HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN BELIZE: A GRID AND GROUP EXPLANATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In spite of global efforts to decrease dropout rates, high school dropout rates continue to increase. Although little or no research ha s been done ,there are many reasons for the concerns over dropouts in Belize. First, Belize is a developing nation that needs the skills and education of all persons who have the potential to be educated at the high school level. Students who successfully complete high school often have the skills and potential to succeed in higher education. The recent growth of the tourism industry in Belize means that the country now needs to make significant investment in training people. As the number of tourist and sophisticated visitors choosing the country for business or pleasure increases , Belize will need to remain competitive with its neighbours in the region. This can only happen if higher numbers of students are successful in high school and they have the potential for advanced training in tourism.

There are also concerns over dropouts in Belize because they are often associated with social ills such as crime. It is generally believed that the high level of crime , especially , in Belize City has led to significant revenue lost for the city and country . The tarnished image of the country abroad has discouraged some tourist from considering the country as an ideal location for business or vacation although many more still choose Belize, but bypass the city.

In general, a dropout is any student who leaves school before receiving high school certification (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004; Tieben & Wolvers, 2010). In Belize, a high school dropout is defined as a student who was enrolled at a secondary school, but dropped out (Ministry of Education, 2002).

One reason for the global concern regarding dropouts is the perpetuation of the poverty cycle (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu, & Pagani, 2008). In the United States, for example, the lack of a high school diploma places high school dropouts at an economic disadvantage on par with high school graduates. Consequently, there is a huge difference in potential income between graduates and non-graduates (NCES, 2009). According to this report, the income of high school graduates age 25 and over on average was $42,000, but only $24,000 for non-graduates which is slightly more than half the salary as their certified colleagues. In addition, they are less financially viable and will likely contribute less to their families or communities. NCES also reports that dropouts make up an inexplicably higher percentage of the nation's prison and death row inmates. The disproportionate number of high school dropouts in prison means that more money must be budgeted for rehabilitation or detaining prisoners, than for social programs intended to promote the communities growth.

Even though many studies on high school dropouts are conducted in the United States, there is also a need to conduct similar research in countries like Belize, since high school dropouts are a major concern to that country's educational stakeholders. The *Statistics at a Glance* (2008) revealed a national dropout rate in Belize of 12.5% for boys and 8% for girls. For the 2008-2009 school year, dropout rates for boys increased slightly to 12.8% and 8.1% for girls. The rate of high school dropouts and the specific groups of students who drop out is a global concern because those who dropped out before completing high school may not have acquired the requisite skills to contribute to the economic growth of their communities.

Statement of the Problem

Despite concerted efforts, high school dropout rates continue to be a global problem (NCES, 2009). In Belize, the Ministry of Education is persistently striving to decrease student

dropout, by providing financial assistance and instituting social programs; however, the number of dropouts continue to rise at a rate of approximately two hundred students each year. During the 2007-2008 academic school year approximately 1,728 students dropped out and, 1,897students dropped out in the 2008-09 academic school year. This increase is expected to continue in future years (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010).

Research in the United States attributes many factors to students dropping out of school, including poverty and low socio economic status (Entwhistle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004; Strom & Boster, 2010) as well as low levels of intelligence, family support, and maternal intelligence (Sommers & Pilliasky, 2004). Whether or not these factors can be generalized to Belizean society remains a question, as there has been little research conducted on dropouts in Belize.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe factors that lead to selected Belizean students dropping out of high school.

Research Questions

To investigate the purpose of the study, four questions were developed:

1. What factors lead to specific students dropping out of high school in Belize?

2. How does grid and group theory explain these factors?

3. How effective is grid and group theory in explaining why these high school students dropped out?

4. What other realties are revealed outside of grid and group assessment tool?

Epistemological Perspective

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) posit that epistemology poses such questions as: What is the relationship between the knower and what is known? and How do we

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know what we know? In this study, naturalistic inquiry, which is influenced by constructivism, was used to attain knowledge about specific dropouts in Belize. From the naturalist view, knowledge is established through the meanings attached to the phenomena studied; researchers interact with the participants of study to obtain knowledge that is context and time dependent (Coll & Chapman, 2000; Cousins, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

In discussing strategies for improving schools, Harris (2005) notes that certain social mind-sets influence education in schools. Mary Douglas' (1982) typology of grid and group is a framework that helps in understanding these mind-sets. This Typology allows educators to deal with the conceptual and methodological challenges that are common to cultural inquiry as well as educational practice. It also provides a matrix for classifying contexts and elicits specific observations about individuals' values beliefs and behavior.

