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An analysis of dropout's talk about participation at school from democratic perspectives

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AN ANALYSIS OF DROPOUTS' TALK ABOUT PARTICIPATION AT SCHOOL FROM DEMOCRATIC PERSPECTIVES

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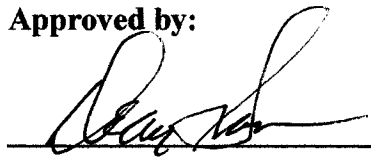

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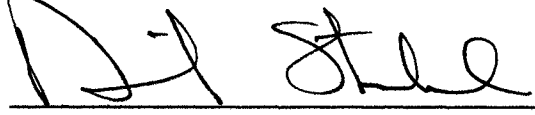

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ABSTRACT

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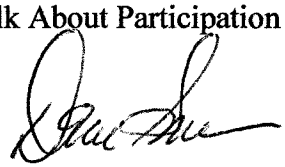
An Analysis of Dropouts' Talk About Participation at School From Democratic Perspectives

Advisor: Dr. Dean Sorenson 

This qualitative study examined participation at school as described by youths who had dropped out of high school. These descriptions of participation were then subjected to qualitative data analysis techniques in an effort to determine how they related to qualities of participation in exchange and institutional perspectives of democracy as described by March and Olsen (1995; 2000).

A purposefully selected sample of 11 youths who had dropped out of school was questioned about participation at school. The participants responded to open-ended questions asked via a predetermined protocol in a focus group interview format. The data obtained from the focus group interview process was then transcribed and subjected to qualitative data analysis as prescribed by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

The processes of open, axial, and selective coding resulted in five distinct categories of data: doing school, sidetracking, props, winners and losers, and wanting more. Further qualitative analysis of the data resulted in the following conclusions:

1. Youth who drop out view high school as not difficult, but cannot relate to the limited student identity and may replace school with alternative activities giving them an identity that makes them feel successful or important.
2. Alienation from school encourages potential dropouts to engage in counterproductive activities ranging from not listening in class to absenting themselves from school. These alternative activities interfere with or compete with their participation in school.
3. Dropouts feel that certain attributes, such as family reputation or athletic or academic ability, influence how adults and peers treat students in school. Potential dropouts view discriminations based on such attributes as unfair, take them personally, and respond by reducing their effort in school to a minimal level.
4. Dropouts see both adults and peers in school treating certain students like winners and others like losers. Potential dropouts are affected by negative discriminations whether they are personally subjected to them or witness others being subjected to them.
5. Potential dropouts resent teachers' gravitation toward students perceived as academically adept. They desire alternative ways of being taught and also desire to be respected for the academic potential they have.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Graduation from high school is a relatively modern expectation. Sonnenberg's (1993) historical comparison of graduation rates over the last 120 years shows that in 1869-70 only about two seventeen-year olds out of one hundred had received high school diplomas. By around 1910, graduates numbered approximately nine out of a hundred seventeen-year olds, and by 1940 over fifty percent were high school graduates. After a slight dip during World War II, the percentage of high school graduates climbed to 70 percent in 1959-60, peaked at 77 percent at the end of the 1960's, and fell to around 71 percent in 1979-80 (Sonnenberg, 1993).

In 1987, the long-term, historical trend of dropping out before graduating from high school was perceived as declining while the short-term trend remained steady or even increased (Rumberger, 1987). This plateau in the number of dropouts still seems to be in effect today. In 1990, the national dropout rate was reported to include over 25 percent of the nation's school population (Baker & Sansone, 1990); in 2000 The National Center for Education Statistics reported that five out of every 100 youths enrolled in high school had left within the previous year without graduating (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). At the personal level, high school graduation today is virtually "a requirement for accessing additional education, training, or the labor force" (Kaufman, et al., 2001, p. 1). At the national level, there is serious concern over dropping out of high school because the civic and economic welfare of the nation is seen as dependent on a certain universally minimal level of educational attainment by individual citizens (Bloch, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Modern research on dropping out has been aptly described as "confusing and blurred" (Renihan & Renihan, 1995, p. 2). Methods of calculating dropout rates have varied widely (Kominski, 1990; Morrow, 1986) and included "vague terminology and uncertain definitions" (Bloch, 1991, p. 38). Wide variations in reported historical trends may be due to calculation methods, as in Rumberger's (1987) example where the 1984 national dropout rate was reported as being between 15.2 and 29.1 percent. Rate comparisons over time can be difficult to make both because states have been increasing the rigor of their graduation requirements and because many dropouts return to school later and do graduate (United States Department of Education, 1994). Changing definitions of what constitutes a dropout have also affected reported rates to some extent (Kaufman, et al., 2001). Local dropout rates may be affected by their intended purpose: "A district that wants more money to start a program can derive a high figure; a similar district pressed to defend itself will use different procedures and produce a low rate" (Mann, 1986, p. 307).

While certain pupil characteristics at virtually every grade level have been shown to predict the likelihood of dropping out (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001), the data also show that most students considered to be at-risk do not drop out (United States Department of Education, 1994). Most of the students who do drop out didn't fit dropout profiles while they were in school (Bearden, Spencer, & Moracco, 1989) or come from groups not really considered to be at risk (Bracey, 1994). For example, if differences in the relative sizes of ethnic groups are taken into account, "the picture of the typical dropout is that of a white, middle-income student" (Bracey, 1994, p. 727). While whites have a lower rate of dropping out compared to other ethnic groups, in actual numbers the

group accounts for 59% of all dropouts (Bracey, 1994). Socioeconomic stereotyping of dropouts is challenged by data revealing that "middle-income families account for 75% of all dropouts and families living in the suburbs account for 40%, a higher rate than that of either urban or nonmetropolitan areas" (Bracey, 1994, p. 727).

Across the United States, high school dropouts' most frequently cited reasons for leaving school have been found to be related to contextual factors within schools (Jordan, Lara & McPartland, 1996). Dropout rates at various schools have been shown to be predictable based on school attributes (Toles, Schultz, & Rice, 1986) and schools that are more responsive to student performance and behavior seem to be more successful in holding students in school (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986). School experiences can be a major bellwether of the decision to drop out (McDill, et al., 1986) and, while schools can't change the characteristics of dropouts, they can affect students' attitudes and beliefs to prevent dropping out (Wehlage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1987).

Participation as a Focus of Analysis

The American public assumes that public schools educate youth for gainful employment, but it also assumes that a major role of public schooling is to educate students for their role as citizens in our democratic society (Rose & Gallup, 2000). High school mission statements often reflect these expectations, but "while everyone agrees that schools should have some sort of covenant, vision, mission philosophy, or values to guide their work...nearly all schools tend to ignore them" (Allen, 2001). In reality then, "U.S. schools rarely enact democratic life within their boundaries...they are more often authoritarian than participative" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 141). Participation is defined as "to have or take a part or share with others" (Guralnik, 1982, p. 1036), but the

quality of students' participation in high school can range from passive to active.

Traditional school environments and their educational practices are "largely based on a view of students as passive recipients of knowledge provided by the teacher, and a view of learning as the acquisition of progressively more elaborated knowledge and skills" (Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Lewis, & Schaps, 1999, p. 4). Traditional structures of schooling do not do much to promote "the full development of all students for citizenship in a democratic society" (Battistich, et al., 1999, p. 4). Yet the "traditional instructional environment of the high school is the controlling operational reality that has impeded, defied and survived" (Carroll, 1990, p. 360) the efforts of legislatures, school boards, and administrators to bring about fundamental changes (Carroll, 1990), including attempts to replace it with more progressive, democratic models (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kohn, 2000; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Students in traditional schools have been described as simply trading passive cooperation for their eventual diploma (Glasser, 1988; Sizer, 1992). While dropping out is obviously an extreme form of non-participation, Glasser (1988) estimated that as many as fifty percent of students who have not dropped out of school, including those "who are intelligent enough to do well, many even brilliantly" (p. 3) are putting out very little effort by eighth grade. Such resistance and non-involvement have been identified as natural reactions to the often irrelevant and impersonal nature of traditional schools (Sizer & Sizer, 1999).

Student participation in school is not one-way transaction whereby students "just need to pay attention and engage themselves" in learning. Students must be allowed to participate actively and meaningfully by those who control schooling. Glasser's (1988)

choice theory explains that students' engagement in school is directly related to having their basic and natural human needs for power and belonging satisfied. These needs are more satisfied if students have more control over what and how they learn, as well as opportunities to work together. When students are not allowed much control, they become disengaged, often dropping out:

> It is this lack of access to power in the academic classes that is so frustrating to students because it comes just at the time when students are beginning to experience the increased need for power which is part of the normal biology of adolescence. (Glasser, 1988, p. 68)

The power that students have or don't have in school determines the quality of participation allowed to them and affects the degree of their engagement in school. When students have little power, the quality of participation allowed to them is poor, and many of them refuse to participate at that level.

Studies seem to indicate that quality of participation is an issue influencing students' decisions to leave school. For example, dropouts feel disconnected from school personnel (Coley, 1995; Erickson, 1984; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986) and do not share a sense of belonging at school (Coley, 1995; Erickson, 1984; Pittman, 1991). Lower dropout rates have been attributed to factors known to advance the quality of participation for a greater number of students, for example a school's emphasis on equity (Lee & Bryk, 1989). Dropouts themselves have recommended school reforms that could enhance the quality of participation allowed to students, such as broader, more responsive graduation requirements, smaller classes, and higher levels of teacher interest in students (Kaminski, 1993). School reforms allowing higher quality participation and that have

shown success include adults sharing responsibility with students (Pittman, 1991); having caring adults as well as exercising reflectiveness and responsiveness (Garmezy, 1993); and flexibility in instruction and fostering a strong sense of community (Comfort, Giorgi, & Moody, 1997).

Limitations of Previous Research

Research on dropping out has often focused on demographics "in the belief that these factors will supply information about how best to reduce the incidence of dropping out" (Tidwell, 1988, p. 940). Studies commonly assign responsibility for dropping out, as well as other poor educational outcomes, to families, students, and/or society rather than to schools (Bloch, 1991). While this type of information has served a valuable purpose in enlightening the problem, it may have reached a practical limit, because the rather extensive body of research now reveals that dropouts represent all demographic groups, including those not considered particularly at risk. For example, Bearden, et al. (1989) found that a majority of dropouts were participating in extracurricular activities, not using drugs and alcohol, and from intact families; Kaufman, et al. (2001) found a lack of difference between male and female dropout rates for the last 29 years; Pong and Ju (2000) found a lack of difference between single-mother family and intact family dropout rates; and Rumberger (1983) found that minority youth were no more likely to drop out than white youth. In 1994, the United States Department of Education (1994) publication on dropping out pointed out that most dropouts are not at-risk, not from "broken" homes, not pregnant, and/or not poor.

Students' perception of how participation is structured at school – how students' participation is invited and supported the democratic sense – may factor into their

decisions not to participate at all by dropping out. The research on dropouts needs to move away from the atheoretical stance characterizing most of it and "in the direction of developing and advancing theoretical concepts that treat retention, graduation, and completion as consequences of a dynamic interaction of such variables as student characteristics, school context, occupational prospects, and cultural influences" (United States Department of Education, 1994, p.1). The research specifically lacks a theoretical framework linking participation in school (i.e., school context) to assumptions about democratic participation (i.e., cultural influences), yet quality of participation allowed to students may be a significant cause for schools' failure to keep significant numbers of them in school through graduation.

Statement of the Problem

Dropping out continues to be a national problem. In Montana, about 15% of students drop out of high school between their freshman and senior years of high school (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2003). Dropouts' perceptions of their own participation in high school in relation to qualities of participation in perspectives of democracy had not been researched. Dropouts' accounts of participation in school, experienced, expected or desired, provided the data for analysis in this study.

Using a construct-oriented approach (Creswell, 1998), data were analyzed in relation to qualities of participation within commonly held perspectives of democracy, such as the institutional and exchange perspectives described by March and Olsen (1995; 2000). For example, a subject's perception of school as too boring reveals the irrelevance of a predetermined, set curriculum. An irrelevant curriculum can be seen as reflecting an exchange perspective of democracy, whereby the members of an institution are expected

to participate according to presumably rational preset rules and processes in exchange for a benefit, in this case grades, credits, and a diploma. Because the participant has no practical power to influence the rules or processes that govern him or her, students with more resources outside of school, such as a good computer, not having to work to help support the family, or parents that know how to talk to teachers and school boards, are better able to meet the requirements of, function within, or influence pragmatic changes in the existent rules and processes. A subject's insistence that students should have more control over curriculum content could be seen as reflecting an institutional perspective of democracy (March & Olsen, 1995; 2000), whereby each member of an institution is supposed to participate in the construction and ongoing development of the rules and processes that govern. Influence over rules and processes in an institutional perspective of democracy thus function as a resource that is available to all members equally. Resources held by individuals outside of the organization are not allowed to influence rule and process development within the organization.

Research Questions

Creswell (1998) recommends that qualitative researchers reduce their entire study "to a single, overarching question and several subquestions" (p. 99), with the overarching question being "the broadest question they could possibly pose about their studies" (p. 100). This qualitative study was guided by the following central question:

1. How do high school dropouts' perceptions of their own participation in high school, either experienced, expected, or desired, compare with qualities of participation specific to commonly held perspectives of democracy?

The subquestions that were used to explore the central question included:

1. What perceptions do subjects have about participation in high school?
2. How are rules and processes perceived in terms of accessibility by individuals or groups?
3. What do subjects perceive as desirable or preferable experiences of participation in school?
4. What do subjects perceive as undesirable or not preferable experiences of participation in school?
5. How do dropouts' perceptions of participation fit within perspectives of participation described in an exchange perspective of democracy?
6. How do dropouts' perceptions of participation fit within perspectives of participation described in an institutional perspective of democracy?

These questions were proposed to help the development of a grounded theory relating dropouts' perceptions of participation in high school to qualities of participation in perspectives of democracy. The rationale for these questions is explained in Chapter Three (Methodology).

Importance of the Study

There have been calls for students' reasons for leaving high school before graduation to be documented, categorized, and analyzed in order to extend the body of knowledge beyond the head counting of at-risk students and their requisite assumptions (United States Department of Education, 1994). Schools "should be able to reduce the dropout problem by reforming the conditions that push students away from their middle or high school" (Jordan, et al, 1996, p. 91). Researchers need to "help the institutions of

education examine themselves so that they may correct the deficiencies made clear through the actions of the dropouts by their leaving" (Bloch, 1991, p. 37).

Because of the cultural assumptions and expectations of participation in democratic culture and the role of public schools in preparing students for democratic citizenship, dropouts' experiences and expectations of participation in school were analyzed with reference to democratic participation. The value of this research is that it considered dropping out within the context of American democratic culture by analyzing dropouts' perceptions of participation in high school, experienced, expected, or desired, solely in terms of qualities of democratic participation in commonly held perspectives of democracy.

Qualities of participation have been described for exchange and institutional perspectives of democracy by March and Olsen (1995; 2000). In the institutional perspective, all members of an organization participate regularly in the ongoing creation and adjustment of any rules and processes by which the members are governed. The rules and processes governing the system thus function as a resource available to all members, regardless of personal resources outside of the system. In the exchange perspective, all members of an organization are not regularly involved in creating and adjusting the governing rules and processes. Members having greater personal resources outside of the system are usually more able to form coalitions to influence and/or benefit from the governing rules and processes, thus benefiting from the system more than members with fewer outside resources (March & Olsen, 1995; 2000). The degrees and qualities of participation in school described by participants were compared to the differing degrees of influence over and beneficence from rules and processes in exchange and institutional

perspectives of democracy, in order to expose the nature of dropouts' experiences and expectations in sociopolitical terms.

Education reforms have increasingly emphasized economics (Apple, 1990) and the exchange perspective practices in schools reflect this focus (March & Olsen, 2000). Participatory democracy, one of the original purposes of public education in America, requires practice (Pateman, 1970) in the context of public education (Dewey, 1916). Most American public school students are not being served through models of education that not only teach them how to think (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kohn, 2000), but how to participate democratically in a democratic culture (Apple & Beane, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Glickman, 1998; Goodlad, 2000). The extent to which our public education system has failed to be functionally democratic may be a significant cause for its failure to keep a significant number of students from dropping out before graduation.

Definition of Terms

In this study, the following terms are used with specific meaning. For the purposes of this study the following terms are defined as:

Dropout: Because this study focused on the nature of participation in a public high school for students who later left school altogether without graduating, a dropout was defined as any person who stopped attending their high school without graduating or enrolling in another high school, regardless of whether or not they achieved a general equivalency diploma (GED) or finished high school through home schooling, online, or any other non-institutional avenue of completion.

Participation: Participation has been defined as "to have or take a part or share with others" (Guralnik, 1982, p. 1036). For the purposes of this study, participation was

defined as including taking part-type or sharing-type behaviors or actions perceived by, utilized by, or allowed to students, including the rules and processes governing student participation.

Assumptions

School experiences related by participants were accepted at face value as their own realities with which they had personal experience.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to dropouts from Class B schools, having 150 to 350 students, in the state of Montana, and included subjects from class cohort groups spanning several years. These constraints limit the generalizability of findings to similar populations. However, in grounded theory studies, the literature can be referenced "to give validation for the accuracy of the findings or how the findings differ from the published literature" (Creswell, 1998). Readers must inform themselves, at their own discretion, of the generalizability of findings to particular circumstances with which they are familiar and have personal knowledge of.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Students' participation at school can be thought of in terms of belonging and power. These factors have been recognized for their influence over student participation in school (Glasser, 1988). They are also necessary as components of an education for democratic participation (Dewey, 1916; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Glickman, 1995). The school factors that dropouts report as reasons for their leaving school may be related to qualities of democratic participation that public high school students expect, because their education takes place in a democratic society and has the ostensible purpose of preparing them for democratic political participation.

Participation in Perspectives of Democracy

There exist in American culture sets of assumptions about political life, for example exchange and institutional perspectives of democracy (March & Olsen, 2000), which affect how the members of institutions are allowed to participate within their institutions.

An exchange perspective of democracy seeks to facilitate mutually acceptable exchanges for individuals. Using various means of rational negotiation, and locating coalitions and policies that will work for them, individuals are expected to pursue their own preferences and to get the best possible combination of policies that will work for their preferences. The political system in an exchange perspective of democracy lays out the procedures for obtaining legitimate political authority and imposes rules. The rules are set up to make figuring out and implementing mutually attractive exchanges feasible

and mostly free of transaction costs. The political system distributes key political resources (for example, voting rights) in a way that is consistent with broad social norms. Pursuits by individuals are limited by other individuals who also pursuing their own preferences (March & Olsen, 2000).

Exchange perspectives presume that individuals' actions are driven by a consequentialist logic --- that individuals consider alternatives by evaluating their respective consequences in terms of individual preferences or interests. It is assumed that individuals have exchangeable resources existing outside the political system that will be utilized to realize their individual interests. Individuals are "willing to make exchanges if and only if such exchanges improve the realization of their own preferences" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 151). An exchange perspective assumes that individual preferences are stable and consistent, and that they are developed outside of the institution and its political system. The exchange process is sensitive to individual interests, but is not seen as affecting them very much. Individual interests, personal resource distributions, and rules are treated as external to the institutional processes of negotiation. Importantly:

> there is no assumption of a shared public interest to be used a basis for collective action. Whether individual actors achieve their desires in such a system depends on the extent to which their desires are consistent with the desires of others and whether they have exchangeable resources of value, including political rights. (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 151)

An institutional perspective of democracy focuses instead on how interests, resource distributions, interpretations of reality, and rules are created, changed, and sustained by political processes (March & Olsen, 2000). Institutional perspectives treat

the political self as an identity, whose actions require matching to particular situations as both citizen and public official. Individuals' identities can be inconsistent, complex, and/or ambiguous. Actions are based on rules, but are not necessarily routine, because following the rules often means matching an ambiguous rule to an ambiguous situation. The complications of fulfilling various identities require energy and tolerance, and processes of resolving ambiguities and conflicts take place by building greater understandings of the nature of situations and selves, rather than by knowing more about the consequences of actions. Resolutions involve "modeling of behavior on exemplars, establishing similarities among situations by looking for essential features, and the elaboration and diffusion of meanings" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 153). Because the focus is on institutionalized identities and rules, "an institutional perspective highlights the importance of shared meanings within a political community" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 153). Thus while somewhat communitarian in nature, institutional perspectives of democracy emphasize shared rules and laws, rather than shared values. This works well "in large heterogeneous societies where value homogeneity is difficult to achieve and may be problematic as an objective, [thus] institutions, rules, and conventionalized identities become substitutes for communitarian consensus" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 153).

Exchange and institutional perspectives can be viewed as diverging in the ways that structure, processes, rules, and resources originate and are utilized by individuals regularly within the system. Institutional perspectives of democracy allow for participation based on "greater possibilities for choosing and changing the rules" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 153), "the shaping of identities and interests (March & Olsen, 2000,

p. 153), "the conscious construction of resource distributions" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 154), and "action based on the rules and the dictates of identities" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 154). Exchange perspectives of democracy allow for participation based on "brokerage among contending interests" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 153), "voluntary Pareto optimal trading based on initial endowments of resources" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 154), and "calculation of return" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 154).

