknown world with no education and no future.

Learning Skills

To help in this, it is of the utmost necessity to aid these students by teaching them learning skills that can help them survive in the world. In most cases, skills include the development of positive work attitudes, career awareness experiences, and career exploration activities which help them experience success in the work place. As students begin to find out the importance of their education to securing employment, they will become committed. Approaches exist that address the needs of at-risk students. These approaches are: alternative programs, remediation/development programs, support programs, job experience and job placement programs. These programs make employment possible for potential dropouts on completion. Studies have shown that linking employment to education motivates students and pumps up their desire to learn. Considered very important to the success of dropout prevention programs are; administrative commitment, responsive curriculum, counseling, staffing, communication with parents, coordination with community agencies, and a system for data collection of potential at-risk students.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, it is worth noting that of the utmost importance in dropout prevention is funding, flexible scheduling, teacher autonomy, small class size, in-service, administrative commitment, and leadership. The principal, as the instructional leader of the school, plays an important role in shaping the core curriculum to create a positive culture for learning and enhancing student-teacher relationships. The principal's attitude and perception can have a great impact on the school's approach to dropout prevention. The administrator can set aside resources for the running of a prevention program. Without substantial resources, maintaining a dropout prevention program will not be feasible. With enough resources, more personnel may be employed. To further strengthen the program, resources can be used for staff development programs. This will enable

teachers to broaden their understanding of at-risk students, study alternative teaching strategies, and communicate with those who know the difficulties involved in working with those who are likely to dropout.

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