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Non-School Correlates of Dropout: An Integrative Review of the Literature

Beth Spenciner Rosenthal
The City University of New York

School dropout is increasingly being conceptualized as a serious social problem extending far beyond the boundaries of the school. This paper heeds recent calls for non-educators' involvement in this phenomenon by reviewing the empirical research on non-school correlates of dropout, integrating the separate independent findings and organizing them into a few conceptually meaningful categories. These categories are further classified into different levels of analysis which are useful in developing potential interventions to prevent dropout. Much additional research is needed; this research needs to be more technically adequate and conceptually based. Examples of needed research and potential interventions are provided.

School dropout is widely perceived as a serious social problem (Beck & Muia, 1980; Bickel & Papagiannis, 1988; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Hahn, 1987; Hare, 1988; Natriello, Pallas, & McDill, 1986; Pallas, 1987; Rumberger, 1987). The attrition rate for the national high school class of 1984 was approximately 29% (Rumberger, 1987); but there is variation from locality to locality. More than one-half million students dropped out of school between 1980 and 1982 (Peng & Takai, 1983). The costs of school dropout are tremendous both for the individual who drops out and for society at large: estimated lifetime earnings for dropouts are more than \$250,000 less than for high school completers (Rumberger, 1987); the estimated foregone national income resulting from dropouts for the high school class of 1981 alone is \$228 billion, resulting in more than \$68 billion in foregone government revenues (Catterall, 1985); the estimated cost of providing social services and dealing with crime associated with dropouts is \$6 billion a year (Rumberger, 1987). The National Association of Social Workers (1991) has called school dropout a "growing national tragedy" (p. 164).

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Requests for reprints should be addressed to Beth Spenciner Rosenthal, York College of The City University of New York, Jamaica, NY 11451 [rosenthal@ycvax.york.cuny.edu]

School dropout has been considered in the past primarily an education problem; the issues regarding the impact of the organization, structure and other characteristics of schools on dropout have begun to be formulated (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Fine, 1986; Fine & Rosenberg, 1983; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1985; Rumberger, 1987; Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989; Toles, Schulz, & Rice, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Weis, Farrar, & Petrie, 1989) and the idea of "alternative schools" as a means of dealing with the dropout phenomenon is increasingly gaining recognition (Farrell, 1990; Franklin & Streeter, 1991; Hahn, Danzberger, & Lefkowitz, 1987; McNeil & Franklin, 1988; Mann, 1986; Stevens, 1985). But dropout also is increasingly being conceptualized as a social problem extending far beyond the boundaries of the school (Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Farrell, 1990; Frank, 1990; Franklin & Streeter, 1991; Hahn, 1987; Hare, 1988; Harris, 1983; Mann, 1986; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989; Rumberger, 1987; Stedman, Salganik, & Celebuski, 1988; Streeter & Franklin, 1991; Svec, 1987; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Ultimate understanding of the dropout phenomenon must consider all three aspects: school-related correlates; school reform; and non-school correlates. Nevertheless, the size of the relevant literature, the variety of variables considered, the lack of conceptual coherence, the technical problems of current empirical studies, and space constraints mandate a delimitation of the task at present. Fagan & Pabon (1990) have urged that the immediate focus move beyond looking at in-school variables to consider the broader range of social and personal factors that influence dropout. Indeed, the empirical literature on non-school correlates of dropout is burgeoning: half of the 37 studies of non-school correlates found in a thorough search of the literature of the past 25 years have been published in the past five years, and 81% in the past decade. The present paper limits its consideration to the realm of non-school correlates of dropout.

The literature on non-school correlates of dropout is not of the highest technical level; it suffers from deficiencies in measurement, design and sampling. The data on nearly all of the correlates reported in the literature are based on measurements of unknown, or unreported reliability and validity; single indicator variables are legion. Dropout is defined in varying ways resulting in the use of several different measures. Most studies use retrospective rather than longitudinal designs. There have been four large data collections which used national representative samples and a variety of specific variables: Project TALENT (Combs & Cooley, 1968), Youth in Transition (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen, 1971; Bachman, O'Malley, & Johnson, 1978), National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labor Market Experience (Rumber-

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