In an institutional perspective, individual resources outside the system are less relevant; individual participation in rule and process construction and modification within the organizational structure have the effect of converting rules and processes into a resource available to all members. The individual beneficence from rules and processes of the organization influenced by unevenly distributed resources outside the system is less operative. Members' identities and desires are more influenced within the system, are more flexible, and are less limited by unevenly distributed resources outside the system. Because an institutional perspective of democracy allows all members access to and participation in rule and process construction, modification, and maintenance, power is shared and community reinforced.

In an exchange perspective, the rules that facilitate individuals' acting to achieve their own interests are constructed outside of individuals' regular activities within the institution and are not easily modifiable. Individuals are expected and allowed to use personal resources outside of the system to find and engage in mutually agreeable trades within the system. Unevenly distributed personal resources outside of the system will affect to what extent individuals are able to utilize the political system to achieve their desires.

Exchange and institutional perspectives of democracy "can easily be made to subsume the other, thus appearing to eliminate the differences; but the differences in emphasis are real and lead to real differences in implications for building democracy and for discovering the democratic purposes of schooling" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 154).

Participation in Traditional and Democratic Schools

The belief that public schools are separate from politics has never actually been true (Lutz & Merz, 1992). In reality,

> Schools play a central role in the political socialization of society's youth, both through the educational system's implicit invisible curriculum and through its explicit planned citizenship instruction...it is inconceivable that the values taught by a society's educational system, both through its planned instructional processes and its implicit operations, could be divorced from the society's political future or living past. (Lutz & Merz, 1992, p. xi)

A description of the relationship between public schooling and politics should include that "The search for an educational program occurs within a set of taken-for-granted assumptions about political life" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 148). How students are allowed to participate in school reflects a predominance of assumptions of either an exchange or an institutional perspective of democracy. Each perspective molds very different institutions of education based on its respective set of "taken-for-granted assumptions" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 148).

March & Olsen (2000) observed that

> In many respects, contemporary education in the United States and other

> developed countries is preeminently designed to further effective exchange politics. Recent discussions of democracy tend to subordinate political processes of discussion and debate to processes of information exchange leading to mutually acceptable trades, and recent discussions of schools tend to see them as institutions that prepare individuals for such markets and marketlike politics...Much of the practical training of schooling is training in dealing with markets of exchange. Students learn how to enter a market to secure their own desires, the role of the possession of resources in that process, and procedures for exchanging information within markets. (p. 157)

Thus the primary democratic role of schooling in an exchange perspective "is to contribute to the educational, experiential, and shared understanding bases of democratic brokerage" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 156). In traditional-type high schools students obtain knowledge codified in a curriculum that is predetermined in exchange for certain behaviors. The process is facilitated by the possession of personal resources outside of school. The modes of participation allowed to students in traditional high schools, while very limited, are seen as democratic in exchange perspectives of democracy because, for example, even though rules and processes are created, modified, and sustained outside of the immediate system and by other than the immediate participants, it is accomplished legitimately. Such an exchange perspective of democratic schooling is exemplified by Moe's (2000) contention that

> ...the public schools are agencies of democratic government, created and controlled by democratic authorities. They are not free to do what they

> want. They are not even free to be what they want. Everything about them, from goals to structure to operations, is a legitimate matter for decision by their democratic superiors and subject to influence by the political processes that determine who those superiors are and how they exercise their public authority. (p. 127)

In contrast, schooling in an institutional perspective of democracy "solicits a concept of education that is activist with shaping the constraints of politics" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 158). An institutional perspective of democracy would count as democratic those schools where students play a role in determining at least some part of the knowledge utilized, which skills would be developed and according to which criteria, through processes of democratic discourse affecting rules not necessarily fixed for the duration of a student's tenure at school. Glickman's (1998) contention that democratic learning in schools is

> a set of purposeful activities, always building toward increasing student activity, choice, participation, connection, and contribution. It always aims for students, individually and collectively, to take on greater responsibility for their own learning. It is *not* a pedagogy of opening up the classroom doors and telling students to be free. (p. 30)

reflects an institutional perspective. The tasks of democracy in institutional perspectives are accomplished when

> The institutions of democratic politics seek to sustain preferences, expectations, beliefs, identities, and interests that are consistent with democratic processes and to discourage those that are not, ...seek

> procedures for interpreting the events of political history in ways that facilitate understanding, maintenance of a democratic culture, and accountability, ...and seek to provide the processes, resources, and abilities necessary to learn from experience and to match the changing political environment. (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 158)

Darling-Hammond's (1997) premise that education for democracy requires "access to social knowledge and understanding forged by participation in a democratic community. How people are grouped for teaching and learning and for participation in decision making is important, what they are asked to participate in is important, and how they are asked to participate is important" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 142) reflects this institutionalist perspective. School structures exemplifying an institutional perspective of democratic schooling would find it necessary for students to participate in ways that Glickman (1998) describes for schools belonging to the League of Professional Schools:

- Students actively working with problems, ideas, materials, and people as they learn skills and content;
- Students having escalating degrees of choices, both as individuals and as groups, within the parameters provided by the teacher;
- Students being responsible to their peers, teachers, parents, and school community to ensure educational time is being used purposefully and productively;
- Students sharing their learning with one another, with teachers, and with parents and other community members;

- Students deciding how to make their learning a contribution to their community;
- Students assuming escalating responsibility for securing resources (of people and materials outside of school) and for finding places where they can apply and further their learning;
- Students demonstrating what they know and can do in public settings and receiving public feedback;
- Students working and learning from one another, individually and in groups, at a pace that challenges all.

For schools, from institutional perspectives and as institutions of democratic politics, "securing democracy is seen as involving three tasks that are less significant in an exchange vision" (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 158), including creating political identities, molding a comprehensible and accountable political system, and making a political system adaptive (March & Olsen, 2000). Schools reflecting institutional perspectives thus allow participation for students of a more active quality than traditional schools reflecting exchange perspectives.

Participation and Dropping Out

Almost one hundred years ago Dewey (1916) recognized the importance of belonging and of social relationships to processes of both learning and democratic participation. For Dewey (1916), a democratic society "must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" (Dewey, 1916, p. 99). Dewey's idea of education for democracy involved participation as a social

individual in a socially interactive environment, was experiential in the social continuity sense, emphasized social service, character, and community, and placed a great reliance on recognition of the mutual interest factor of social control (Haliburton, 1997). Dewey envisioned "a new system of curriculum and instruction that rooted academic learning in scientific, social, and technical problem solving and required democratic social relations" (Cohen, 1998, p. 1), and proposed this model as an antidote both to the problems of alienation and stratification in industrial societies and "problems of students' weak motivation, diffuse interest, and boredom with school" (Cohen, 1998, p. 7).

Quality of participation at school is an issue for dropouts and completers alike. According to the United States Department of Education (1994),

> The ideal objective is for all students to possess not just the diploma, but also the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for participating productively in society. Many graduates do not. Still others drop out of high school. In both instances, students have disengaged themselves from learning. (www.ed.gov/pubs/ ReachingGoals/Goal_2/Introduction.html)

For many students, poor school performance involves "varying degrees of participation, of which leaving school altogether is the extreme" (Finn, 1989). The quality of participation is so low for some students who do not dropout that the high school diploma has been called "proof of dedication, if not knowledge" (Glasser, 1988, p. 10). Dropping out of school has been recognized as an act of "rejecting membership in a community in which a youth feels marginal, gains little self-esteem, perceives the institution as offering few rewards, and which he or she experiences as personally rejecting him" (Roderick, 1993).

Glasser (1988) proposed that problems with public education, including disengagement, boredom, and dropping out, are occurring because students are not being allowed to exercise their basic needs, including for power and belonging, within the educational systems where they spend a great deal of their time. Such basic human needs must be satisfied as a sort of payoff in order for all human beings to work, including students in schools. Glasser's (1988) choice theory, derived from years of teaching and interviewing students, links student participation to the quality of participation schools allow students. Only certain students are rewarded by the structure of traditional schools, feel like they belong, and work hard because they realize the payoffs will work for them. Traditional high schools tend to

> ...have many more losers than winners because there is more failure, more competition, more emphasis on memorization and less on thinking than there is in most elementary schools. It is this lack of access to power in the academic classes that is so frustrating to students because it comes just at the time when students are beginning to experience the increased need for power which is part of the normal biology of adolescence. Now, wanting more power, they had access to less because it is all but impossible for any but a few high-achieving students to gain any sense of personal power from the work they do in a traditional high school classroom. (Glasser, 1988, p. 68)

Glasser (1988) gave an example of a classroom teacher's approach that gives all of her students power by allowing a high quality of student participation:

> She is clear in her mind what her job is and what the students are to do. She is basically responsible for the structure of the class and they are responsible to work in that structure. She is also continually responsible for improving the structure and she believes that it can always be improved: There is no best structure. But rather than look to outside "experts" to show her how to design the unachievable "best" system, she turns to the students who are working within the system and asks them for feedback. She knows more than anyone else that they know how to improve it, but she must set up a method to hear from them. Then, by taking some of their suggestions, she shows them that what they offer has value. In this way, more than anything else she can do she gives them a sense of power and in no way diminishes her own...The teacher and the students would engage in a continual examination of how the subject is taught and time will be specifically set aside to do this. There would be a real effort to do away with preconceived notions and actively enlist the help of the students in working to improve the process. From the start she would see that it is the [traditional] classroom structure, not the students, which is the cause of most of the problems. Because she does not see the students as problems, she will encourage them to speak out. (p. 98)

External control theory, manifested in traditional, teacher-directed education, has left many students disengaged (Glasser, 1988; Kohn, 2000). Students cannot be made to learn either through rewards or punishments: only when such basic needs as belonging and power are satisfied will most students really engage or participate in their own

education (Glasser, 1988). Components of student participation in relation to the institution of school, including belonging and power have been identified as correlates of dropping out in numerous studies from the last three decades during which dropout rates ceased to decrease significantly.

Dropout Factors

Dropout factors have been sorted, for example, into six major categories that include (a) school-related, (b) family-related, (c) economic, (d) demographic, (e) individual, and (f) peer (Rumberger, 1987), or three categories that include (a) school-related, (b) family-related, or (c) job-related (Jordan et al., 1996). Correlates of dropping out have been categorized as either push effects or pull effects (Gambetta, 1987; Rumberger, 1987). Pull effects are factors that operate outside the school and compete with school for students' time and energy, such as family, neighborhood, community organizations, and religious, legal, and health institutions. Push effects are factors that operate within a school itself and negatively impact the student's relationship with the school's environment. Push effects may be manifested in disruptive behavior, absenteeism, or a cessation of academic effort.

School-level variables identified as affecting dropping out include student composition, structural characteristics, organization, and climate (Rumberger, 1995). Factors categorized as student-related might be more accurately, or at least just as accurately, categorized as school-related. For example, Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) have suggested that a student-related factor such as "Attendance, and particularly truancy, tells us something about the ability of schools to engage students" (p. 38).

School Factors in National Studies

Both the High School and Beyond (HS&B) and the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) are large studies that have provided national data for research on dropping out. The HS&B study began in 1983 and was conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. The study documented data "drawn from a highly stratified national probability sample of about thirty thousand high school sophomores who attended about one thousand public and private high schools in 1980" (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986, p. 53). In addition to the initial collection of information, "A follow-up survey collected data from and retested over twenty-two thousand of these students who were seniors in 1982 and over two thousand of the individuals who had dropped out of school by 1982" (Ekstrom, et al., 1986, p. 53). The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), also conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, collected data from comprehensive survey that included students, teachers, schools, and families. The survey was based on a national probability sample of 1,100 public and private middle schools in the United States. About twenty-five students per school were surveyed, yielding an initial sample of about 25,000 students (Ingels, Scott, Lindmark, Frankel, & Meyers, 1992). Follow-up surveys were conducted with a sample of respondents in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000 (http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/nels88/).

A sample of the research over time that utilized these two databases reveals similar school-related factors in dropping out. Erickson (1984) summarized dropouts in the HS&B study as having

- a belief that high school is a different, more difficult experience than grade

school...

- A feeling of not sharing a sense of belonging to the high school as a whole;
- A tendency to avoid talking with school personnel about dropping out because they doubt it will help or because they do not know whom to contact;
- A feeling of losing interest in school and a belief that school personnel have lost interest in them...(p. 1).

Looking into the HS&B data for "insights into the characteristics of students' school experiences that may contribute to dropping out and that might be altered through policy interventions" (p. 374), Wehlage and Rutter (1986) found "a perceived lack of teacher interest in students, the perception that the discipline system is ineffective and unfair, and the presence of widespread truancy" (p. 389). Ekstrom et al.'s (1986) analysis of the HS&B data in search of the salient characteristics of dropouts identified grades and the extent of problem behaviors as major variables, determined in part by the home educational support system. Lee and Bryk (1989) identified from the HS&B data certain "characteristics of secondary schools that encourage a high level of achievement and promote an equitable distribution of achievement across the diverse social class, racial/ethnic, and academic backgrounds of students" (p. 172): i.e., "A distribution of achievement that maintains a high average level, as well as being socially equitable, is more likely to arise when the average level of academic course taking is high and the differences among students' programs of study are small" (p. 188). In contrast, the highly differentiated structure of the modern comprehensive high school "tends to amplify initial social differences among students and to culminate in a less equitable distribution of achievement (Lee & Bryk, 1989, p. 188). This effect correlates with school size because

"Although the size of schools has no effect on average achievement, it has a strong impact on social and academic differentiation. Quite simply, it is easier to create a more internally differentiated academic structure in a larger school" (Lee & Bryk, 1989, p. 188).

Pittman (1991) used HS&B data to investigate whether enrollment in vocational or business courses had a positive effect on school completion as compared to personal and social characteristics of students. He found that "the variables that had the largest potential link with dropout rate were interest in school, academic performance, and the frequency of changing schools" (p. 293). Pittman (1991) also found that "interest in school, peer influences, the sense of belonging, and other factors of the general social environment may be more important in the dropout decision for girls...[while] the quality of the relationship with school staff appeared to be a greater contributor for boys" (p. 292). McNeal (1997) used HS&B data to examine the school's role in creating high school dropouts, concluding "the disadvantages of attending schools structured in a certain manner or possessing a certain climate are felt equitably by all types of students" (p. 218). McNeal (1997) found support for the argument that greater pupil-teacher ratios reduce the quantity and quality of interaction between pupils, leading to increased dropping out. McNeal (1997) proposed that "Student perception may explain the significant relationship between teaching intensity [afforded by a higher teacher-pupil ratio] and dropping out. Students may perceive an ethos of caring in schools that place a greater emphasis on having large numbers of teachers" (p. 216).

Using data from NELS:88, Coley (1995) found that many dropouts didn't like school (44%), were getting poor grades (39%), couldn't get along with teachers (26%), or

felt they didn't belong (24%). Jordan, Lara, & McPartland (1996) used NELS:88 data to study race/ethnicity and gender differences in reasons for early school dropouts. They found school push factors to be the most influential in dropping out among every race-ethnicity and gender group and that "General alienation from school was higher among males than females, and highest among Whites of each sex" (Jordan, et al., 1996, p. 90).

School Factors in Rural School Studies

From 1960 to 1980, high school completion in rural areas was reported as being about ten percent lower than in metropolitan areas; from 1980 to 1990, the difference dropped to 7.8%, but the gap in college completion rates widened to 9.5% (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). About one quarter of students in the United States attend rural schools (Haas, 1992).

Studies from a range of years reveal that rural students' school-related reasons' for dropping out mirror those found in the HS&B and NELS:88 databases. Pittman (1986) found that rural students' school-related reasons for dropping out included lack of interest, failing grades, dissatisfaction with teachers or principals, and unhappy school experience. Herzog and Pittman's (1995) rural students said that their schools "could have provided more opportunities for the disadvantaged students and better preparation for college and workplace" (p. 118). Kaminski's (1993) rural students' reasons for dropping out included discipline problems and boredom. Bickel (1989) found that district-to-district high school completion rates in rural areas correlated to post-high school educational and economic opportunities, demonstrating the influence of social and contextual factors over individual and family traits. Ukaga, Yoder, and Etling (1998) found no significant difference between rural and urban 8th graders who completed or

didn't complete high school. Both groups were seen as troublemakers and had low educational aspirations.

Summary

Certain qualities of participation such as belonging and power have been recognized for their influence over student participation in school (Glasser, 1988) as well their necessity to education for democratic participation (Dewey, 1916; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Glickman, 1995). Previous national research on dropping out indicates that school factors play a role. Rural students have been found to drop out at higher rates than metropolitan students (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). Differences in dropout rates among rural districts also correlate with post-high school opportunities (Bickel, 1989). The United States Department of Education (1994) recognized a need for theoretically oriented research that could inform the public about whatever aspects of students' experiences determine whether or not students graduate from high school. Such theories "offer a rationale for dropout programs based on the motivating properties of student life, rather than the unexamined assumptions that accompany mere membership in the at-risk categories" (p. 24). School factors reported by dropouts and related to qualities of participation may be relevant to students' expectations of democratic participation as a consequence of living in a democratic society and to their motivation for staying in or leaving school.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Research Design

Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined research methodology as a "way of thinking about and studying social reality" (p. 3) and a research method as a "set of procedures and techniques for gathering and analyzing data" (p. 3). As a methodology, qualitative research is "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Creswell (1998) explained that the qualitative researcher "builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15). Using qualitative methods, researchers "gather words," analyze them inductively, focus on the meanings of participants, and "describe a process that is expressive and persuasive in language" (Creswell, 1998, p. 14), rather than in numbers or statistical relationships. As such, "Qualitative inquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration without apology or comparisons to quantitative research" (Creswell, 1998, p. 9). There are strong rationales for utilizing qualitative methodologies for certain studies, including when "theories are not available to explain behavior of participants or their population of study, and theories need to be developed" (Creswell, 1998, p. 17). Qualitative methodologies and methods emphasize the researcher's role as telling a story or describing an experience or phenomenon from participants' views, rather than as an expert who evaluates or judges participants (Creswell, 1998).

Dropping out of high school is both a human and a social problem. By collecting

and analyzing the perceptions of participation at school of those who have left school, this project sought to accomplish what volumes of demographic studies have failed to do: explore the varied and detailed experiential perceptions of those who have lived the phenomena in their own words, then examine those words in relation to relevant cultural perceptions about democratic participation. This research study thus required qualitative methods of data collection and analysis.

Grounded Theory

Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe grounded theory methodology as a particular "way of thinking about and studying social reality," (p. 3). In fact, "most researchers using this methodology probably hope that their work has direct or potential relevance for both nonacademic and academic audiences. This is because the methodology enjoins taking with great seriousness the words and actions of the people studied" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 6). Grounded theory is "a nonmathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organizing these into a theoretical explanatory scheme" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Researchers using grounded theory methods realize that

> the design, like the concepts, must be allowed to **emerge** during the research process. As concepts and relationships emerge from data through qualitative analysis, the researcher can use that information to decide where and how to go about gathering additional data that will further the evolution of the theory [bold in original]." (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 33)

The main goal or "centerpiece of grounded theory research is the development or generation of a theory closely related to the context of the phenomenon being studied"

(Creswell, 1998, p. 56). Theory has been defined as "A set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.15). Developing theory is a complex activity. Although it does involve both description and conceptual ordering, it should not be confused with either of those two processes, because "A theory is usually more than a set of findings; it offers an explanation about a phenomena...rather than just generating a set of findings..." (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 22). Developing theory then "is a complex process and often a long one...that entails not only **conceiving or intuiting** ideas (concepts) but also **formulating them** into a logical, systematic, and explanatory scheme...and necessitates that an idea be explored fully **and considered from many different angles or perspectives** (bold in original)" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 21).

The purpose of this study was to explore dropouts' perceptions of participation in high school in relation to certain perspectives of democracy embedded in American culture. This type of research study was best suited to grounded theory methodologies because the data, consisting of dropouts perceptions of participation in school, were analyzed specifically with reference to qualities of participation within certain perspectives of democracy in order to "**generate or discover a theory**, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, that relates to a particular situation (bold in original)" (Creswell, 1998, p. 56). The researcher recognized that when utilizing grounded theory methodology, one "begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data rather than beginning a study with a preconceived theory in mind" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.12).

Data

Sample

In grounded theory methods, theoretical sampling is utilized to choose participants who will be able "to help the researcher best form the theory" (Creswell, 1998, p. 57). Participants "need to be individuals who have taken an action or participated in a process that is central to the grounded theory study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 114). Theoretical sampling "begins with selecting and studying a homogeneous sample of individuals...and then, after developing the theory, selecting and studying a heterogeneous sample...The rationale for studying this heterogeneous sample is to confirm or disconfirm the conditions, both contextual and intervening, under which the model holds" (Creswell, 1998, p. 118). Furthermore, "the individuals may not be located at a single site; in fact, if they are dispersed, then they can provide important contextual information useful in the axial coding phase of research" (Creswell, 1998, p. 114).

This study initially utilized a theoretical sample consisting of individuals who had dropped out of two different Class B Montana schools before graduating, who would have graduated within a few years of each other, who were able to be located, and who were willing to participate. Subsequently, as the data was analyzed and theory emerged, an additional sample was utilized, consisting of a group of individuals who had dropped out of six other, different Class B Montana schools, also who would have graduated within a few years of each other. Each group consisted of five to six persons and included persons within a six-year graduation date range, due to availability of participants. The theoretical sampling process, which was utilized in this study, often "begins with a homogeneous sample of individuals who are similar, and, as the data collection proceeds

and the categories emerge, the researcher turns to a heterogeneous sample to see under what conditions the categories hold true" (Creswell, 1998, p. 243). Since the initial focus group was somewhat homogeneous, as is recommended for well-functioning focus groups (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001), the heterogeneity necessary for grounded theoretical studies was obtained by subsequently including individuals from different schools and graduating year cohort groups.

Data Collection

Data for this study consisted of high school dropouts' perceptions of school participation shared in a focus group interview format. Initial participants were solicited from a pool of community youths who were slated to graduate from high school between 1998 and 2008, but had both stopped attending their school and had not graduated from any other high school. The focus group, long utilized by commercial interests to gain consumer insight and input on commercial endeavors, "is a socially legitimated occasion for participants to engage in 'retrospective introspection', to attempt collectively to tease out previously taken for granted assumptions. This teasing out may only be partial (with many areas of ambiguity or opacity remaining) and it may be disputatious (as limits are encountered to shared meanings), but it may yield up as much rich data on group norms as long periods of ethnographic fieldwork" (Bloor, et al., 2001, p. 5). Focus groups can "provide an ostensibly attractive medium for public participation in the research process: they are sociable events; they are time-limited; and they require no technical skills of the group members" (Bloor, et al., 2001, p. 13). Importantly,

> ...focus groups can encourage participation from individuals or groups who may be reluctant to be involved in a one-to-one interview. Groups

> may be reassuring in the sense that there is safety in numbers and this may be particularly true of groups where individuals share a particular status or experience or where the group consists of individuals who already have social knowledge of each other. (Bloor, et al., 2001, p. 35)

Focus groups encourage participation because their very nature "may mean that there may be a particular propensity for participants to reveal information about which they would otherwise remain silent" (Bloor, et al., 2001, p. 25).

Since Class B schools in Montana have about 150 to 300 students in grades 9 through 12, and are so classified for extracurricular competition, participants could "already have social knowledge of each other" (Bloor, et al., 2001, p. 35) yet be virtual strangers because their daily social relationships of choice or opportunity most likely were limited to a much smaller group of peers. Focus groups "may potentially have the additional advantage of allowing people to speak more freely and openly than they would in a pre-existing social group (the sense of confessing all to the stranger on the train) without fear of repercussions after the group is over" (Bloor, et al., 2001, p. 24). Utilizing groups of virtual strangers, even if they know of each other, can "minimize post-group discomfort and problems" (Bloor, et al., 2001, p. 26), because participants will not have to deal with disclosure issues outside of the focus group (Bloor, et al., 2001).

Grounded theory methods allowed for data to be collected in more than one stage: "...data collection in a grounded theory study is a "zigzag" process---out to the field to gather information, analyze the data, back to the field to gather more information, and so forth" (Creswell, 1998, p. 56). The "data collection and analysis occur in alternate sequences. Analysis begins with the first interview and observation, which leads to the

next interview and observation, followed by more analysis, more interviews or fieldwork, and so on. It is the analysis that drives the data collection" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 42). The number of times the researcher needs to return to the field for additional data "depends on whether the categories of information become saturated and whether the theory is elaborated in all of its complexity" (Creswell, 1998, p. 57). In order to test the consistency of any emerging theory, subsequent groups needed to include students from different Class B schools than the first two. Additional data sources added to the database during the course of this investigation consisted of a second focus group of dropouts from different Class B schools than the first group. All of the participants in the second focus group were in residence at a federal job-training program at the time of the interview.

Procedures

Interviews: Initially the researcher had a class B high school principal mail the researcher's invitational and informational letter (Appendix A) to potential participants who had dropped out of that high school. The mailing included the researcher's phone number and a stamped, addressed return postcard (Appendix A). Potential subjects who wished to find out more about the study and/or participate could mail the postcard or call the researcher directly. The researcher contacted by phone potential participants who indicated interest to answer any additional questions they had. Two of the participants in the initial focus group were not on the original contact list, but were recruited by participants who had been. One of these recruits was from a different school. Researcher confidentiality was guaranteed and confidentiality considerations specific to a group situation were explained. For willing participants who were minors, Parental or Guardian Permission Forms (Appendix B) and Participant Assent Forms for Minors (Appendix B)

were given to them and their parent or guardian and collected at the focus group. This procedure applied to one subject in the first group and three subjects in the second group. Willing participants who were non-minors were asked to review and sign Participant Consent Forms (Appendix B) at the beginning of each focus group.

The researcher constructed focus groups consisting of five to six participants who would have graduated within approximately six years of each other, due to availability of participants. While groups of widely varying sizes have been used for focus groups, those consisting of between six to eight participants are optimal: smaller groups may result in limited discussion and larger ones in not allowing each participant enough time to talk (Bloor, et al., 2001). Successful recruitment is essential to the success of any group and "may depend on the accessibility of the venue to participants" (Bloor, et al., 2001, p. 37). A conference room at the local public library provided the first focus group with an easily accessible, comfortable setting "free from interruptions or surveillance" (Bloor, et al., 2001, p. 38) essential for group-type interviews. A small conference room at the job-training program provided a private, quiet setting on location for the second focus group. To further assure participation, written and phone call reminders of the meeting time and place were utilized for the first focus group (Bloor, et al., 2001). A counselor at the job-training program organized participants for the second focus group, as there was no practical way to make phone call reminders to those group members. Interviews were both videotaped and tape-recorded, in case of equipment malfunction and for clarification in transcription. Tapes were transcribed by the researcher within a few days of the interview, using research names chosen by the participants themselves. The tapes were stored in a locked file cabinet for safekeeping until transcriptions were deemed accurate,

then destroyed.

Interview Protocol: Interviews utilizing set protocols have been criticized for being "...an approach that is behavioral and antilinguistic, relies on the stimulus-response model, and decontextualizes the meaning of responses..." (Mishler, 1986, p. 27). Noting from his own research the fallacy of standardized interviews resulting from a standardized protocol, Mishler (1986) proposed a different approach that "centers on a view of the interview as a discourse between speakers and on the ways that the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent" (Mischler, 1986, p. 43). In other words, the manner and context in which respondents share information requested of them are as important as the words themselves, and "an adequate understanding of interviews depends on recognizing how interviewers reformulate questions and how respondents frame answers in terms of their reciprocal understanding as meanings emerge during the course of an interview" (Mishler, 1986, p. 52). Thus

> Rather than serving as a stimulus having a predetermined and presumably shared meaning and intended to elicit a response, a question may more usefully be thought of as part of a circular process through which its meaning and that of its answer are created in the discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other. (Mishler, 1986, p. 54)

In the standard interview approach, "The process of negotiating meaning is brushed aside...[and] responses tend to be coded and analyzed as if they were 'answers' to preformulated questions" (Mishler, 1986, p. 59). Interviews must be respected as

discursive events: "To come to a more adequate understanding of what respondents mean and to develop stronger theories as well as more vivid generalizations in interview research, we must attend to the discursive nature of the interview process" (Mishler, 1986, p. 65).

While an Interview Protocol (Appendix C) with a core set of questions informed by the literature was used as a guide for the focus group interviews, the researcher asked "open-ended research questions, wanting to listen to the participants...and shaping the questions after we 'explore,' and...refrain from assuming the role of the expert researcher with the 'best' questions...questions change during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem" (Creswell, 1998, p. 19). This view seems to be supported by Glaser's (1992) idea of Grounded Theory research as well: "Even...when specific questions can be asked without forcing the data or its collection, the researcher never, never [emphasis in original] asks the [research] question directly in interviews as this would preconceive the emergence of data. Interview questions have to relate directly to what the interview is about impirically [sic], so the researcher maximizes the acquisition of non-forced data. These specific questions are in the thoughts and analysis of the researcher, to be reviewed later" (Glaser, 1992, p. 25). Thus interview questions and direction of the discussion sought to disclose participants' perceptions of participation at school, but not the relationships of those perceptions to cultural perspectives of democracy. Each focus group was asked the same core questions, as needed, to focus the discussion on and around participants' perspectives of participation at school. This semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher flexibility to explore issues that arose during the course of the interviews.

When asking participants to disclose personal information for research purposes, it is important for the researcher "to gain access and establish rapport so that participants will provide good data..." (Creswell, 1998, p. 110). Groups of people who do not know each other may take longer to warm up: this process was facilitated by having participants complete a Participant Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix C), as well as discuss and sign Participant Consent Forms at the start of the group (Bloor, et al., 2001). Minors whose forms were previously signed had a chance to review those. Minors whose Parent or Guardian Permission Forms had not been received at the time of the focus group would not have been allowed to participate. Subjects who did not want to be video or audio taped would not have been allowed to participate.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues in qualitative research with regard to subjects of the research include "seeking consent, avoiding the conundrum of deception, maintaining confidentiality, and protecting the anonymity of individuals with whom we speak" (Creswell, 1998, p. 20). These issues were addressed with an 11 Point IRB Summary (Appendix D) addressed to the University of Montana's Institutional Review Board regarding research with human subjects.

Grounded theory methodologies challenged the researcher to avoid personal bias while gathering and analyzing data, and to "set aside, as much as possible, theoretical ideas or notions so that the analytic, substantive theory can emerge" (Creswell, 1998, p. 58). In grounded theory research,

> One does not begin with preconceived ideas or extant theory and then force them on data for the purpose of verifying them or rearranging them

> into a corrected grounded theory...it is not a sophisticated verificational process, honoring some extant theory that does not work or is not relevant in the first place. (Glaser, 1992, p. 15)

The researcher needed to put aside preconceived ideas or hopes for verification and not worry because the problem would "emerge as well as the manner by which subjects involved continually process it" (Glaser, 1992, p. 21).

An important ethical issue that applies to group work includes overdisclosure, due to "the fact that assurances of confidentiality on the part of the researcher are limited in focus group research, in that information is shared among members of the group over whom the researcher has little control" (Bloor, et al., 2001, p. 26). This problem was minimized by the researcher's emphasis on the voluntary nature of the research and by making sure that each participant knew what the research topic was before agreeing to participate in the group (Bloor, et al., 2001).

Personal biases that this researcher needed to be sensitive to included negative notions of how youths who have left school perceive school and their place in it, as well as concern over their feelings of a lack of efficacy due to not having stayed in school. The researcher is licensed in school counseling and trained in individual and group counseling.

Development of Questions

Creswell (1998) recommended that qualitative researchers reduce their entire study "to a single, overarching question and several subquestions" (p. 99).

Central Question: The researcher's central question should be "the broadest question they could possibly pose about their studies" (Creswell, 1998, p. 100). This

study was guided by the following central question:

1. How do high school dropouts' perceptions of their own participation in high school, either experienced, expected, or desired, compare with qualities of participation specific to commonly held perspectives of democracy?

Subquestions: The following six subquestions were used to explore the central question:

1. What perceptions do subjects have about participation in high school?
2. How are rules and processes perceived in terms of accessibility by individuals or groups?
3. What do subjects perceive as desirable or preferable experiences of participation in school?
4. What do subjects perceive as undesirable or not preferable experiences of participation in school?
5. How do dropouts' perceptions of participation fit within perspectives of participation described in an exchange perspective of democracy?
6. How do dropouts' perceptions of participation fit within perspectives of participation described in an institutional perspective of democracy?

Strauss and Corbin (1998) have recommended "Before beginning a project, a researcher can turn to the literature to formulate questions that act as a stepping off point during initial observations and interviews" (p. 51). To answer the central and subquestions for this proposal, the interview protocol consisting of an initial question focusing on defining "participation" and nine additional prompt questions was developed from a review of the literature as synthesized in this proposal's Chapter Two (Review of the Literature).

Research Question Rationale

The research questions for this proposal were developed from a review of the literature on dropping out and included a central question and six subquestions. In keeping with qualitative methodology, the central question was written in the broadest form possible in order to overarch the subject to be researched (Creswell, 1998). The central research question, subquestions, and research protocol questions reflected the necessity that qualitative researchers ask open-ended questions to get at participants' meanings and "refrain from assuming the role of the expert researcher with the 'best' questions" (Creswell, 1998, p. 19). Furthermore, any of the questions posed in this study could have been changed "during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem" (Creswell, 1998, p. 19).

Central Question: How do high school dropouts' perceptions of their own participation in high school, either experienced, expected, or desired, compare with qualities of participation specific to commonly held perspectives of democracy?

Participation is defined as "to have or take a part or share with others" (Guralnik, 1980, p. 1036), thus the quality of participation allowed to students' can range from passive or irrelevant, i.e. low, to active or meaningful, i.e. high. A review of the literature on dropping out strongly indicates that quality of participation, specifically the degree to which students have been allowed to or invited to participate, is a recurring theme in students' reasons for leaving high school before graduation. The reasons that dropouts give for leaving school, commonly and over time, include feeling like they don't belong (Coley, 1995; Erickson, 1984) or feeling disconnected from school personnel (Coley, 1995; Erickson, 1984; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). When students are invited to participate

actively in their own education, allowing a higher quality type of participation, they become engaged in school; when students are expected to participate passively for the most part, allowing a lower quality type of participation, they become disengaged, often to the point of dropping out (Glasser, 1988). Schools described as "democratic" build a certain degree of participation into the system by including "purposeful activities, always building toward increasing student activity, choice, participation, connection, and contribution" (Glickman, 1998, p. 30), allowing higher quality participation for students.

March and Olsen (1995; 2000) described qualities of participation within two perspectives of democracy common in American culture: an exchange perspective and an institutional perspective. Participation for individuals in an exchange perspective is limited: rules and processes are mostly already in place and can only be affected if like-minded individuals get together to change them, a process largely facilitated by resources that individuals have access to outside the system. The governing rules and processes are presumed to be rational, and members of the organization are expected to play by them in order to gain from the system. In schools, students gain grades, credits and a diploma when they comply with predetermined rules and processes that govern the course of study. Participation for individuals in an institutional perspective is not so limited: rules and processes can be adjusted to meet the needs of the members of the organization. The process of changing rules and processes includes all members of the organization and is not allowed to be influenced by resources that individuals have access to outside the system. The governing rules and processes are the products of current members' discourse about the rules and processes. In schools, students, parents and teachers would be allowed and expected to participate in the development of rules and processes

governing the course of study. In an institutional perspective, the rules and processes themselves function as a resource available to all members of the system regardless of the resources they personally may have access to outside of the system itself.

Data pertaining to the quality of participation experienced by students as described in their perceptions of participation at school and relating to the following subquestions were sought utilizing the following protocol questions.

Subquestion #1: What perceptions do subjects have about participation in high school? The public believes that a major role of public schooling in the United States is to prepare students for democratic participation in American society (Rose & Gallup, 2000). Yet most public schooling treats "students as passive recipients of knowledge provided by the teacher...[and] learning as the acquisition of progressively more elaborated knowledge and skills" (Battistich, et al., 1999, p. 4).

Interview Question #1: How would you define "participation"? and Interview Question #2: What do you think of when you think of participation at school?

Subquestion #2: How are rules and processes perceived in terms of accessibility by individuals or groups? Passive participation-type and active participation-type public schools are both seen as democratic in American society. Yet public schools rarely "enact democratic life within their boundaries" (Darling-Hammond, 1997; p. 141): the quality and degree of participation, especially beneficence from and access to rules, processes, and resources within each system varies widely. Dropouts have recognized institutional culpability soon after leaving school, but when interviewed a few years later felt that they alone were responsible for their academic failure (Fine, 1987).

Interview Question #9: What would have had to happen to make you stay in school? and Interview Question #10: Is there anything you would do differently now, if you were suddenly back in school?

Subquestion #3: What do subjects perceive as desirable or preferable experiences of participation in school? A "push out" dimension has been identified in students' reasons for dropping out, including failing in school work, not liking school, and not getting along with teachers (Jordan, et al., 1996). High school students have recommended reforms that include connecting school experiences to the world of experience outside of school, breaking down the traditional boundaries between subjects, using a more flexible instructional system that actively engages students, and developing a stronger sense of community and connectedness between students (Comfort, et al., 1997).

Interview Question #3: What are some of the ways that you liked participating at school?, Interview Question #5: Were there other ways you could have participated at school, but didn't?, and Interview Question #6: How do you think your school could encourage student participation?

Subquestion #4: What do subjects perceive as undesirable or not preferable experiences of participation in school? Dropouts frequently cite not liking school as a reason for leaving (Ekstrom, et al., 1986; Jordan, et al., 1996). Even students not considered to be at risk for dropping out while in high school have reported that school was boring, that they were absent often, that their grades were poor and that they preferred work to school (Bearden, et al., 1989).

Interview Question #4: What are some of the ways you disliked participating at school?, Interview Question #7: What problems did you have at school? and Interview Question #8: What played the biggest role in your leaving school?

Subquestion #5: How do dropouts' perceptions of participation fit within perspectives of participation described in an exchange perspective of democracy? Widely varying degrees of participation allowed to students in school may be relatable to qualities of participation within the exchange and institutional perspectives of democracy described by March and Olsen (2000). For example, participants may state that they dropped out of school because they were bored. The expression of boredom may reveal that, in fact, they felt that a majority of the curriculum was too personally meaningless for them to invest their time in. This view reflects a rejection of an exchange perspective of democracy (March & Olsen, 2000), whereby members of an organization are expected participate according to standards and rules probably developed without their input, in exchange for a benefit, in this case grades, credits, and a diploma.

Subquestion #6: How do dropouts' perceptions of participation fit within perspectives of participation described in an institutional perspective of democracy? Participants may suggest that students should have more say in what they study, rather than having four years of a pre-set curriculum. This view reflects a desire toward an institutional perspective of democracy (March & Olsen, 2000), whereby all members of an organization are expected to participate in the construction and ongoing development of the rules and processes by which everyone participates, and resources held by individuals outside of the organization are not allowed to influence either processes or rules.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this research was done from verbatim transcriptions of interviews compiled shortly after each focus group session. The researcher did not assume "that the preparation of transcripts is simply a technical detail prior to the main business of the analysis" (Silverman, 2001, p. 164). Instead, she knew that "Transcribing tape-recorded interviews is complex, tedious, and time-consuming work that demands careful listening and relistening, the use of explicit transcription rules, and a well-specified notation system" (Mishler, 1986, p. 47). The researcher transcribed the notes, using a mode of transcription intended to be "sensitive to an investigator's general theoretical model of relations between meaning and speech, selectively focus on aspects of speech that bear directly on the specific aims of the study, and take into consideration the limitations of the basic data and of resources available for analysis" (Mishler, 1986, p. 49). Transcripts included participants' verbatim words and indicated common speech patterns such as pauses, overlapping talk, pauses in tenths of seconds, and changes in pitch noted by underscoring (Silverman, 2001).

Analysis in grounded theory has been described as "the interplay between researchers and data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13), where scientific expectations call for "maintaining a certain degree of rigor and by grounding analysis in data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13) and creative expectations call for " the ability of researchers to aptly name categories, ask stimulating questions, make comparisons, and extract an innovative, integrated, realistic scheme from masses of unorganized raw data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13).

Coding: Coding procedures are intended to build theory rather than test it, give

researchers analytic tools for dealing with volumes of raw data, help analysts consider alternative meanings of phenomena, and be both systematic and creative at the same time in order to "Identify, develop, and relate the concepts that are the building blocks of theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13). Coding included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Challenges in using these Grounded Theory techniques included setting aside theoretical ideas so the analytic, substantive theory could emerge, and carefully watching for saturation (Creswell, 1998).

In the open coding phase, the researcher examined the transcripts of the focus group interviews "for salient categories of information supported by the text" (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). Utilizing a constant comparative approach, the researcher attempted to saturate the categories "— to look for instances that represent the **category** and to continue looking (and interviewing) until the new information obtained does not further provide insight into the category (bold in original)" (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). Open coding has been described as a process of conceptualizing or abstracting: "to see new possibilities in phenomena and classify them in ways that others might not have thought of before" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 105). Eventually, "certain concepts can be grouped under a more abstract higher order concept, based on its ability to explain what is going on" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 113).

Once the initial set of categories was developed, the researcher tried to identify "**causal conditions** that influence the central phenomenon, the **strategies** for addressing the phenomenon, the **context** and **intervening conditions** that shape the strategies, and the consequences of undertaking the strategies (bold in original)" (Creswell, 1998, p. 151). At this stage of analysis, "the researcher creates a **coding paradigm,** or theoretical

model that visually portrays the interrelationship of these axial coding categories of information (bold in original)" (Creswell, 1998, p. 151). Axial coding is used to relate "categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). Here the researcher was "looking for **repeated patterns of happenings, events, or actions/interactions that represent what people do or say, alone or together, in response to the problems and situations in which they find themselves** (bold in original)" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher had to remember that

> axial and open coding are not sequential acts. One does not stop coding for properties and dimensions while one is developing relationships between concepts...Both dimensions and relationships add density and explanatory power to a theory and will continue to emerge during analysis. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136)

The researcher then utilized selective coding to integrate and refine categories to form a larger theoretical scheme. This integration included deciding on a central category that had the analytic power "to pull other categories together to form an explanatory whole...and account for considerable variation within categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146). Finally, the theory that emerged was checked for internal consistency and logic (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Verification

Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out that a "theory is validated by comparing it to raw data or by presenting it to respondents for their reactions. A theory that is grounded in data should be recognizable to participants, and although it might not fit every aspect

of their cases, the larger concepts should apply" (p. 161). Member checks are recommended to ensure validity in qualitative studies (Creswell, 1998). However, with regard to focus groups Bloor, et al. (2001) noted that "members' judgements [sic] are provisional and subject to change, but most of all that to view end-of-study focus groups as a member validation exercise is to forget that focus groups are subject to methodological frailties in an analogous manner to the earlier (main) study methodology" (p. 15). Such frailties include the difficulty of getting a group of people together and power dynamics among group members that influence participation (Bloor, et al., 2001).

Triangulation, also utilized to check the validity of findings in qualitative studies (Creswell, 1998), has been viewed as irrelevant for both focus groups and grounded theory. Regarding focus groups, Bloor, et al. (2001) pointed out that

> research methods are not readily substitutable: in any given research setting one particular method will be more suitable for the particular research topic than any other...Why then should we reject the findings that are the product of a superior method simply because they have not been confirmed (triangulated) by an inferior method?...Extending the range of methods used may extend an initial analysis, but it is not a test of it. (p. 13)

Regarding grounded theory in particular, Glaser (1992) held that

> the theory that is emerged is validated only by its fit to the data and its integration. If an hypothesis within this theory is relevant for its high impact on resolving the main concern of the participants, then a verificational study (an experiment or survey) can be made to verify its

> true import...But most often the plausibility of the grounded theory (its workability, relevance, fit and modifiability) is enough to trust hypotheses as applied in other situations and the theory's ready modifiability makes a test too static for changing situations. (p. 105)

Generalizability: According to Glaser (1992), "Generalizing to a larger population is a unit orientation that is not appropriate to grounded theory" (p. 107). Instead

> What applies to grounded theory is its generalizability from a substantive theory of limited scope to a process of larger scope with parsimony, based on its ability to fit, work, and be relevant. Is it readily modifiable. Thus, for example, how generalizable is the cultivating of clients by milkmen, to the cultivating of clients in general for profit or to the cultivating of all relationships for fun and profit? (Glaser, 1992, p. 117)

Grounded theory methods then "generalize to a basic social process of scope and depth...For example, redesigning of lifestyles because of chronic illness can be further generalized to redesigning of lifestyles due to a chronic condition of everyday life, e.g. occupational mobility" (Glaser, 1992, p. 107).

Data Reporting

The Role of the Researcher: Grounded theorists need to be able to practice certain characteristics that facilitate the process of exploring data with regard to theories that may emerge, including being able to step back from their research and critically analyze situations, to recognize tendencies toward bias, to think abstractly, to be open and flexible to helpful criticism, to be sensitive to respondents' words and actions, and to have a sense of absorption in and devotion to the work process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In fact, "The

analyst might be, and often is, surprised at what he or she finds out when in the field" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 233).

This researcher attempted to check biases in her view as to the practical efficacy of a traditional high school diploma for all students (Fine, 1991), as well as biases in her concern over feelings of efficacy on the part of youths who have dropped out of high school. This researcher has extensive experience teaching and counseling students of high school age in several different settings, including high schools, group homes for severely emotionally disturbed youth, a sex offender program, and an Upward Bound program. The researcher is familiar with the issues and concerns of adolescents, and with the importance of confidentiality.

Narrative

After the data were analyzed and summarized, they were reported in the form of a narrative organized according to themes that emerged and were supported by the literature. The narrative took form through the process of analytic induction, and took into account that the audience would most likely consist of people in education and others involved in the research.

Analytic Induction: Bogdan and Biklen (2003) have noted that analytic induction is utilized when "some specific problem, question, or issue becomes the focus of research" (p. 63). In analytic induction, "Data are collected and analyzed to develop a descriptive model that encompasses all cases of the phenomena" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 64). Strauss and Corbin (1998) cautioned that

> Although statements of relationship or hypotheses do evolve from data (we go from the specific case to the general), whenever we

> conceptualize data or develop hypothesis, we are interpreting to some degree. To us, an interpretation is a form of deduction. We are deducing what is going on based on data but also based on our reading of that data along with our assumptions about the nature of life, the literature we carry in our heads, and the discussions we have with colleagues. (p. 136)

They thus "recognize the human element in analysis and the possible distortion of meaning" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 137) and recommend that the analyst "validate his or her interpretations through constantly comparing one piece of data to another" (p. 137), as this researcher attempted to do.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings from the Qualitative Inquiry

This study was guided by the general research question: How do high school dropouts' perceptions of participation in high school, either experienced, expected, or desired, compare with qualities of participation specific to commonly held perspectives of democracy? Data collected pertaining to this question and analysis of that data is reported in this section. This study utilized semi-structured focus groups conducted by the researcher, a licensed school counselor.

The first focus group consisted of five subjects, three female and two male, aged 17 to 23, from two different Class B Montana high schools, who would have graduated between the spring of 2000 and the spring of 2006. These subjects were purposefully selected for this study and interviewed together in a focus group for about an hour and a half, using a standard protocol with a core set of ten questions that sought data pertaining to the research question above. The second focus group consisted of six subjects, one female and five male, aged 16 to 20, from six other Class B Montana high schools, who would have graduated between the spring of 2003 and the spring of 2007. All of the members of the second focus group were currently participating in the same residential Federal job-training program located in the state of Montana at the time of the interview. These subjects were also purposefully selected for this study and interviewed together in a focus group for about an hour and a half, using the standard protocol with the core set of ten questions that sought data pertaining to the research question above.

The descriptive data in this study are emphasized through the use of direct quotations taken from interview transcripts. Quotes are presented verbatim and connected

to their source, but fictitious identities, names chosen by the participants themselves, are consistently used for each individual subject. The identities of the subjects and the schools they attended have been purposefully disguised, but the confidentiality of this information does not detract from any data collection or analysis.

Analysis of the data from each focus group was completed in hopes of identifying common relationships and phenomena. In this analysis, one core category emerged: "Dropouts Perceptions of Participation in High School." The five subcategories that emerged from the data were: (a) Doing School, (b) Sidetracking, (c) Props, (d) Winners and Losers, and (e) Wanting More. The relationships that occurred between the categories and their properties served as the foundation for this narrative. This narrative would not have been possible without the data provided by each participant.

Subjects for this study provided data in the form of their thoughts, experiences, perceptions, and feelings about their own and their peers' participation in their high school. General information about the participants in this study can be found in Table 1. This table provides demographic information for each subject, including gender, age at the time of the study, age when they dropped out of high school, year and semester in school when they left, and a randomly assigned alphabetical letter code for the high school they left.

Table 1
Subject Information

Focus Group	Research Name	Age	Sex	School	Age at Dropping Out	Year/Semester Dropped Out
1	Betty	17	F	A	15	9th/fall
1	Maya	19	F	A	17	11th/not given
1	Xavier	20	M	B	16	10th/not given
1	Zoie	21	F	A	18	12th/spring
1	Joseph	23	M	A	18	12th/spring
2	Buck	16	M	H	16	10th/spring
2	Bob	16	M	E	16	10th/fall
2	Rose	17	F	F	16	10th/spring
2	Rick	18	M	G	16	10th/not given
2	Moses	19	M	C	16	10th/spring
2	JD	20	M	D	17	10th/not given

The analysis of data for this study utilized the format described by Strauss and Corbin (1998), a process that includes open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These three processes allow the researcher to take data apart, analyze relationships, and then re-contextualize the data.

Open Coding

Strauss and Corbin (1998) described open coding as a process by which the researcher uncovers, names, and develops concepts, opening up the text to expose the thoughts, ideas and meanings contained within it. During this process,

> Broadly speaking, data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. Events, happenings, objects, and actions/interactions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under more abstract concepts termed "categories." (Strauss & Corbin, p.102)

The open coding process revealed the following categories: (a) Doing School, (b) Sidetracking, (c) Props, (d) Winners and Losers, and (e) Wanting More. Once the

researcher identifies a category, she "can begin to develop it in terms of its specific properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.116). The properties of a category include its general or specific characteristics or attributes, while the "dimensions represent the location of a property along a continuum or range" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 117). The first of the identified categories examined was Doing School.

Doing School

Table 2 presents the category of Doing School and the dimensional range of the properties of this category.

Table 2

Properties and Dimensional Range: Doing School

Category	Properties	Dimensional Range		
Doing School	physical attendance	at school	in classes	
	intellectual attendance	paying attention	doing class work	doing home work
	attitudinal attendance	not worrying what others think	trying; effort; doing one's best	being pro-active; being in sports

Descriptive narratives from the transcripts of the focus group interviews with dropouts support each property and the dimensional range of each property shown in Table 2. The first property, Physical Attendance, begins the process of open coding.

Physical Attendance. Subjects who have left school before graduating realized that "doing school" in order to graduate requires a certain level of physical attendance.

The dimensionality of Physical Attendance ranged from attendance at school to actual attendance in classes, to having an attending to one's attitude. Subjects recognized the importance of attendance to graduating from high school, for example Maya and Betty's facetious suggestion that "actually going" is required. Subjects also acknowledged that while they may be at school, they might not be in class when they are scheduled to be, as Betty pointed out that participation would also mean going to class without skipping. Looking back, subjects seemed to regret not getting to school and classes on a regular basis. Maya felt that she "was just some sort of wimp," and should have "just sucked it up" and gone to class. She said "The biggest part of me not going to school was just not going. Like I didn't care." Buck started missing school after his father died, a day or two at first, and then just stopped going. Maya felt like she could have graduated "if I would have just went." Betty seemed very conflicted, saying "I could have gone to class, but just, just couldn't do it." If she had it to do over again, Maya would definitely make more of an effort to go to class: "you don't necessarily have to do all your homework...if you like just go to class and participate, you'll pass...high school is not that hard."

Intellectual Attendance. Subjects perceived a positive relationship between graduating and attending to course content requirements. The dimensionality of Intellectual Attendance ranged from paying attention while in class, to doing one's class work while in class, and finally to doing one's homework outside of class. Moses seemed to hold the view that just paying attention is class should count for much, saying "I listened to your lecture, can I go? I don't need anything to take home with me, trust me, it's alright." Rose and Bob both stated that they intentionally participated as little as possible in class. Bob said he could have had much higher grades, but he only did what

he had to do to get by. For Bob, "It's about all I was there." Rick said that teachers threatened students with detentions for not doing their class work, but, he said, it gets to the point where "we're lazy...We don't care when we got there to that point, we're just like, F you, pretty much." When Bob got detention for not handing in assignments, teachers tried to keep him after school. He'd stay for a little while, then just get tired of it and leave. When the teacher told him he was getting "real" detention for leaving early, Bob wouldn't serve those either.

Homework was a separate issue from class for several subjects. Bob acknowledged that participating in school meant being willing to do work and school work, but he also felt that his time at home after school was his time, not for homework, and that anything not directly connected with academics or done in the classroom was an infringement, including meetings, detentions, pep rallies and football games. Moses just did a "half-assed job" on his homework; Rick got his homework done in school, before the day was over, and Bob just didn't do homework because it wasn't important to him. Maya and Xavier realized that doing homework was important, but just didn't do it. Xavier admitted that he could have done his homework, but also that he "Could have done a lot of stuff." A few subjects completed their schoolwork and homework under challenging circumstances. When Moses was expelled for attacking a staff and finished his 10th grade year by doing all of his schoolwork at home. He tried to return to school his senior year, but was unable emotionally to pull it off. Joseph ended up in jail while he was still in high school and "for a long time" continued to do his homework from jail.

Subjects' explanations for not doing schoolwork or homework reflect a certain amount of burnout. Although they knew it was important, they just couldn't do it. Rick

thought that he had tried too hard in school when he was younger, so when he got in high school he didn't care anymore. Buck also worked very hard in elementary school, by high school he said he had "wore myself out on it." For Joseph, if you didn't do the work in junior high, it makes it all that harder in high school. Bob thought that while switching classes every period in junior high was a welcome change from elementary school, "after you get into high school you're just like Oh…I don't want to move any more, man." Moses expressed a similar exhaustion: "I'm so tired of open/close my locker, open/close my locker." For Joseph, it was global: "There were a lot of things I just didn't care about, or I didn't think that I needed to do or whatever. I just didn't do it, I guess." Looking back, he said "I could have done school if I'd really, really, tried."

Attitudinal Attendance. Subjects' perception was that an attitude toward being involved in school is important to graduating. The dimensionality of Attitudinal Attendance ranged from not worrying about what others think, to trying or making an effort and doing one's best, to being pro-active or "playing sports." Joseph suggested that participating involved not worrying about what someone else is doing or anything you say. Don't let people judge you, and be yourself. Joseph also thought that participating in school means doing the best you can no matter what. For him, a person can go to school or be at school, but participation really occurs when a person is being proactive about whatever they're doing, "Like being, more up-tempo than not…more into it." Subjects also perceived that being involved in sports supports school success. JD and Rick both enjoyed being in sports in high school. Joseph knew that he could have played a lot of sports if he had wanted to and that it would have helped him be successful in school. Rick got involved in boxing matches in his community. He felt that the boxing smokers were a

good outlet for his penchant for fighting. Rick said that he didn't win much, but that he learned a lot. Buck said that he could have participated in sports, but he just wasn't a sports person.

Looking back, subjects' perceived how their attitudes had affected their participation at school. Joseph said that he was too mature to go to school, but at the same time "too immature to just do it." Maya said that she just wasn't ready for the investment that high school demanded of her, but she had to go anyway. Joseph said that he "didn't want to play the games that everyone did," but he was not a social outcast because of that. He didn't want to do the exact same things as everyone else. Moses stated that they all had problems, and JD felt that they all had "Some kind of problem, or something that we couldn't get by in school." Buck said that they "all did something we shouldn't have."

Sidetracking

Table 3 presents the category of Sidetracking and the dimensional range of the properties of this category.

Table 3

Properties and Dimensional Range: Sidetracking

Category	Properties	Dimensional Range		
Sidetracking	in class	not take notes; draw	talk in class; not dress out in PE; ignore academic work;	be high; get into trouble
	at school	run around; hang out	leave early for lunch; only go until lunch	smoke; do drugs
	off campus	take care of child; take care of self	play sick; hang out with friends	smoke; drink; use drugs; get suspended or expelled; get on probation; get into jail

Descriptive narratives from the transcripts of the focus group interviews with dropouts support each property and the dimensional range of each property shown in Table 3.

In Class. Subjects who left school without graduating utilized various means of sidetracking themselves from full participation even while in class. The dimensionality of In Class ranged from not taking notes to talking in class, not dressing out or ignoring class work, to attending class while high on drugs and/or leaving classes before the class period ended.

Maya described a required class where the teacher lectured in a manner she described as "Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." She said that she couldn't listen to him because his tediousness drove her "nuts." Instead of taking notes, Maya would draw while he lectured. In other classes, Maya was "too busy talking to everybody" to get her class work done. In gym, she often refused to dress out. The gym teacher would then tell Maya to just go do whatever she wanted to, since she was doing that anyway. Drug and alcohol use around school was popular with most subjects and being high in classes was common. At lunch, Xavier and his friends would "go get drunk" off campus, then come back to school and go to class. JD and his friends would smoke pot at lunch. JD started smoking pot at school when he was a freshman, with his cousins who were seniors. In the beginning he thought that it would be OK, but then it became an "everyday thing." Bob was doing drugs "all the time...every school day." He said that when he chose to listen, it helped him to be stoned. Buck also said that he did drugs "during school, after school, before school, at lunch."

At School. Subjects sidetracked themselves from participating when they were not in their scheduled classes either surreptitiously or because of legitimate free time such as lunch. The dimensionality of At School ranged from running around or hanging out, to leaving school early for lunch or only attending school until lunch, to smoking and doing drugs at school. Maya spent a lot of in-school time out of her classes, running around, being social with her friends, doing "whatever I wanted." Sometimes other students would do her work for her, so she didn't worry about getting it done. Maya and Betty often went to classes only until lunch, and even then only if those classes before lunch were classes that they actually liked, which turned out to be a total of two. On a rotating

block system at their school, classes were held every other day. Going a half-day meant missing a day and a half's worth of classes. Xavier spent a lot of his time at school just getting in trouble. As he puts it, "I did a lot of shit in school." He really didn't like anybody at school, both adults and peers, and did not want to be there. As was mentioned earlier, some school time was spent getting high. Although Buck wasn't in sports himself, he said that in his school if you're smoking weed and you're in sports, people won't bother you "unless you give them suspicion." While Buck spent his time hanging out "with my druggie friends" at school, JD and Rick managed to hang out with the pot smokers and participate in sports at the same time. After awhile, both JD and Rick had to give up the sports partly due to the drugs.

Off Campus. Subjects got sidetracked from school by their off-campus activities, too. The dimensionality of Off Campus ranged from staying home to care for a child or to take care of themselves, to "playing sick" or hanging out with friends, and finally to smoking, drinking, doing drugs, getting suspended or expelled, being on probation, and being in jail. Betty had a child at 15 and it changed her priorities. She said that it wasn't worth it to her to leave her newborn with someone else at daycare so she could attend high school. Although her attendance was limited due to becoming a mother at so young an age and then dropping out, Betty still hated high school. She very much preferred to stay home and spend her time with her son instead. Rose and Moses had traumatic experiences at school that neither of them would elaborate on. When they stayed home from school, it was a way of taking care of themselves. Xavier and his brothers often played sick, for a week at a time even, because their mother "didn't give a shit whether I went to school or not." Joseph had a lot of acquaintances in high school, but his real

friends that he hung out with were already out. His non-high school friends were just working and living. Joseph thought he could be doing that too, if he weren't still in high school. When Maya and Betty left campus for the day at noontime, which was often, they would go get stoned together. Zoie also preferred drinking, smoking, and hanging out with her friends to being at school. Both JD and Bob would skip school to go in search of pot if they were out of it. JD said that in his community, if you aren't doing school you might as well smoke a joint or go drink. After that, "it's just like Shit, I don't wanna go to school."

At one point, JD was suspended for three days for smoking pot in the school bathroom and chose not to return to school afterwards. Moses was either suspended or expelled for assaulting a staff member. He never returned to school. Even though he and his Mom planned that he would for his senior year, he just couldn't bring himself to do it because of prior traumatic experiences at school. Rick ended up in boot camp. When he had an opportunity to return to his old high school afterwards, he refused because he said it had nothing to offer him. Maya was on probation "the whole time" she was in high school. Because she had gotten a possession ticket, people thought she was a bad kid. The cops followed her around "constantly." Joseph eventually ended up in jail and wasn't let out to attend school. Eventually he went to boot camp, too. It seemed true for many of these subjects, as JD suggested, that they were all doing "something to get us out of school" because they had "all got kicked out, or chose not to go to school."

Props

Table 4 presents the category of Props and the dimensional range of the properties of this category.

Table 4

Properties and Dimensional Range: Props

Category	Properties	Dimensional Range	
Props	family reputation	positive; supported participation	negative; undermined participation
	academic or athletic ability	positive; supported participation	negative; undermined participation
	self-accommodation	positive; helped with school	negative; did not help with school

Descriptive narratives from the transcripts of the focus group interviews with dropouts support each property and the dimensional range of each property shown in Table 4.

Family Reputation. Subjects who left school without graduating recognized that family reputation could either prop up or undermine students' school participation. The dimensionality of Family Reputation ranged from the positive, when family association helped student participation, to the negative, when family association hindered participation. Negative family reputation experiences were recounted most often with these subjects. Rick's experience started out positive, but ended up negative. Rick tried sports because it was such a positive experience for his stepbrother, who enjoyed a reputation as an outstanding athlete at their school. When Rick tried to emulate this stepbrother whom he admired, he found that even though he himself was somewhat athletic, the role just "wasn't me." The pressure of trying to succeed in sports when he wasn't really cut out for it, as well as using drugs while he was participating in sports,

eventually led to his dropping out of both sports and school. Bob said his younger brothers were forced to join sports so they could avoid being harassed by school personnel for being too much like Bob. He said that "Anytime one of my [younger] brothers wouldn't join one sport they'd go Oh, What's going on here? You turning into your brother, Huh?"

Zoie was adamant that in her school having a popular last name helped those students who did, and she resented it. To Xavier, it wasn't so much having a popular last name that gave students an advantage in school as having "the right last name." His experience with this came when another student in his school repeatedly threatened him. When Xavier finally threatened the student back, he got in trouble with the school and the cops, but the other student never did get in trouble over it. Xavier felt that this was because this other student was in sports and in with "the popular crowd." Xavier was eventually either suspended or expelled for threatening that student, and said that he did not understand it. Rose said that in small towns, "your future consisted of what your past was by your family." Rose felt looked down on because both her older sister and brother dropped out of high school and her sister had a baby as a teenager. Rose said that her "family consisted of drugs, a suicide, then another death in the family because of drugs," and that these family events influenced her future at school. Rose never did drugs, but because of her family's reputation, her locker was searched and things removed to the point where she quit using a locker. Eventually, she became depressed, did not want to do anything at school, and was suicidal. The inability of people at school to separate her from her family eventually led her to leave school. JD felt that he was unfairly passed over for a scholarship because of something that his father had done that had negatively

impacted one of the scholarship committee members' families. When this happened to him, he lost interest in both school and sports. While his mother's reputation as an athlete propped his own pursuit of athletic recognition, since she had been a state basketball champion and he was headed that way for awhile too, JD's fathers repeated imprisonments and having killed someone while drunk driving ended up impacting his school participation the most, and in a negative way. Rose's initiative in creative writing actually worked against her because of her family's negative impact in her community. On her own, Rose maintained a "poem binder" of things that she had written. Rather than being seen by school personnel as a creative endeavor expressing Rose's personal experience, this collection became a discipline issue with her school administration. Her family's bad reputation caused her to be hassled about it because people at school could not separate her from them.

Academic or Athletic Ability. Subjects realized that having some recognized ability, either academic or athletic, also acted to prop student's school participation. The dimensionality of Academic or Athletic Ability ranged from the general positive effect of being perceived as having either academic or athletic ability to the general negative of being perceived as having little or no academic or athletic ability. Subjects felt that students who enjoyed a reputation as academically or athletically adept received more help and recognition from adults. Both Bob and JD said that their teachers mostly helped students who seemed like they were going to succeed. JD believed that his teachers taught their classes to the smarter students and disregarded those that couldn't catch on right away by "just pushing them off." Buck thought that the way teachers treat students when they won't help them is "like they're retarded." JD became very frustrated in his

math class because the teacher just would not help him when he didn't understand it, which was daily. JD knew that his math teacher disliked him; he could see it on the man's face. JD resented this teacher's attitude toward him and believed that with help he would have understood that math. Trying to get help from this teacher got to be too frustrating and humiliating for JD, so he quit asking. At one point, when the teacher came to school drunk, JD and he almost got into a physical fight that was stopped just in time by the cops. If they would have fought, JD said it would have been the teacher's fault, not his, for coming to school drunk and saying something to JD that "sparked me up." Moses said that a lot of teachers acted like they thought that when you didn't get something it was because you weren't paying attention. If you asked for any help, you'd get in trouble for not paying attention. Maya said that when she didn't understand the material in math class her freshman year, she wouldn't participate, but would "just sit there, like Uhhhhhhh." Zoie said "the teachers look at you like you're stupid." In fact, her school's counselor told her that she was stupid when she was in her last semester of school and needed three additional credits to graduate. She dropped out because of that, and because no one at the school would help her figure out how to get the three credits she needed.

Besides feelings of not being helped because of teacher's tendencies toward helping more adept students, being subjected to redundant or repetitious curriculum were also submitted by subjects as negative. Rick's experience is one example of this. He spent two years in Special Education and his worst subject was math. Rick's dislike of fraction math made him remember each time they were part of his curriculum. He realized that he was being taught about fractions over again at each grade level. When he expressed the desire to move up to something like algebra, Rick was led to believe that he would be

able to, but it never happened. Rick became frustrated with this process, saying "how's that supposed to help a kid who doesn't really know anything about math?" He felt both held back and treated like he was academically inept at the same time. Buck said that no matter how far along you are in school, they keep teaching you the same things. As Moses put it, "It's all repetitive."

Both Bob and JD developed strategies for maintaining their academic participation at a certain minimal level: Bob's first semester grades would be high enough to average with second semester low ones to pass for the year, while JD intentionally managed his school work to keep his grade point average at a constant 2.8. Both of them picked and chose what assignments and classes they would "do" and "not do" and could have done much better if they had actually tried. Bob felt that teachers hassled him about his schoolwork rather than helping him, and that the teachers' attitude was one of not helping students who were perceived as not "going anywhere" just because they had failed one thing. Buck said that the students who "didn't associate in school" or play sports got "walked all over" and "if they needed help they wouldn't help them or nothing." Joseph's experience was that whatever you did in the first semester of high school characterized who you were and what you were going to do, and stuck with you for the rest of high school. Bob could relate to this: both he and a friend of JD's were voted "least likely to succeed" in high school. Bob said that the experience "wasn't fun" and "sucked." To Joseph, having one "directed path" of school for everyone doesn't work, because "not everybody can be herded the same way." In a place like his high school, "it's hard to see past that and you get stuck." Joseph said that people think they have to go to college from high school to be successful, and it's just not "that true."

Students don't necessarily have to take the one accepted goal that high school "throws at them," but if you don't, "you're kind of like a little bit left out," an "outcast." Moses, Buck, and Bob made it very clear that when they were in high school, they were just there for the diploma and nothing else. Joseph felt that for students who don't fit in with the school's narrow goals, "it's like a dead end" that they can't go beyond "when you already feel like your life is like a dead end."

Being athletic or being in sports was perceived by some and experienced by others as a positive prop at school. Rick's favorite class was physical education. He loved it because he felt he was "pretty athletic." JD enjoyed the rush that he got from others recognizing his skill as an athlete. He was good enough to be on the varsity basketball team as a freshman. Although his description of the experience as "weird" shows that he was not entirely comfortable with it, he "loved the attention, 'specially if it was a packed house." If JD scored a lot of points it made the team look good and people who wouldn't ordinarily even acknowledge him congratulated him. This made him feel very important. After he didn't get his scholarship and when the school began drug testing their athletes, he quit. Joseph was hassled a lot for not being in sports. He knew for certain that he could have been a state-level champion in his sport, because he had talent as a wrestler and had already done really well at it in junior high. When he went to high school, he lost interest in the whole idea of "winning" and no longer wanted to be in sports.

Subjects perceived that students with athletic ability had advantages over others students and resented it. Maya told about one family in which all five kids were in high school sports. Like Betty, she believed that a lot of their success at school in general was due to their popularity for being in sports. To Zoie and Xavier, the people who are in

sports at school are the ones who get things that others don't. In Moses' school, if you weren't in sports, "you weren't popular or anything." Buck said that "sports was a big thing" in his school, so much so that students who smoked weed and were in sports they weren't treated as suspect. He said that the students in his school "that played sports get really high on teachers' priority." In Rose's school, if you weren't actively involved in some sport at school, you were "an outcast" and "looked down upon in society."

Self-Accommodation. Subjects reported utilizing various self-accommodations as attempts to prop up their participation at school. The dimensionality of Self Accommodation ranged from accommodations that helped subjects successfully deal with school to those that undermined their success at school. A positive accommodation suggested by Joseph was that students should just not worry about what someone else is doing, or "things you say." Another accommodation was doing just enough schoolwork to meet the minimum requirements. Bob, JD, and Rick all had strategies for managing their work load and not doing any more work than was needed to get whatever grades or grade point average they had set for themselves. Several subjects made the point that they were just there at school for the diploma, itself an assumption of minimal participation. At one point while on leave, Bob sat in his car outside of his high school wondering whether or not he should re-enroll there because of some problems he was having with other students at the job training program. The idea of spending four years in his high school, which he really hated, compared to one year in the job training program in order to get basically the same credentials was enough for him to decide to stick with the latter. At 16, three years versus one year is a large chunk of one's life.

Using drugs helped many subjects deal with school, but ultimately was

counterproductive to their success there. Buck and Bob both used drugs, including during school, to be different than everybody else. Bob pointed out that only a few students in his school knew about or used drugs and he enjoyed being one of this small group of select people. Bob also did drugs because of the rush of getting away with it, and Buck because of being able to "outsmart" some people. For Bob, doing drugs such as pot at school made it go by faster and helped him deal with it by being more mellow, calmed down, and not caring: "you know, the teacher can yell at you, you're just like Yeah, yeah, that sucks for you, man." Buck said he used drugs to help him calm down and for fun. Moses used drugs at school because when he did, he forgot all about his problems: "I couldn't remember, I'd just be happy, I didn't have any problems." While Buck and Bob could deal with not having pot available, JD and Moses could not and would to ditch school to find some if they had to. Rick dropped out of school because of the drugs, but also because "there was nothing there." His eventual attitude was "Screw the high school...They don't teach you crap." Rick felt that the job-training program was more relevant for him, and he was successful there. JD felt that if he would have stuck closer to his non-drug using friends, he could have stuck high school out and graduated. He said that some of the students in the job-training program were just like the ones back home, in that they were smoking, drinking, and getting kicked out. In his words, they were acting "immature or something." His new strategy for staying out of trouble, which was working well for him, included keeping to himself and being quiet. Bob had really liked using drugs, but accomplishing other things was also important to him. He could forgo drugs for a worthy goal and proved this by his success in the job-training program.

Winners and Losers

Table 5 presents the category of Winners and Losers and the dimensional range of the properties of this category.

Table 5

Properties and Dimensional Range: Winners and Losers

Category	Properties	Dimensional Range	
winners and losers	interactions with adults	direct; positive or negative	indirect; positive or negative
	interactions with peers	direct; positive or negative	indirect; positive or negative

Descriptive narratives from the transcripts of the focus group interviews with dropouts support each property and the dimensional range of each property shown in Table 5.

Interactions With Adults. The dimensionality of Adult Interactions ranged from those experienced directly to those experienced indirectly. Direct interactions were those that subjects experienced in person in classes, on campus, or during extracurricular activities such as sports. Subjects perceived these interactions as having positive or negative effects on them. When JD was playing basketball, he received a lot of positive feedback in the form of recognition from many adults, including some who were important in the community, or wealthy, and who would not otherwise have recognized or talked to him. Bob had a good relationship with his science teacher and always did well in his class. Mainly he felt like he and this teacher could relate well to each other

and that the teacher respected him as a person. Moses really liked his computer teacher. Like Bob, he felt that he and his computer teacher could relate well to each other and had a satisfactory relationship. Moses said that this particular teacher and he "were always joking around." If another student in his computer class harassed Moses, the teacher wouldn't interfere with his telling them off. Or, she would tell them to "shut up and leave me [Moses] alone." Buck thought his welding teacher was "pretty cool" and liked the class he had with that teacher. He also got along well with his science teacher, who he said was a personal friend that he had known for a long time. Bob really appreciated lunch. He got a laugh from the group for bringing this up, but said that he really wasn't trying to be funny. Bob felt that the food service personnel took really good care of the students by taking the time to prepare and serve a homemade and healthy cuisine. One thing you could count on in Bob's school: the food was always of some quality, not the typical frozen and micro waved menu. Because of the food service staff's quality production, Bob recognized their efforts as important to the students and it made him feel cared for.

Subjects also experienced direct interactions perceived as negative that led them to believe that teachers or administrators didn't care about them at all. Zoie said that the counselor of her school told her she "was stupid and to quit," which she did. At the time, she needed three credits to graduate. Zoie said if you had problems and told them they wouldn't do anything, "just let it go through one ear and out the other." For example, if you were fighting with someone and they threatened you, "they don't care." Maya related how teachers' pets would enjoy privileges while she herself was not allowed to get her needs met. The teacher's pet would be allowed to leave class for any reason while Maya

couldn't leave to use the bathroom when she really had to go. She felt that teachers should "treat everybody the same way" in this regard. Joseph felt like the schools staff was negligent "as far as telling you there's life after high school...or if you can make it after high school." Joseph said that instead of school staff helping students to realize that they can go to college and get a four-point even with a general equivalency diploma, "They just say Well, if you don't go through high school, you're a loser." Xavier's interactions with adults in the school were so negative, partly as a result of issues with a peer, that he "just didn't feel welcome." Because of her minor in possession violation, Maya felt permanently identified as a bad kid: "All of a sudden, I'm the worst kid on the planet." At one point her high school principal told her that he noticed she was failing with the attitude of "I don't know what to tell you...Guess you're going to have to suck it up and do some more homework or something." Maya said that even if teachers saw you struggling in class, they wouldn't help you. When JD was playing basketball and hanging around with pot smokers, he felt like one teacher was constantly watching him. The teacher told him "You hang with a bad crowd" and was always waiting for him at the doors after lunch. When JD was caught smoking pot in the school bathroom and suspended for three days, the superintendent told him "I knew it was you." Although he had experienced considerable initial success as an athlete and a student, he never went back. Moses and Rose were both traumatized specifically by the things that happened to them at school. Moses stated in definite terms that he "would never, ever go back to that school." Rose became depressed, unmotivated, and suicidal because of how she was treated there. She said that "School had everything to do with it."

Indirect interactions happened to other students, but subjects knew about them

and were affected by them. Most of these were negative. Bob told of how when teachers didn't really like a student that did well on an assignment, they acted as if it was an anomaly or an accident, instead of giving the student positive feedback about their success. Rick felt that teachers were intrusive rather than caring towards him. Maya told how one teacher gave the kids in sports "a hard time." She thought that this was wrong, even though she herself had a lot of animosity toward students in sports because of the privileges she felt they got, but didn't deserve to have at the expense of the rest of the students. A few of Zoie's friends were told by the new school counselor that they should quit school, just as she was told by the old one. Bob was convinced that teachers only attend seminars on how to handle aggressive students, how to defend themselves against the students, and "how to expect everything negative." He said "They're never there for a seminar on, you know, how you can be positive to a student" or how to "push" students academically in a positive way. At one point in Bob's school, students had to have a see-through backpack. That practice was discontinued because of the unaffordability to individuals and families. Bob described the school climate as one of "too many people looking out for themselves...No one's willing to help the common man, woman, animal, environment, nothing." JD and Moses thought that staff "don't care enough." To Bob, "everything in school now is mostly negative." Neither Xavier, Betty, nor Rose mentioned any positive interactions with either adults or other students at school. Both Xavier and Betty stated unequivocally "I hated school," and Rose stated repeatedly that she had participated as little as possible. Moses, JD, and Rick all stated that there was nothing that their school could do that could ever entice them to go back.

Interactions With Peers. Subjects perceived that interactions with peers as

having positive or negative effects on them. The dimensionality of Interactions With Peers ranged from those directly experienced to those indirectly experienced, both positive and negative. Subjects reported mostly negative interactions, especially of peer harassment and social intimidation. Part of the reason Xavier didn't like school was because of peers, especially one person who threatened him over a long period of time. He said of the people at school, "they didn't even know me." Zoie told how she didn't like going to class because of the cliques and preppies. They'd sit together and then "they'd call you a whore." Maya commented sarcastically about name calling, saying "They're good at that." Betty said that it "Didn't matter where you were at, what you were," people would call you names. Not a hateful person by nature, she "hated every person in that school." In Moses' school, you were an outcast if "you either wanted to be, or if you just didn't get along with anybody." Bob told how the students who played sports were "horrible people." They "were the kind of kids that were like I'm better than you...they had a very conceited sense about them...they were good at it and they liked to throw it in your face." Rick thought that these students didn't play because their heart was in it, "but just to show off." For a while Moses was "just bouncing from people to people" because he couldn't figure out who he fit in most with, until finally he was able to hang out with anybody. There were a few people that Moses didn't like though, so he just wouldn't let them hang around with him and his friends. When other students made fun of Bob, he said he would ask them "Does that make you feel good about yourself, making fun of me? And they'd be like Yes. I went, Well then I'm happy for you." Bob's philosophy for using this strategy was that if people needed to make fun of him to raise their self-confidence, he didn't care because he thought everyone should get to feel

important. For fun, Bob would go up and down the halls asking other students if they wanted to buy some weed from him, but "no one in my school did it" except for him and a few of his friends, so he never got any takers. Zoie, apparently a perpetrator of harassment when she was in high school, expressed regret about "everything," saying that she had she had done "a lot of things" to other students.

Indirect interactions happened to others, but subjects knew about them and were affected by them. Rick related how a significant number of members of his community were in the military and serving in the war in Iraq. When someone was killed, "the teachers were like, down in the dumps." To him, it affected everybody, showing that they were connected to each other as a community. On the negative side of indirect interactions, Betty related how students "that were supposedly sluts" had things written on their lockers, and that students who didn't fit in included anyone who was "outside of what other people think they should be doing." She told how the unpopular kids, "like the kids that have problems," would have stuff thrown at them in classes, and that other students would call them names, mimic them and make fun of them. Betty disapproved of this harassment, and it made the school a negative place to her. Even when Bob was harassed daily by other students at the Federal job training program, he still would not return to his former high school because the climate there was so negative for him.

Wanting More

Table 6 presents the category of Wanting More and the dimensional range of the properties of this category.

Table 6

Properties and Dimensional Range: Wanting More

Category	Properties	Dimensional Range	
Wanting More	classroom instruction	curriculum	pedagogy
	student-teacher relations	more academically supportive	more socially supportive

Descriptive narratives from the transcripts of the focus group interviews with dropouts support each property and the dimensional range of each property shown in Table 6.

Classroom Instruction. Subjects who have left school before graduating made suggestions for improving the quality of participation at school for students. The dimensionality of Classroom Instruction ranged from curriculum to pedagogy. Subjects made suggestions for improving the quality or relevance of curricula and the effectiveness of pedagogies. As Rick put it, "We need a different program here, for our teaching." He was not alone in his house on this issue. Although his step-brother had been very successful in school sports, still, he said, "my family agrees with me." In Joseph's words, "I remember wanting more then" than what his school had to offer its students. Joseph assessed the one-size-fits-all plan that his high school offered to every student as limited and felt that it happened because it was "the only thing they can fit in, that seems to fit in" to the high school model. Joseph said that when you're in a high school like his, it's really hard to see very far ahead in your life; it limits your personal

vision.

Subjects suggested that teachers make teaching more interesting and engaging. Maya complained about teachers droning on and on in a lecture format. Like many adults, she found it irritating and impossible to listen to. Some of her suggestions included making the class more interesting, or "more like hands on." Xavier suggested that teachers make teaching more interactive, "So there's not someone just sitting there preaching to you all day." Maya recommended that teachers should make "it" more exciting, "make us want to learn, not tell us that we have to. Cuz that's nuts." Maya suggested that teachers not just sit there and just talk; if they have to teach the same thing over and over again, they should do it in a different way. Joseph suggested that teachers "teach in more of a way that everyone, of any... ability can understand." Most people, he said, cannot just listen to a lecture or read a text and retain it, but that is "just a general, it's just one way of teaching, that people teach." Bob thought that his federal job training program was more effective than high school because students could work at their own pace. Maya's suggestions for math were that teachers provide more than one way to learn a concept: "you could try this, to help you understand math, you could try that maybe, see what works best for you?" She said that there was not enough "of that," flexibility or adaptation to different abilities and learning styles. Moses suggested that if teenagers themselves were involved in the design of learning activities, instead of just school staff, they'd be a lot more appealing. Maya, Joseph, and Zoie perceived one particular teacher's classroom as more effective for them. Maya said that this teacher utilized many "hands-on" activities in her classes, her classes were fun, and Zoie said she took the students places. Joseph said that this teacher's classes were "better" in quality.

Student-Teacher Relations. Subjects perceived that some student-teacher relations enhance the quality of participation for students in high school and some detract. The dimensionality of Student-Teacher Relations ranged from the academically supportive to the socially supportive.

Socially supportive student-teacher relations were suggested, often in terms of what hadn't worked for subjects. To Rick, teachers need to be appropriately concerned about and involved with students. Some teachers' academic concern for Rick, they manner in which they asked him about his life and studies, was experienced by him as inappropriate and alienating. JD recommended that teachers "help out with every student...the ones that are slow, they should help them a lot more, instead of just pushing them off." Teachers should not just focus on the students that they think are going to succeed. Bob thought that teachers should be supportive of all students' successes, not just those students who usually do well. When a student does well unexpectedly, teachers should recognize their success instead of responding with the attitude "Wow, hey, I wonder what happened. Accident." To Bob, "positive's always better. You could think a negative, if you can do a positive." Maya felt that if teachers cared, when they saw that you were struggling in class they would help you. There was one teacher that she really liked who actually told Maya that she would give her help, and did, whenever Maya was in one of her classes. Maya felt that teachers shouldn't let students get away with leaving school, for example leaving early for lunch. Because of the way one principal had treated her, Maya thought that he was "an idiot." Instead of helping her with her academic problems, he told her to "do more homework." Zoie said that the school staff "should be helping you get credits if you need it." She did not get such help, but was instead told that

she should drop out. Maya suggested that school staff should ask students what they can do to help them academically, rather than just telling them "Well, you have to do this, or you have to do that, or we're not going to help you, you're not going to graduate." To her, she was being told that because the difficulty she was having accomplishing specific things. Instead of help, she heard "You know you might as well drop out now, because you're dumb." Joseph thought that academic identity in high school was limited and that "even if you did grow within yourself you would always have that one image." He felt that whatever identity students happened to project in the first semester was what they were stuck with for the rest of high school.

Bob recommended hiring teachers that were more understanding of students. He said that every student deserved to feel good about themselves at school. JD also recommended getting teachers that know how to make students feel good about themselves. Moses said that "would help a lot." Buck wanted teachers to treat all students as equals, as "No different." Bob though that staff could change their attitude toward students they don't like and recommended that teachers "at least pretend they are treated like equals." Zoie suggested that school would be better "if teachers actually cared about you." Joseph talked about one teacher that he said was not as "black and white" in the way she treated the students regarding discipline and other issues. This one teacher respected the students' relationships with each other and the fact that they had a social life at school. When he and another student were having problems with each other, this one teacher understood that the problem existed in the context of a long-term friendship and did not overreact. Joseph said that many teachers would send students to the office when they had problems with each other so that they wouldn't have to deal with it. The

reality, he said, was that teachers didn't have to really deal with most of the students' issues with each other anyway. Joseph said that he respected this one teacher more than other teachers for the way she treated students in her classes.

In closing the open coding section, Bob's comment about school participation reflects a global sensitivity as to what participation consists of. In order to describe participation so one can talk about it, "you have got to have, what you did and what you didn't do, and what you were not allowed to do in school, I would think."

Axial Coding

Five categories of data resulted from the open coding process in the previous section. Using the process of axial coding, the data were de-contextualized into small parts that were then subsequently analyzed. When this analysis was completed, those parts were then re-contextualized in a different way. Through this re-contextualization of the data, properties for each of the five categories were identified and then reported with their respective dimensional ranges.

Analysis of the re-contextualized data led to identification of phenomena directly related to the causal condition and the properties of that phenomenon. The relationships and properties which then emerged from the axial coding process are referred to as "Causal Condition," Phenomenon," "Context," "Intervening Condition," "Action/Interaction," and "Consequence." A brief explanation of each of these terms, synthesized from Strauss and Corbin (1998) is given below.

Causal Condition. Causal conditions influence usually represent sets of events or happenings that influence the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The causal condition for each category in this study is the subjects' perceptions of high school

participation. It is their perception of participation at school that led to the development of each phenomenon.

Phenomenon. A phenomenon is a central event, issue, or happening defined as being significant to subjects (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The phenomena that emerged in this study are the five categories of data that resulted from the open coding process. These specific phenomena include (a) Doing School, (b) Sidetracking, (c) Props, (d) Winners and Losers, and (e) Wanting More.

Context. Context includes the specific sets of conditions that intersect to create a set of circumstances or problems to which people respond through their actions/interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As the data in this study were de-contextualized and re-contextualized, the context of each phenomenon was directly linked to the phenomena that had emerged. For the purposes of this study, each context has an intervening condition.

Intervening Condition. Intervening conditions mitigate or otherwise change the impact of causal conditions on phenomena, often arise out of contingencies, and require a response in the form of action/interaction (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Action/Interaction. Actions/interactions consist of responses to issues, problems, circumstances, or events that arise under certain conditions, by individuals or groups (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Consequence. Consequences are the outcomes of actions/interactions and can be described as what happens as a result of action/interaction (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Table 7 illustrates the components of axial coding and the progression between those components in the analysis process.

Table 7

Axial Coding Process

causal condition > phenomenon > context(s) context > intervening condition(s) > action/interaction(s) > consequence(s)

Axial coding begins with the identification of a causal condition and the phenomena of that causal condition. Table 8 displays the causal condition and phenomena identified during axial coding.

Table 8

Causal Condition and Phenomena

Causal Condition	Phenomena
Dropouts' Perceptions of High School Participation	doing school sidetracking props winners and losers wanting more

The phenomena listed in Table 8 emerged from the fusion of various contexts and their features. For the purposes of this study those features were: intervening condition, action/interaction, and consequence. Each phenomenon and its context are presented in a table format. Following the table for each phenomenon, the context of that phenomenon, and the features of each context ("Intervening Condition," Action/Interaction," and "Consequence") are given. The first phenomenon analyzed is "Doing School."

The Phenomenon: Doing School

Doing School emerged from the synthesis of two contexts. Table 9 lists the two contexts from which the Doing School phenomenon emerged.

Table 9

Phenomenon	Context
Doing School	subjects recognized that a certain level of participation is required for successfully "doing school" subjects resented some of the requirements of school and chose not to meet them

The following discusses the two contexts of Doing School and the features of each context.

Doing School Context #1. Subjects in this study recognized that a certain level of participation is required for successfully "doing school."

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects viewed school as important.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects wanted to be able to "do school."
2. Subjects thought that the requirements of high school weren't all that difficult.
3. Subjects had worked hard at school when they were younger.
4. Subjects met some of the requirements of high school in spite of significant obstacles.

Consequence

1. Subjects had experienced some academic and social success in high school.
2. Subjects realized that it would have been physically possible for them to "do school."

3. Subjects felt burned out on school.

Doing School Context #2. Subjects resented some of the requirements of school and chose not to meet them.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects viewed some of the components of high school as frivolous or unnecessary to the purposes of schooling.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects were unable to or opted not to attend school regularly.
2. Subjects were unable to or opted not to do class work or homework.
3. Subjects declined to participate beyond a certain minimal level.

Consequence

1. Subjects fell behind academically.
2. Subjects became alienated from school.

The second phenomenon analyzed is "Sidetracking."

The Phenomenon: Sidetracking

Sidetracking emerged from the synthesis of two contexts. Table 10 lists the two contexts from which the Sidetracking phenomenon emerged.

Table 10

Phenomenon	Context
Sidetracking	subjects were sidetracked from schooling by alternative activities
	subjects' alternative activities provided them with roles and identities different from that of the typical student

The following discusses the two contexts of Sidetracking and the features of each context.

Sidetracking Context #1. Subjects in this study were sidetracked from schooling by alternative activities.

1. Subjects had a need to be involved in something.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects participated in alternative activities both in and out of school.
2. Subjects supported each other in alternative activities.
3. Drug use by subjects was a common alternative activity.

Consequence

1. Subjects' alternative activities compromised their attendance to the requirements of school.
2. Subjects felt important even though they were failing school.

Sidetracking Context #2. Subjects' alternative activities provided them with roles and identities different from that of the typical student.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects had difficulty relating to the typical student role.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects actively sought out alternative activities.
2. Subjects were sympathetic to the use of alternative activities by others.
3. Subjects felt that their alternative activities were legitimate.

Consequence

1. Subjects felt in control of their roles and identities.

2. Alternative role and identities had a negative impact on the student role.

3. Subjects couldn't necessarily realize the ultimate negative impact of alternative activities on schooling.

The third phenomenon analyzed is "Props."

The Phenomenon: Props

Props emerged from the synthesis of four contexts. Table 11 lists the four contexts from which the Props phenomenon emerged.

Table 11

Phenomenon	Context
Props	subjects' felt that family reputation influenced acceptance at school
	subjects' felt that participation in sports influenced acceptance at school
	subjects felt that a perception of academic ability influenced academic assistance at school
	subjects accommodated themselves by creating a counterculture of controlled minimal participation

The following discusses the four contexts of Props and the features of each context.

Props Context #1. Subjects in this study felt that family reputation influenced acceptance at school.

Intervening Condition

1. Family association was experienced as helping or hindering subjects' acceptance at school.

2. Subjects saw themselves as persons in their own right, separate from their

families.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects resented how they were treated.

2. Subjects resented others' advantages.

Consequence

1. Subjects felt the school was biased and unfair.

2. Subjects wanted to be treated as people in their own right.

3. Subjects felt disrespected, discounted, and helpless.

Props Context #2. Subjects' felt that participation in sports influenced acceptance at school.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects viewed participation in sports as access to special consideration.

2. Subjects saw themselves as deserving of consideration regardless of participation in sports.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects acknowledged and enjoyed the special consideration they received for being in sports.

2. Subjects tried to emulate family members' success in sports.

3. Subjects not in sports resented the special consideration enjoyed by students who participated in sports.

4. Subjects resented the negative effects of not participating in sports on themselves.

Consequence

1. Subjects felt they were being held to different standards than those in sports.

2. Subjects felt they had access to a lesser school experience that students in sports.
3. Subjects gave up.

Props Context #3. Subjects felt that a perception of academic ability influenced academic assistance at school.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects viewed adults' perception of academic ability as controlling access to teachers' expertise.
2. Subjects realized that most students are capable of learning if they have appropriate instruction.
3. Subjects saw students as deserving of access to teachers' expertise regardless of their academic ability.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects resented the special consideration enjoyed by students with greater perceived academic ability.
2. Subjects resented the negative effects of not being perceived by teachers' as having academic ability they felt they did have.
3. Subjects gave up.

Consequence

1. Subjects believed they were teachable and could learn high school material.
2. Subjects felt they were being held to different standards than students perceived as having greater academic ability.
3. Subjects felt they had access to a lesser school experience than students perceived as having more academic ability.

4. Subjects stopped seeking help from teachers when they didn't understand something.

Props Context #4. Subjects accommodated themselves by creating a counterculture of controlled minimal participation.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects made a calculated attempt to pass.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects managed assignments to avoid negative interactions with staff.
2. Subjects picked and chose assignments to meet minimum requirements for passing classes.
3. Subjects developed strategies for managing GPA at a passing level.

Consequence

1. Subjects' school focus was on requirements and credentials rather than on learning.
2. Subjects' academic goals and achievement were significantly self-downsized.

The fourth phenomenon analyzed is "Winners and Losers."

The Phenomenon: Winners and Losers

Winners and Losers emerged from the synthesis of five contexts. Table 12 lists the five contexts from which the Winners and Losers phenomenon emerged.

Table 12

Phenomenon	Context
Winners and Losers	subjects perceived interactions with adults as based on the adults' positive or negative assessment of them as a student or a person
	subjects' interactions with adults at school were experienced as either supportive or hostile to their identity as a student or a person
	subjects perceived interactions with peers as based on the peers' positive or negative assessment of them as a person
	subjects' interactions with peers at school were experienced as either supportive or hostile to their school experience
	subjects were affected by both direct and indirect interactions

The following discusses the five contexts of Winners and Losers and the features of each context.

Winners and Losers Context #1. Subjects in this study perceived interactions with adults as based on the adults' positive or negative assessment of them as a student or a person.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects were sensitive to what adults thought about them.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects wanted to be seen as academically capable.

2. Subjects reacted to how they thought adults perceived them.

Consequence

1. Subjects felt that adults in the school often perceived them as losers.

2. Subjects still felt academically capable.

Winners and Losers Context #2. Subjects' interactions with adults at school were experienced as either supportive or hostile to their identity as a student or a person.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects were sensitive to interactions with adults.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects wanted to be supported by adults in their academic endeavors.

2. Subjects reacted to the positivity or negativity of adults' interactions with them.

Consequence

1. Subjects' interactions with adults affected their ability to function effectively at school.

2. Subjects felt that adults in the school treated them like they were losers.

3. Subjects felt that the school's academic environment was hostile to them.

Winners and Losers Context #3. Subjects perceived interactions with peers as based on the peers' positive or negative assessment of them as a person.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects were sensitive to peers' range of tolerance for different people.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects were willing to tolerate peers who were different than them.

2. Subjects wanted to be tolerated their by peers at school.

3. Subjects reacted to the positivity or negativity of peers' interactions with them.

Consequence

1. Subjects felt that the school's social environment was negative.

Winners and Losers Context #4. Subjects' interactions with peers at school were experienced as either supportive or hostile to their school experience.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects were sensitive to peer interactions at school.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects felt that peers were very negative to students they perceived as "different."

Consequence

1. Subjects felt intimidated by the school's negative social environment.

Winners and Losers Context #5. Subjects were affected by both direct and indirect interactions.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects were sensitive to peer interactions at school whether or not they happened to them personally.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects were the targets of peers' abuse.
2. Subjects witnessed their peers targeting other students for abuse.

Consequence

1. The school social and academic environments were experienced as hostile and alienating.

The fifth phenomenon analyzed is "Wanting More."

The Phenomenon: Wanting More

Wanting More emerged from the synthesis of three contexts. Table 13 lists the three contexts from which the Wanting More phenomenon emerged.

Table 13

Phenomenon	Context
Wanting More	subjects expressed a desire for more differential instruction or kinesthetic instruction in classrooms
	subjects expressed a desire for a more diverse academic school culture
	subjects expressed a desire for more personable and equitable relationships with teachers and peers

The following discusses the three contexts of Wanting More and the features of each context.

Wanting More Context #1. Subjects in this study expressed a desire for more differential instruction or kinesthetic instruction in classrooms.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects' experience with traditional methods of conveying knowledge were negative.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects felt academically competent, but stifled or ignored.

Consequence

1. Subjects recommended that a wider range of teaching methods be utilized so more

students can learn.

Wanting More Context #2. Subjects expressed a desire for a more diverse academic school culture.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects viewed school as an opportunity.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects perceived opportunities at school as too limited.

Consequence

1. Subjects thought that schools could better meet students' needs by offering a less narrow range of range of options.

Wanting More Context #3. Subjects expressed a desire for more personable and equitable relationships with teachers and peers.

Intervening Condition

1. Subjects' interpersonal experiences at school were of significant importance.

Action/Interaction

1. Subjects experienced stress because of negative peer and adult interactions.

Consequence

1. Subjects thought that teachers should have more positive relationships with students.
2. Subjects thought that students should not worry about what others think.

Selective Coding

Selective coding has been described as "the process of integrating and refining the theory (Strauss & Corbin, p. 143). In building a theory, findings need to be presented "as

a set of interrelated concepts, not just a listing of themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 145). The aim of the selective coding process "is to integrate the categories along the dimensional level to form a theory, validate the statements of relationship among concepts, and fill in any categories in need of further refinement" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 211). Selective coding is "the final step in grounded theory analysis ---the integration of concepts around a core category and the filling in of categories in need of further development and refinement" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 237).

The data analyzed in this study and the interrelationships that exist between the data make up this section of the study. The story line presented here is developed from the axial coding process and focuses on five phenomena, forming a grounded theory in the process. The context of each phenomenon is presented in the following storyline along with the interrelationships of the phenomena "Dropouts' perceptions of participation in high school." The concepts that are "related to context of the phenomena are identified in **bold** to assist the reader in the analysis" (Johnson, 2002, p. 100) of the story line.

Subjects who have dropped out of school before graduating relate perceptions of participation that contributed to their having left school. The subjects of this study **recognized the participatory requirements** that are required for high school graduation, or **"doing school."** Subjects **viewed school as important**, and **wanted to be able to do school successfully**. Overall, subjects seemed to think that the participatory **requirements for school weren't all that difficult**. Many regretted not having just dug in and finished high school. A few of the subjects remembered that they had **worked hard in grade school**. School had once been something that they were motivated to meet

the participatory requirements of. At times, some of the subjects **met the requirements of school in spite of significant obstacles.** While suspended, expelled, or in jail, some subjects had managed to continue doing their schoolwork and getting it back to the school for credit. Most subjects had **experienced some academic and social success** in high school and realized, looking back, that it would have been physically **possible for them to "do school."** The factors that came up later indicated how this physical possibility was overrun by social and emotional factors. Many subjects **felt burned out** on "doing school." Even though subjects acknowledged the requirements of school participation willingly and accurately, the **resented some of the requirements of schooling** and **chose not to meet them.** Subjects **viewed certain components of high school as frivolous or unnecessary** to the purposes of schooling. As a result, they often **didn't attend school regularly, didn't do class work,** and **didn't do homework.** Subjects responded to the participatory requirements of schooling by **declining to participate beyond a certain level.** Caught up in a vicious circle where they refused to participate in what perceived as redundant, irrelevant, or undoable, some subjects **fell behind academically** and **became alienated from school**.

One of the ways that subjects dealt with school was through the process of **sidetracking.** Sidetracking included the alternative activities that distracted students from fully participating in school. Subjects had a **need to be involved** in something that did not seem to be satisfied by school. **Sidetracking activities** initiated by subjects **both in and out of school** may have filled their need to be involved in something. Subjects **supported each other** in their **alternative activities** as a way of validating each other. On campus, subjects sidetracked by refusing to pay attention in class or do work, dress

out for PE, or complete homework. Off campus, subjects stayed home to take care of themselves or a family member, played sick, hung out with friends, or used drugs. **Drug** use by subjects was a **common alternative** activity. Subjects used drugs in school and went to classes while under the influence. In some way or another, subjects' alternative activities **compromised their attendance** to the requirements of schooling. Sidetracking activities had the effect of **making subjects' feel important,** even though they were failing school. For these subjects, alternative activities provided them with **roles and identities** different from those of the typical student. Most of them had trouble seeing themselves in the typical student role: They **could not relate to the typical student identity.** As a result, subjects in this study **sought out alternative activities,** and **were sympathetic to others'** use of alternative activities. In reinforcing each other's use of activities as alternatives to regular school participation, **subjects sought to legitimize** sidetracking and **perceived it as legitimate.** Because of their inability to comply with the participatory requirements of school and their loss of that role, sidetracking had the effect of allowing subjects to **feel in control of roles and identities** that were not imposed upon them. Ultimately, the **roles inherent in sidetracking had a negative impact** on subjects' roles as students. Subjects, however, **could not necessarily evaluate** ahead of time the **negative impact sidetracking activities would ultimately have** on their participation and success in high school.

Subjects exhibited an awareness that **certain attributes can prop up student participation** in school. Subjects viewed **family reputation** as one factor that could either benefit or undermine acceptance at school. Family reputation was **seen as influencing acceptance** at school for subjects. Subjects also perceived themselves as

people in their own right, as separate from their families. In this view, student would not have a right to expect their family reputation to assist them at school. By the same measure, a poor family reputation should not negatively impact a student. Experiences belied these desires. Subjects believed that **family reputation was a factor** in how they were treated at school. Subjects **resented** some of the **ways they were treated** at school **because of their families' reputations** and **resented others' advantages** that resulted from having the right family name. Subjects felt that their **schools were biased and unfair** with regard to treatment of students based on family reputation, and they **wanted to be treated as persons in their own right.** As a result of the biases they perceived at school with regard to family reputation, subjects **felt disrespected, discounted, and helpless.** Subjects also felt that **participation in sports influenced one's acceptance** at school. Subjects saw students who were active in or good at sports as having **access to special consideration.** For example, students who were in sports might not be disciplined to the extent that subjects who weren't in sports were. Subjects **saw themselves as deserving** consideration regardless of whether or not they participated in sports.

Some of the subjects **acknowledged and enjoyed the special consideration** they had been given while participating in sports; some **tried to emulate** a family member's success. Subjects not in sports, and even one who had been, **resented the special consideration** enjoyed by students who did participate. More poignantly, subjects **resented the negative effects** of not participating in sports. These negative effects included being subjected to higher discipline standards than students who were participating in sports. In the final analysis, subjects felt they were being held to **different standards** that students in sports and had access to **a lesser school experience** because

they didn't have access to the same privileges. Subjects also felt that **perception of academic ability influenced academic assistance.** They felt that teachers were more willing to help students with ability than students they thought didn't have ability. In this way, **perception of academic ability controlled access to teachers' expertise.** Subjects generally had the **attitude that most students are capable of learning** if they have **access to appropriate instruction,** but felt it was limited to students that had talent. Subjects themselves **saw students as deserving** of access to teachers' expertise **regardless of academic ability. Subjects resented the special consideration** given to students with perceived academic ability, and they **resented the negative effects** of not being perceived by teachers as having academic ability that **they felt they did, in fact, have.** As a result of these perceived barriers to participation in school, **subjects gave up.**

However, subjects assumed that **they were teachable** and could learn high school material. Subjects felt they were **being held to different academic standards** than students who were perceived as having academic ability. Subjects felt that they had access to **a lesser school experience** than those students who were perceived as having more academic ability than them. Eventually, subjects **stopped seeking help** in class if they didn't understand something. As a result of their lack of ability to fully participate, subjects **accommodated themselves** by engaging in minimal participation. This involved subjects **calculating the lowest level of participation required** to pass classes and grade levels. To accomplish this, subjects managed their course assignments at a level just high enough **to avoid negative interactions with staff.** Subjects related how they had **picked and chosen** just enough assignments **to meet the minimum requirements** for passing a class. Subjects also **developed strategies for managing their GPAs** at a passing level

for the year. This effectively created a **counterculture of controlled minimal participation**, with subjects' school **focus on requirements and credentials** rather than on learning. By utilizing this process, subjects' **self-downsized** their **academic goals and achievement** significantly.

Subjects felt that many **interactions with adults** at school **were based on** whether or not the adults in question had a **positive or negative assessment of them** as a student or a person. Subjects were **sensitive to** and cared about **what adults thought** of them. They **wanted to be thought of as academically capable**. Subjects **reacted to how they thought adults perceived them**. They were bothered by adults' negative perceptions and buoyed by adults' positive perceptions. If subjects were **treated negatively by adults**, they felt that it was because those adults thought **they were losers.** In spite of all of this, subjects indicated that they still **felt academically capable**. Many **interactions with adults** at school were experienced by subjects as **either supportive or hostile** to their identity as a student or a person. Subjects showed significant **sensitivity to interactions** with adults. They truly **wanted to be supported** by the adults at school in their academic endeavors, and **reacted** to how **positive or negative adults' interactions** with them were. The tone of subjects' interactions with adults **affected whether or not they were able to function** effectively at school. At times, **subjects felt like** the adults in their schools treated them like they thought the subjects were **losers**. Ultimately, subjects **felt certain hostility** in the school's academic environment. Subjects also felt that their **interactions with peers** were **based on** whether or not those peers' had a **positive or negative assessment** of them as a person. Subjects felt that their **peers exhibited a limited tolerance** for students who were different from them. The subjects, however,

seemed **willing to tolerate peers** who were different than them and **wanted others to be more tolerant** of them as well. Subjects were **sensitive to** whether their **peers acted positively or negatively** to them, and felt that their schools **social environment was negative.** Subjects' experienced their **interactions with peers** as either **supportive or hostile** to their school experience. Subjects were **sensitive to peer interactions** at school. They felt that **peers were very negative to students they perceived as "different."** Subjects indicated that they **felt some intimidation** because of the school's **negative social environment.** Subjects were **affected by** negative interactions that happened to them **directly or that they had witnessed** or heard about. They were **sensitive to the positive or negative nature** of peer interactions **whether or not they happened to them personally**. Some subjects had been the **targets of peers' abuse**, and at least **one had been an abuser**. Subjects were **witnesses to peer targeting** of other students. The resulting **school social and academic environments** were experienced as **hostile and alienating** to these subjects.

Subjects in this study wanted more from school. They expressed a **desire for more differential instruction or kinesthetic instruction** in classrooms. Their experience had been mostly with **traditional teaching methods** of conveying knowledge, and there were many times when these seemed to them to be **ineffective for them**. They did feel **academically competent**, but thought that **school had stifled them** and **teachers ignored them**. Subjects seemed to be **aware** that **other teaching methods** were available, and **recommended that a wider range** of teaching methods be utilized so more students would be able to learn. Subjects also expressed a **desire for** a more **diverse academic school culture**, rather than a one-size-fits-all model. In spite of their

leaving school early, **subjects viewed it as an opportunity**, but they also perceived opportunities at **school in general as too limited** and thought that schools could better meet students' needs by offering a **wider range of options**. Lack of community in schools was also a concern for subjects. They expressed a **desire** for more **personable and equitable relationships with both teachers and peers**. The **interpersonal experiences** of subjects at school were **of significant importance** to them. Peer and adult **interactions that were negative** caused them some **distress**. Subjects thought that school could be **more effective if teachers could have more positive relationships** with students. Subjects did not offer recommendations for better peer relationships, except to say that would be better for students if they didn't worry about what their peers thought about them.

The interrelationships between the phenomena resulted in the story found during selective coding. Final analysis of data from open coding and axial coding re-contextualized in selective coding resulted in the emergence of a core category. This core category is labeled "Dropouts' perceptions of participation in high school." This core category is related to the five phenomena examined in the process of axial coding. Because the core category has emerged from the analysis of data, the phenomena are now referred to as subcategories. The relationship between the core category and its subcategories, or phenomena, requires this change in labeling. The core category and its interrelationship with the subcategories form the structure of the narrative report.

Core Category. The core category is based upon the interrelationships between the previously identified subcategories that came about during the selective coding process. The core category is related to the following five subcategories: (a) Doing

School, (b) Sidetracking, (c) Props, (d) Winners and Losers, and (e) Wanting More. These five subcategories are also related to each other.

Subcategories. The interrelationships between subcategories are discussed below under their respective headings. The first is "Doing School."

Doing School. Youth who leave high school before graduating know what the participatory requirements for high school are. Looking back, some see high school as facile and think that if they would have just tried harder they could have been more successful. However, at the time the requirements of high school seemed tedious or arbitrary, or they felt alienated and or behind academically. They have trouble relating to the role of high school student, and gradually replace school with alternative activities, or Sidetracking, that give them an identity and a role that that can relate to and makes them feel successful or important.

Sidetracking. Subjects' alienation from schooling makes them vulnerable to "Sidetracking" by other, more enticing activities. These activities may occur in class, in school and out, and may be as simple as not listening in class or as complex as absenting themselves from a traumatic school environment. High school aged youth have complicated and demanding lives, and may not identify well with the role of high school student. They may use drugs as an alternative to "Doing School." Drug users gain membership to a culture in which they have a role and an identity that makes them feel unique and important. Sidetracking is a way of compensating for not Doing School very well, and eventually these alternative activities can interfere with a students' ability for Doing School at all.

Props. High school students realize that certain attributes, such as family name

or reputation, or athletic or academic ability, can influence how adults and peers treat them at school. When such attributes lead to unfair advantages, they are resented. Unfair advantages might include having the teacher's attention because they perceive a student as intelligent or good at a subject, or being respected because of who their family is. There are also biases that occur because students are perceived as unintelligent or as coming from a "bad" family. They may feel that students are treated like Winners and Losers rather than unique human beings. Youth are sensitive to these discriminations and take them personally, to the point where they stop working in school because they feel that it's pointless. If they can't succeed in school by competing with unfair advantages, or if they are going to be discriminated against for not being smart enough, they accommodate themselves by reducing their effort to some self-controlled, minimal level.

Winners and Losers. Youth are sensitive to the interactions they experience at school with both adults and peers. They see adults in school treating certain students like Winners and others like Losers. If adults treat some youth like they are Losers, it has a negative effect on their desire to do well in school. They also see their peers treating students who are different in abusive ways. Students who enjoy the benefits of Props may not have to put up with this harassment, for they may more likely to be seen as Winners by both adults and peers. Students who are harassed may be more likely to engage in sidetracking, especially drug use, as an alternative way of feeling more like a Winner when Doing School is becoming more problematic due to a negative social environment.

Wanting More. When teachers gravitate toward the more adept students and ignore those who have a more difficult time, those left out will resent it. They may even realize that there are many ways that teachers may utilize to teach a given concept and

feel that they should be utilizing alternative methodologies. School is seen as an opportunity, but also as a place where uniqueness is stifled. Youth desire positive relationships with their teachers, and respect for their academic differences. They feel that everyone deserves a chance to be a Winner.

Summary

The data collected for this study, obtained through semi-structured focus group interviews, were subjected to open, axial, and selective coding. This chapter presents an analysis of the findings. Several themes evolved from the open coding process which were de-contextualized into data segments at the beginning of the axial coding process. The micro analysis that occurred later during axial coding resulted in re-contextualizing of the relationships that emerged. As the axial process was concluded, five phenomena were identified, as well as contextual components for each phenomenon.

Selective coding of the re-contextualized data was the final stage of data analysis. Selective coding utilizes a macro analysis of the data. This macro analysis allowed a core category to emerge from the phenomena that were identified during axial coding. During this stage of the analysis, the phenomena were re-identified as subcategories of the core category. The interrelationship of these subcategories then formed the basis of the grounded theory, which comprised the narrative report.

In Chapter 5 the findings of this study are summarized with reference to the open, axial, and selective coding processes. The findings were examined with a broader set of data to answer the Central Question of this study: How do dropouts perceptions of participation in high school, either experienced, expected, or desired, compare with qualities of participation specific to commonly held perspectives of democracy? Chapter

Five concludes with implications for practitioners and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETIVE SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Qualitative research is an inductive process that focuses on the meanings of participants. It allows participants to have a voice, and that voice to be heard. Chapter Five summarizes the findings of Chapter Four of this qualitative study. It begins with a broad spectrum analysis of the core category "Dropouts' Perceptions of Participation in High School" as well as the five subcategories of (a) Doing School, (b) Sidetracking, (c) Props, (d) Winners and Losers, and (e) Wanting More. The interrelation between the core category and the subcategories, as well as between the subcategories themselves acknowledges a macro view perspective.

The first item discussed in this chapter, *Broad Spectrum Analysis*, describes the transition from the micro to the macro perspective of the analyzed data to formulate a grounded theory. This section is concluded with a discussion of the relationship of the categories that emerged to the extant literature. A discussion of the central question and sub-questions posed in Chapter One follows. A *General Implications of the Findings* section is included to suggest the implications of this study for practitioners as well as *Recommendations* for both practitioners and further research. A description of the qualitative procedures utilized for this study begins the following summary.

Summary

Broad Spectrum Analysis

The generation of the grounded theory concerning "Dropouts Perceptions of Participation in High School" resulted from a synthesis of the analysis of the original

qualitative data. This grounded theory is the final product of a series of analyses utilizing the processes of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The five categories that emerged from the axial coding process are the basis of the grounded theory of this study. The sixth category that emerged during selective coding encompassed the other five and was called the "core category," as it was integrated with the five subcategories: (a) Doing School, (b) Sidetracking, (c) Props, (d) Winners and Losers, and (e) Wanting More. Together these categories make up the grounded theory presented in Chapter Four.

The data gathered in this study was first analyzed in the micro perspective of the axial coding stage and then in the macro perspective of the selective coding phase. Through these two processes, a grounded theory emerged. The grounded theory was enhanced by the use of intensely descriptive language, giving the viewer the opportunity to see the phenomenon in ways not previously accomplished. The perceptions of dropouts about participation in high school and how those perceptions affect their participation at school became apparent during this process of analysis. A broad spectrum view of the data, generated through the various analyses conducted during this study, revealed that how dropouts perceived participation in high school had profound effects on their identities as students and as members of their schools.

Exploration of the Central Question and Sub-Questions

Analyses of data collected through focus group interviews led to categorical relationships between the core category "Dropouts Perceptions of Participation in High School," and the five subcategories: (a) Doing School, (b) Sidetracking, (c) Props, (d) Winners and Losers, and (e) Wanting More. In-depth analysis of these categorical

relationships and their components revealed a new perspective on the central research question that framed this study. This research question was:

- How do high school dropouts' perceptions of their own participation in high school, either experienced, expected, or desired, compare with qualities of participation specific to commonly held perspectives of democracy?

For the purposes of this study, subquestions are linked to subcategories discovered through axial coding that inform each question.

What perceptions do subjects have about participation in high school? All of the five subcategories identified through axial coding are related to subjects' perceptions of participation at school. The subcategory Doing School revealed that subjects viewed school as important and wanted to be successful at school. They thought that the requirements of school weren't all that difficult, and had worked hard at it when they were younger. The subcategory Sidetracking revealed that subjects found alternative ways of participating that had a negative impact on their participation at school, such as ditching or doing drugs. The subcategory Props revealed subjects' realization that having the right family name, academic ability, or athletic ability enhanced participation because of how others in the school community viewed them and treated students with these resources. The subcategory Winners and Losers revealed that participation was broadly stereotypical, making it difficult for students who did not or could not fit the stereotype. Adults and peers alike perpetrated the stereotypes. The subcategory Wanting More revealed that subjects desired more meaningful and satisfying ways of participating in high school, both academically and socially.

How are rules and processes perceived in terms of accessibility by individuals or

groups? Three of the five subcategories found through axial coding were related to how subjects perceived rules and processes. The subcategory Props revealed that subjects saw family name, athletic ability, and academic ability as influencing how students were treated at school. Subjects felt that students with the right family name or who participated in sports enjoyed a suspension of the rules in some circumstances and greater social acceptance by adults and peers. Students who were academically adept were seen as having greater access to teachers' expertise in class. Subjects wanted to be treated as educable persons, and as separate from their families' identities when necessary, and felt that they had access to a lesser high school experience than students with perceived academic ability, athletic ability, or the right family name. Of all of these effects, not being perceived as having academic ability was most discouraging because these subjects were often not helped academically by teachers and even got in trouble for not paying attention if they asked for help.

The subcategory Winners and Losers revealed that subjects were subjected to negative interactions on the part of both peers and adults. Many of these negative interactions were related to subjects' inability to learn a subject quickly through lectures and other traditional teaching methods. Because of this, staff interacted negatively with them. Subjects said that students who did not fit in or who were different were subjected to social intimidation and harassment by peers. Whether subjects were subjected to this personally, witnessed it happening or just heard about it, they felt that it was wrong and created a negative social and academic environment. The subcategory of Wanting More revealed subjects' desire for a broader curriculum and more diverse pedagogy, as well as better relationships with teachers.

What do subjects perceive as desirable or preferable experiences of participation in school? Four of the five categories found through axial coding relate to this question. The subcategory Doing School revealed that subjects had experienced social and academic success at school. Certain classes where teachers utilized diverse instructional methods and/or showed concern for students as people, subjects found preferable and desirable. The subcategory Sidetracking revealed that students generated more preferable experiences of participation in school by getting high, socializing with friends during class, or ditching school altogether. The subcategory Props revealed that subjects' participation in sports was related to the positive feedback they received. Subjects also made school a more preferable experience by downsizing their academic goals and achievement to some minimal level. One common self-accommodation utilized by subjects to make school participation more desirable was the use of drugs. The subcategory Winners and Losers revealed that subjects desired positive interactions with adults and peers in their schools.

What do subjects perceive as undesirable or not preferable experiences of participation in school? Three of the five subcategories found through axial coding related to this question. The subcategory Doing School revealed that subjects had worked hard in elementary school and were burned out by high school. They resented some of the requirements of school, and chose not to meet them. Ultimately, they opted not to complete class work and homework, and not to attend classes or school. They became alienated from school. The subcategory Sidetracking revealed that subjects found ways of avoiding participation requirements while in class, at school, and off campus. These alternatives included doing drugs, hanging out with friends, or taking care of their child.

Subjects justified these alternative activities, which provided identities and roles for them that school had not. The subcategory Props revealed that when subjects felt that requirements of participation, for example getting good grades, were unattainable for them, they down-sized their academic goals and achievement to minimal levels.

How do dropouts' perceptions of participation fit within perspectives of participation described in an exchange perspective of democracy? Four of the five subcategories found through axial coding related to this question. The subcategory Doing School revealed that subjects know that standard behaviors are required from them in exchange for the credential they desire. Even though subjects dropped out of school, they felt they could have done it if they had really tried, in spite of the fact that many issues had prevented that from happening. The subcategory Props revealed that school participation is influenced by resources outside of school that are differentially available to students, such as the right family name. Identities are also limited, as evidenced by the favoritism showed to those with athletic or academic ability. The subcategory of Winners and Losers revealed that students with alternative identities were not well tolerated, as students perceived as different were subjected to peer harassment. The subcategory of Wanting More revealed subjects' aversion to inflexible curricula and pedagogies that readily serve some types of students, but not others.

How do dropouts' perceptions of participation fit within perspectives of participation described in an institutional perspective of democracy? Four of the five subcategories found through axial coding related to this question. The subcategory Sidetracking revealed subjects' resistance to the reality of school that certain limited academic behaviors were required in exchange for a credential, which they resisted. This

resistance indicates subjects' desire for more control of their roles and identities. The subcategory Props revealed subjects' aversion to the differential influence of outside resources on school participation. Subjects also had an aversion to the limitations on acceptable identities, for example the favoritism showed to those with athletic or academic ability. The subcategory Winners and Losers revealed subjects' aversion to the lack of tolerance for students with alternative identities. The subcategory of Wanting More revealed subjects' desire for more flexible curricula and pedagogies that serve all types of students.

Broad Spectrum Analysis Related to the Literature. Data from the semi-structured focus groups has been re-contextualized and examined in light of the six sub-questions and the central question that framed this study. Extant literature supports the data found regarding subcategories.

Glickman, (1998), Darling-Hammond (1997), and Dewey (1916) delineated between traditional models of education, which reflect an exchange perspective as described by March and Olsen (2000), and progressive models of education, which reflect an institutional perspective of democracy as described by March and Olsen (2000). Exchange and institutional perspectives of democracy affect the structure of schooling (March & Olsen, 2000) and how students are allowed to participate within schools. In institutions reflecting an exchange perspective of democracy, rules are constructed outside of the daily operations and are not easily modifiable. Rules exist to facilitate individuals' acting in mutually agreeable exchanges to achieve their own interests. Endowed resources facilitate these exchanges. Pursuits by individuals are limited by other individuals who also pursuing their own preferences. Individual

preferences are assumed to be stable, consistent, and developed outside of the institution and its political system. The exchange process is sensitive to individual interests, but not seen as affecting them very much. Individual interests, personal resource distributions, and rules are treated as external to the institutional processes of negotiation and exchange. In an exchange perspective, "there is no assumption of a shared public interest to be used a basis for collective action. Whether individual actors achieve their desires in such a system depends on the extent to which their desires are consistent with the desires of others and whether they have exchangeable resources of value, including political rights. (March & Olsen, 2000, p. 151)." In schooling, individuals in the role or identity of students would use the resources they had available to them personally, including outside of school, to make beneficial exchanges resulting in their attaining what the rules have proscribed an education as consisting of.

Subjects' contention that Doing School isn't essentially a difficult endeavor has been reported by Sizer (1992). Subjects' negligence of class work and homework is supported by Kohn's (2000) documentation that emphasizing teacher-directed education leaves many students disengaged. Subjects declining to participate beyond a certain minimal level as a defensive mechanism utilized by disenfranchised or bored students has been recognized by Sizer (1992) and Glasser (1988). Subjects' perception that Doing School is a process of exchange, where a certain level of participation is traded for a diploma, supports March and Olsen's (2000) contention that public schooling largely reflects exchange rather than institutional perspectives of democracy.

The utilization of Sidetracking activities both in and out of school is supported by Glasser's (1988) testimony that adolescents who have little power in school will find

negative activities through which to experience some power in their lives. The contribution of truancy to dropping out was found by Wehlage and Rutter (1986) in their analysis of the High School and beyond data. Pittman's (1991) analysis from the same database supports interest in school and academic performance s having a large potential link with dropping out. That Sidetracking activities compromised subjects' ability to meet the requirements of schooling is supported by Finn's (1989) observation that dropping out is the end result of a gradual diminishing of participation. Subjects' perception of schooling as an exchange process governed by rules and processes that they have no active influence over as members of the institution is supported by March and Olsen's (2000) description of institutions reflecting an exchange perspective of democracy.

Subjects' identification of Props as affecting access to participation in school supports Lee and Bryk's (1989) proposal that modern comprehensive high schools tend to amplify the initial social differences among students and result in a less equitable distribution of achievement. Likewise, Herzog and Pittman's (1995) rural subjects feeling that their schools could have provided more support for disadvantaged students also seemed supported. Subjects' perception that certain personal resources influence the quality of participation at school supports Darling-Hammond's (1997) observation that democratic schooling, as framed in an institutional perspective, is not widely available in American public schools. Subjects' perception that personal resources determine access to participation is reflects March and Olsen's (2000) description of schooling reflecting an exchange perspective of democracy.

Subjects' perception that whether or not they were seen as Winners or Losers affected both peers' and teachers' treatment of them supports Glasser's (1988) contention

that students designated as "haves" fare far better in traditional classrooms than those designated as "have nots." Subjects' perception of identities as both inflexible and influencing access to participation reflect an exchange perspective of democracy as described by March and Olsen (2000). A sense of belonging or not as influencing dropping out was reported by Pittman (1991) and Coley (1995) from their respective analyses of the NELS:88 data. Relationships with teachers were found to be a factor by Pittman (1986) Coley (1995), McNeal (1997), and Pittman (1991), the latter two having analyzed HS&B data. Peer relationships were also seen as a factor in dropping out by Pittman (1991). Roderick (1993) suggested that dropping out is the rejection of a community that has already rejected the dropout.

In institutions reflecting an institutional perspective of democracy, the expectation of individual participation in construction and modification of rules and processes that affect them has the effect of converting rules and processes into a universal resource for the members. Members have in common that they are active citizens of the institution, but individual identities are flexible and unrestrained by a lack of endowed resources. Following rules often means matching an ambiguous rule to an ambiguous situation, a complication requiring energy and tolerance. Resolving ambiguities and conflicts takes place by building greater understandings of the nature of situations and selves, rather than by knowing more about the consequences of actions. The importance of shared meanings within the political community is emphasized (March & Olsen, 2000). In schooling, the collective of citizen identities who are members of the institution would mold the institution in response to the needs of the diverse and changing identities of students seeking their education. By Wanting More, subjects in this study demonstrated a desire

for schooling reflecting such an institutional perspective of democracy.

Glickman (1998) described democratic schools as those where students have a more active role in both curriculum and pedagogy. Glasser (1988) advocated for more student control as a necessary component of adolescent psychological health. Darling-Hammond (1997) proposed that education for democracy requires a certain access to social knowledge and understanding that is learned by a students' participation in a democratic community. Dewey (1916) held that active participation is essential to the social nature of education as a process. Subjects' desire for a more participatory curriculum and pedagogy thus reflects an institutional perspective of democracy as described by March and Olsen (2000).

General Implications of the Findings

Analysis of data from this study resulted in two general implications for educational leaders, educators, and state legislators. These implications deserve careful consideration given high school dropout rates. These implications are (a) educating students for democratic participation in our democratic society, and (b) educating students for academic success democratically.

Educating for Democracy

Since public schools are situated in American society, they are assumed to be democratic. Except for the preparation of students for democratic citizenship through civics and social studies courses however, the extent to which active democratic participation is allowed varies widely from school to school. Traditional models of schooling do not foster the active democratic participation required to achieve proficiency by allowing students to actually practice it in meaningful and practical ways.

Thus the quality of participation allowed for students in traditional schools, while thought of as democratic, is in fact alienating students from school. Furthermore, if students are not allowed to practice the skills of active, democratic participation in schools, future democratic participation in society is destined to be stunted.

Educational leaders in public education should be aware that while student participation in schools may be framed in democratic terms and assumed to be fostering democratic citizenship, the degree to which participation is specifically allowed at the lived level of the organization for students varies widely and affects students' engagement in school. Educational leaders need to promote the active practice of democratic participation within schools as democratically and developmentally appropriate for students.

Educating for Academic Success

Public schools in the United States that identify themselves specifically as democratic schools utilize non-routine, collaborative-type cultures and are more likely to define students' learning potential as alterable and indeterminate. Such models of school are progressive, and characterized by the idea that students grow naturally and need guidance by teachers; that learning is an individual experience; that outcomes must be flexible and reflect diversity of student experience and capacity; that curriculum should be individualized and developmentally appropriate; and that teachers are learners and should provide instructional guidance to students (Wiles & Bondi, 2001). Almost one hundred years of research has shown that students schooled within such progressive models of education and curricula consistently outperform those schooled within traditional ones, in both public and private institutions (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kohn,

2000).

Educational leaders in public education should be aware that while curricula in traditional schools may be framed in democratic terms and assumed to foster academic success for all students, the degree to which it is inflexible or specifically supports some students and not others affects students' engagement in school. Educational leaders need to promote the active practice of democratic participation in curricula and pedagogy as educationally and developmentally appropriate for students.

Recommendations

Two recommendations have resulted from the findings in this study, (a) Recommendations for Practitioners, and (b) Recommendations for Future Studies.

Recommendations for Practitioners

The findings of this study and these students' perspectives provide valuable insight into dropouts' perceptions of high school participation. While it is not the intention of this research to minimize the role of choice or responsibility on the part of students, high school educators should re-examine their beliefs about traditional schools and how they can be improved to ensure that they are meeting the needs of students and that more students succeed. Specific recommendations include

1. Traditional schools are not providing opportunities for youth to practice the skills required for active democratic participation. Schools must change to meet the democratic needs of the youth of this country. We can no longer tolerate a population that is disengaged from governing itself, and students learn governance by how they are allowed to participate in governance at school. Students of high school age need more access to governance through both choice and responsibility within curricula intending to

serve them. Educational leaders should promote such active democratic participation by students in schools as educationally, developmentally, and democratically appropriate.

2. Schools must change to meet the 21st Century educational needs of the youth of this country. We are too far along in the information age to continue acting as if a one-size-fits-all curriculum represents even a fraction of the knowledge in the world. Today's students need opportunities as well as responsibility and guidance in managing knowledge toward personally challenging and meaningful purposes. Educational leaders should promote such flexibility in curricula and pedagogy as educationally, developmentally, and democratically appropriate.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The current study looks at participation from the point of view of dropouts from Class B high schools in Montana. Future research should try to determine if the perceptions of participation discovered in this study are held by other youth in other public and private school communities. Similar studies engaging broader demographic samples of dropouts need to be conducted, for example from Class A or Class C schools, as aggregated state data indicate that dropout rates increase as school size increases (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2003). Similar studies engaging specific ethnic samples of dropouts need to be conducted, for example schools serving Native American student populations, as state data indicates that these students drop out at rates three times higher than white [sic] students (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2003). Future research might also include successful high school students, high school graduates, or GED completers, in order to determine differences and similarities in their perceptions of participation in high school as they relate to participation in perspectives of democracy.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Dear Former Student of [A] High School:

I am a graduate student at the University of Montana and am doing research about students who left school without graduating. I am looking for some students who have left school to discuss their perceptions of participation in high school.

I know that talking about high school may be a sensitive subject for you, but your input for this type of research is very valuable to people who are trying to improve schools.

People who do wish to participate in this study will be asked to join a small discussion group for about 1½ hours to talk about participation in high school. If you do choose to participate, anything you say in this study would be confidential. No one at PCHS would know that you participated in the study or what you say about your experiences at school. Members of each discussion group will be asked and expected to keep what is said "in the room."

If you would like to find out more about this study and possibly participate in a discussion group, please call me or mail the enclosed post card *as soon as possible*. Mailing the postcard or calling me will not in any way obligate you to participate.

Thank You,

Rosemary J. Hertel
519 5th St.
Deer Lodge, MT 59722
Ph. (406) 846-2912

Dear Ms. Hertel,

I would like to get more information and/or possibly participate in the study you described. Please contact me.

_____
(name)

_____
(phone)

To:
R. J. Hertel
519 5th St.
Deer Lodge
MT 59722

APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form

Title of the Study: An Analysis of Dropouts' Talk About Participation at School From Democratic Perspectives

Investigator: Rosemary J. Hertel
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling
The University of Montana
(406) 846-2912

519 5th St.
Deer Lodge
MT 59722

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Dean Sorenson
Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
(406) 243-5610

Special instructions to the potential subjects: *This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you see any words that you don't understand, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.*

Purpose: You are being asked to participate in a focus group with several other people of about your age to talk about what kinds of experiences you had in high school and how they may have impacted your leaving school. You will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion for about 90 minutes. You will be asked to think back to school and relate experiences specifically having to do with ways you or other students participated at school, expectations you may have had about participation at school, and how you thought students should be allowed to participate at school. After talking with and listening to the focus group discussion, the investigator will see what the common and individual thoughts are among your experiences and compare them to ways that people see participation in terms of how we often think about democracy.

Procedures: If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be given two permission forms to sign. One will be a copy for my records. The other copy is for you. You will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion for about 90 minutes. The focus group will take place at the local public library.

Risks/Discomforts: I can't imagine any risks associated with your taking part in this study. However, the group discussion may bring back unhappy memories, which may be a sad experience for you. If at any time during the group discussion you wish to stop, you will be free to do so.

Benefits: Your help with this study may give us a better understanding of what kinds of participatory experiences students who have left school before graduating experienced, expected to experience, or wished to experience. We hope that these results will help people involved with public education understand how students view school participation in relation to ideas about democracy.

Confidentiality: *The focus group members will be asked not to share what other members of the group say outside of the focus group discussion.* This is common practice for groups where people share personal information and experiences, even if the people in the group know each other outside of the group, and it helps people feel more comfortable in talking about their experiences. Everything you share will be kept secret by me. Your records will be kept private and will not be given to anyone without your permission. Only my professor and I will have access to the files. Your identity will be kept secret, and only a made-up name will identify you as the information is analyzed. If the results of this study are written in a book or magazine, or presented at an educational meeting, your name will not be used. The information from this study will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Your signed permission form will be stored in a cabinet separate from the data. The audiotapes will be transcribed without any information that could identify you. The videotapes will be used to accurately identify speakers during transcription, since it will be a group situation. The tapes will be erased after they are transcribed. We will not share what you say about your high schools with school employees.

Compensation for Injury: Although we do not see any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms: "In the event that you are injured as a result of this research, you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims representative or University Legal Counsel."

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal: Your decision to take part in this research study or to take part in the research yourself is entirely up to you. You may stop at any time without penalty.

Questions: If you have any questions about the research now or during the study, contact Rosemary J. Hertel at (406) 846-2912.

Subject's Statement of Consent: I have read the above description of this research study. I have been told of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I know that a member of the research team will also answer any future questions I may have. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand that my words may be used in books or magazines, but would appear

without anyone knowing my name. I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____
(Subject's printed name)

_____ _____
(Subject's signature) (Date)

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Project Title: An Analysis of Dropouts' Talk About Participation at School From Democratic Perspectives

Study Director:
Rosemary J. Hertel
519 5th St.
Deer Lodge, Mt 59722
Phone: (406) 846-2912 (h); (406) 846-1553, ext. 2704 (w)

Study Team Members:
Dr. Dean Sorenson
Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Phone: (406) 243-5610

This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you see any words that you don't understand, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.

Purpose of the Project: Your son or daughter is being asked to take part in a focus group with several other people of about their age, to talk about what kinds of experiences they had in high school and how they may have impacted their leaving school. Your son or daughter will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion for about 90 minutes. They will be asked to think back to school and relate experiences specifically having to do with ways that they or other students participated at school, expectations they may have had about participation at school, and how they thought students should be allowed to participate at school. After talking with and listening to the focus group discussion, the investigator will see what the common and individual thoughts are among their experiences and compare them to ways that people see participation in terms of how we often think about democracy.

Procedures: If you agree to allow your son or daughter to take part in this research study, he or she will be given two permission forms to sign. One will be a copy for my records. The other copy is for you. Your son or daughter will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion for about 90 minutes. The focus group will take place at the local public library.

Risks/Discomforts: I can't imagine any risks associated with your son or daughter's taking part in this study. However, the group discussion may bring back unhappy memories, which may be a sad experience for them. If at any time during the group discussion they wish to stop, they will be free to do so.

Benefits: Your and your son or daughter's help with this study may give us a better understanding of what kinds of participatory experiences students who have left school before graduating experienced, expected to experience, or wished to experience. We hope that these results will help people involved with public education understand how students view school participation in relation to ideas about democracy.

Confidentiality: *The focus group members will be asked not to share what other members of the group say outside of the focus group discussion.* This is common practice for groups where people share personal information and experiences, even if the people in the group know each other outside of the group, and it helps people feel more comfortable in talking about their experiences. Everything your son or daughter shares will be kept secret by me. Their records will be kept private and will not be given to anyone without your and their permission. Only my professor and I will have access to the files. Your son or daughter's identity will be kept secret, and only a made-up name will identify them as the information is analyzed. If the results of this study are written in a book or magazine, or presented at an educational meeting, their name will not be used. The information from this study will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Your signed permission form will be stored in a cabinet separate from the data. The audiotapes will be transcribed without any information that could identify your son or daughter. The videotapes will be used to accurately identify speakers during transcription, since it will be a group situation. The tapes will be erased after they are transcribed. We will not share what your son or daughter says with school employees.

Compensation for Injury: Although we do not see any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms: "In the event that you are injured as a result of this research, you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims representative or University Legal Counsel."

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal: Your decision to allow your son or daughter to take part in this research study is entirely up to you and them. You may stop them from participating or they may stop at any time without penalty.

Questions: If you have any questions about the research now or during the study, contact Rosemary J. Hertel at (406) 846-2912.

Subject's Statement of Consent: I have read the above description of this research study. I have been told of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I know that a member of the research team will also answer any future questions I may have. I voluntarily agree to allow my son or daughter to take part in this study. I understand that their words may be used in books or

magazines, but would appear without anyone knowing their name. I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____
(Printed name of subject)

_____
(Printed name of parent or guardian)

_____ _____
(Signature of parent or guardian) (Date)

GUARDIAN PERMISSION FORM

Project Title: An Analysis of Dropouts' Talk About Participation at School From Democratic Perspectives

Study Director:
Rosemary J. Hertel
519 5th St.
Deer Lodge, Mt 59722
Phone: (406) 846-2912 (h); (406) 846-1553, ext. 2704 (w)

Study Team Members:
Dr. Dean Sorenson
Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Phone: (406) 243-5610

This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you see any words that you don't understand, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.

Purpose of the Project: A minor in your custody is being asked to take part in a focus group with several other people of about their age, to talk about what kinds of experiences they had in high school and how they may have impacted their leaving school. This youth will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion for about 90 minutes. They will be asked to think back to school and relate experiences specifically having to do with ways that they or other students participated at school, expectations they may have had about participation at school, and how they thought students should be allowed to participate at school. After talking with and listening to the focus group discussion, the investigator will see what the common and individual thoughts are among their experiences and compare them to ways that people see participation in terms of how we often think about democracy.

Procedures: If you agree to allow this minor in your custody to take part in this research study, he or she will be given two permission forms to sign. One will be a copy for my records. The other copy is for you. This youth will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion for about 90 minutes. The focus group will take place in a private room suited for that purpose on the institution's premises.

Risks/Discomforts: I can't imagine any risks associated with this youth's taking part in this study. However, the group discussion may bring back unhappy memories, which may be a sad experience for them. If at any time during the group discussion they wish to stop, they will be free to do so.

Benefits: This youth's help with this study may give us a better understanding of what kinds of participatory experiences students who have left school before graduating experienced, expected to experience, or wished to experience. We hope that these results will help people involved with public education understand how students view school participation in relation to ideas about democracy.

Confidentiality: *The focus group members will be asked not to share what other members of the group say outside of the focus group discussion.* This is common practice for groups where people share personal information and experiences, even if the people in the group know each other outside of the group, and it helps people feel more comfortable in talking about their experiences. Everything this youth shares will be kept secret by me. Their records will be kept private and will not be given to anyone without your and their permission. Only my professor and I will have access to the files. Their identity will be kept secret, and only a made-up name will identify them as the information is analyzed. If the results of this study are written in a book or magazine, or presented at an educational meeting, their name will not be used. The information from this study will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Your signed permission form will be stored in a cabinet separate from the data. The audiotapes will be transcribed without any information that could identify this youth. The videotapes will be used to accurately identify speakers during transcription, since it will be a group situation. The tapes will be erased after they are transcribed. We will not share what this youth says with school employees.

Compensation for Injury: Although we do not see any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms: "In the event that you are injured as a result of this research, you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims representative or University Legal Counsel."

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal: Your decision to allow this minor in your custody to take part in this research study is entirely up to you and them. You may stop them from participating or they may stop at any time without penalty.

Questions: If you have any questions about the research now or during the study, contact Rosemary J. Hertel at (406) 846-2912.

Subject's Statement of Consent: I have read the above description of this research study. I have been told of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I know that a member of the research team will also answer any future questions I may have. I voluntarily agree to allow the minor in my custody to take part in this study. I understand that their words may be used in

books or magazines, but would appear without anyone knowing their name. I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____
(Printed name of participant)

_____
(Printed name of legal guardian)

_____ _____
(Signature/Position of legal guardian) (Date)

ASSENT FORM FOR MINORS

Project Title: An Analysis of Dropouts' Talk About Participation at School From Democratic Perspectives

Project Director:
Rosemary J. Hertel
519 5th St.
Deer Lodge, MT 59722
Phone: (406) 846-2912 (h); (406) 846-1553, ext. 2704 (w)

This form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words you don't understand, please ask me for help.

I have asked your parents to allow you to be in a study about schools. This form will help you to answer your questions about the study. The form also gives me your permission to be part of a focus group with other youth and for me to ask you questions for the study.

Why you? By talking to youth like you, I hope to learn more about ways to help all students have a more active role and be more successful in their education and in society.

What will you have to do? You will be asked to join about five other youth in a focus group discussion about school. You will be asked questions, for which there are no right or wrong answers. You and the other group members may discuss the questions as they are important to you by thinking about your experiences and answering them the best you can.

Is there any danger in this project? There is no risk of injury. If you are uncomfortable answering questions or participating in the focus group discussion, you can stop, take a break, or leave at any time.

What will this project do for you? You may not get anything personally out of this project, but others may learn from what you share, and it may make schools better for students.

Who will know about your answers? Your name will not be used at all. Your comments will only be identified by the research (made up) name that you will give. All my notes will be for my use only. Only I will know what you say.

Can you quit if you want to? You may quit at any time. Just tell me that you do not want to be part of the study any more.

What if you have other questions? If you have any questions at all, please call me at one of the numbers above.

Permission: I have read and understand this form. I would like to take part in this study. I know that I can quit at any time. I will be given a copy of this form after I sign it.

_____
Printed Name of Subject

_____ _____
Subject's Signature Date

APPENDIX C

Rosemary J. Hertel

Focus Group Interview Protocol

Instructions for Interviewer:
Greet participants as they arrive, direct them to the snacks and beverages. As non-minors are seated comfortably, give them a Participant Consent Form. Briefly review this with the group, ask the non-minors to sign it, and collect them (Forms for minors will have been collected previous to the group meeting.). Distribute copies of the Participant Demographic Questionnaire and pencils; indicate to participants that they should complete these. Collect the questionnaires as participants complete them and begin.

Opening Statement:

- Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. What you reveal here may help others understand what you have experienced.
- Before we begin I would like to explain the focus group process and how our session will progress. I will be asking some general questions that have to do with participation at school, but your responses may determine in part the direction the discussion will take and what topics will be focused on. It is OK for any of you to respond to each other's comments, but everyone should be treated respectfully and that all members should have time to respond.
- This session will be tape-recorded so that what is said can be transcribed, and also the session is videotaped in case the audiotape is not clear enough to transcribe. At the beginning of the taping, everyone will be asked to introduce themselves by their first name to help with transcribing the tape. In the transcription, however, you will only be referred to by the research (made up) name that you put on your Demographic Questionnaire. If you didn't put a made up name, I will assign you one so that your privacy will be protected.

Statement of Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation:

- All of the information from this focus group interview will be confidential, including all of your comments, my responses, and the transcription that I make. At no time in this study will you be referred to by name or other description that would allow a reader of this research to identify you in this study. This confidentiality is protected by myself, my doctoral dissertation chair, and as a requirement of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Montana. Your name will not be known to anyone except me. Direct quotes used will not be name specific and all names used or referred to will be changed to protect each person's privacy and anonymity.
- *Because this is a group, I cannot control what everyone says outside of the group. However, I would like each of you to make a commitment now to protect the privacy of all of the other group members by leaving what is said here "in the room."* Any member of this group may leave at any time or take a break if they need to. By agreeing to be involved in this research, you are not obligated to follow it through if at any point you are not comfortable with it.

Core set of Questions:
Any questions I may ask have no right or wrong answers. The goal of the questions is to assist us in understanding how students who have left school perceived their participation in school. Does everyone understand what I have just read? Does anyone have any questions before we begin?
I will now start the taping. (Ask each member of the group to introduce themselves by their first name.)

Opening Question:
1. How would you describe "participation"?

Possible Prompt Questions:
2. What do you think of when you think about participating at school?

3. What are some of the ways that you liked participating at school?

4. What are some of the ways that you disliked participating at school?

5. Were there ways you could have participated at school, but didn't?

6. How do you think your school could encourage student participation?

7. What problems did you have at school?

8. What played the biggest role in your leaving school?

9. What would have made you decide to stay in school?

10. Is there anything you would do differently now, if you were suddenly back in school?

Ending: I would like to thank you all for your help in this study. Your input should be very informative for people who are involved in public education. If you have any questions about it later on, please feel free to call me.

Focus Group Participant
Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _____

Phone No.: _____ Age now: _____

Research Name (first name only---you make it up):

_____

High School last attended:

_____

Grade and semester in school when you left: _____ Age then: _____

Cohort (graduating year): _____

APPENDIX D

11 Point IRB Summary - Rosemary J. Hertel

1. **Purpose of the Research Project:** The purpose of this research project is to compare dropouts' perceptions of high school participation with qualities of participation in perspectives of democracy that are part and parcel of American culture. While much educational and sociological research has been devoted to studying various demographics of school leavers and their reasons for leaving, to date there has been no attempt to seek the perspectives of dropouts on school participation and link them to how democratic participation is viewed in the wider culture. Consequently, it is expected that this study will provide crucial information for educators, policymakers, and families regarding how school leavers viewed school participation in democratic terms. Furthermore, the dropouts' accounts gleaned via this qualitative investigation may provide important insight in lasting stories, offering educators, policymakers, and families alike a relevant context when considering how best to organize the participatory context of schools.

2. **The Subjects:** The subjects in this study will be volunteers formerly from Powell County High School. They will range in age from 15 to 24 years, both male and female.

3. **Selecting Subjects:** Initially, the researcher will be able to have the relevant high school principal and school counselor mail the researcher's letter explaining the study to potential participants. The letter will briefly explain the nature and protocol of the study, and include a stamped, return postcard as well as the researcher's phone number. Potential subjects who wish to find out more about the study and/or participate may either call the researcher or mail the enclosed postcard. Potential subjects who contact the researcher and agree to participate will be scheduled into a focus group. For non-minors, Participant Consent Forms will be reviewed and signed at the beginning of a focus group. For participants who are minors, Parental Permission Forms and Assent Forms for Minors will be given or sent to them and their parent or guardian and collected before the focus group meets. Focus groups will be assembled from cohort groups of about six participants, with a span of several years between cohort groups, depending on range and number of subjects agreeing to participate. Each focus group will meet for a 90-minute session. If subjects do not want to be audio or video taped, they will not be able to participate.

4. **Where the Study Will Take Place:** The focus groups will meet in a comfortable and private location at the public library.

5. **Activities the Subjects Will Perform:** Subjects who are of majority age will be asked to sign a Participant Consent Form prior to participating in a focus group. In the case of minors, a Parental Permission Form and Assent Form for Minors will have been collected previously. At the beginning of the focus group interview, participants will be asked to complete a brief demographic information

form. Then an interview protocol will be utilized which contains instructions for the interviewer, an opening statement, *a statement of confidentiality and voluntary participation*, and a core set of questions.

6. **Benefits of the Research:** American public high schools are situated in a democratic culture whose members take certain qualities of participation for granted as being democratic. However, qualities of participation in democratic perspectives vary widely according to the particular perspective, and varieties of perspectives occur simultaneously within the culture. The participation of subjects in this study may facilitate a better understanding of the relationship between students' perceptions and expectations of school participation and the qualities of participation characteristic of perspectives of democracy held in American culture and American minds. As a result of the information gleaned and analyzed for this study, educators, policy makers, and families may understand how to better organize the participatory context of schools for students in order to retain them through graduation.

7. **Risks and Discomforts:** There are no anticipated risks associated with the study. Conversations may bring back some memories of unhappy times and it may evoke feelings of sadness. At any time in the interview, subjects are free to withdraw from the study without penalty of any kind.

8. **Minimize Each Such Deleterious Effect:** Since there are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with subjects' participation in this study, there will be no anticipated need to minimize any such deleterious effect.

9. **The Subject's Personal Privacy Is To Be Protected:** Personal information from the study will be kept private and will not be released without the subject's or their parent's or guardian's consent, except as required by law. Only the researcher and her dissertation chair will have access to the files. The identity of subjects will be kept confidential. If the results of this study are published or presented publicly, subjects' names will not be used. The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Subjects' or their parent's or guardian's signed consent forms will be stored separate from the data. Audiotapes will be transcribed without any information that could identify the subjects, and then erased. Videotapes will be used solely for differentiation between speakers and will also be erased after transcription.

10. **Written Consent Form:** A subjects' consent form, parental permission form, and minors' assent form will be used so that subjects, and in the case of minor subjects their parents or guardians, are very clear about what exactly they are agreeing to do.

11. **Waiver of Written Informed Consent:** Since there are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with subjects' participation in this study, there will be no need for a waiver of written informed consent.