Harris (2005) asserts that Douglas' framework provides a lens through which to view the world, brings order to experience, and provides a common language to explain the behavior and interactions that exist in a culture. According to Douglas, grid refers to the degree to which a person's choices are controlled within a social system by obligatory prescription such as role expectation, rules, and procedures. Group represents the extent to which people value collective relationships and the scope to which they are committed to the larger social unit.

Harris (2005) also posits that there are "four distinctive school cultures in which one may find him or herself, and only two dimensions, grid and group, which define each of these four prototypes" (p. 34). These four social groups are: individualism which promotes competition and personal rights; bureaucratic/authoritarianism which supports strong role classifications and

isolationism; corporate/hierarchical which promotes group allegiance and social incorporation; and collectivist/egalitarianism which encourages free will and equitable opportunities.

To some degree, all of these social mind-sets exist within educational systems and promote or inhibit positive educational processes. In reference to high school dropouts, the combination of individual mind-sets and the social mind-sets inherent in the schools may affect school attendance and attrition. Understanding the various grid and group orientations can help educators adapt appropriate leadership styles that contextualize and improve their schools (Harris, 2005).

Procedures

Naturalistic inquiry directed the procedures of this study. The goal of naturalistic inquiry is to understand the complex world of human experience and behavior from the point-of-view of those involved in the situation of interest (Erlandson et al., 1993). A naturalistic study allows for deep understanding through multiple perspectives and data sources and for describing and explaining a phenomenon more fully. It offers a more comprehensive analysis and insight through the shared constructions of meaning from both participants and researcher.

Researcher Bias

I am a former high school dropout because of disciplinary problems and poor relationships with his high school teachers. I guarded against seeking those factors as the only predictors of why students may drop out of high school today. As one measure to control bias, I used multiple trustworthiness strategies such as persistent observation, document review, member checking, and peer debriefing.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in the southern part of the country of Belize, as best information indicates that Toledo and Stann Creek, the two southern districts, have the highest high school dropout rates in the nation. There are six high schools in the Toledo District: Toledo Community College, Claver College Extension, Julian Cho Technical High school, Corazon Technical High School, Bethel Seventh Day Adventist High School, and Mafredi Vocational High School. The Stann Creek District has four high schools: Ecumenical High school, Delille Academy, Independence High School, and Georgetown Technical High School. George Town Technical High School and Independence High School were selected from the Stann Creek District and Toledo Community College and Claver College of the Toledo District were also chosen. After teacher responses were analysed, Claver College Extension and Toledo Community College were used as the units of analysis for the study.

Data Collection

The grid and group assessment tool was used to select the two schools to participate in the study. Six teachers and six dropouts were selected for a 45-60 minute interview to gather data on high school dropouts. The students were identified by using purposive sampling. One student was identified as a dropout and that student helped me to identify other dropouts. Once other dropouts were identified and located, I invited them to a pre-interview. After the pre-interview with the dropouts and 40 teachers had completed their grid and group assessment tool, I analysed the responses and the pre interview scripts of dropouts and chose 12 persons to be involved in the study. Data for this study were collected from participants' responses on grid and group assessment tool, interviews, observations and artifacts.

Grid and Group Assessment Tool

The grid and group assessment tool (Appendix A) was completed by10 teachers in each of four schools to determine the cultures of those schools. Based on the responses from the participants, two schools in diametrically opposing quadrants of the grid and group assessment tool were selected and six educators, three from each school, were selected for interviews.

Interviews

Naturalistic research interviews take more of the form of a dialogue or an interaction (Erlandson et al., 1993). Twelve interviews were conducted for this study. Six teachers, three from each school and six dropouts, three from each school were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in a format in which the interviewer asked questions related to the study, and the respondent reflected, reconstructed, and interpreted. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) this format for the interviews allowed me and respondents to make reconstructions of the past, interpretations of the present, and predictions for the future.

Open-ended questions were asked to allow the respondents to construct information, offer detailed responses, and clarify information that they provided.

Observations and Artifact Analysis

Some data were collected through observations. Marshall and Rossman (1989) defined observations as the systematic descriptions of events, behaviors and artifacts in the social setting for study. I observed school facilities, classroom sessions, meetings, gatherings, students, and other school personnel. I also reviewed school documents and facilities. Four two hour observations were conducted in each of two schools for a period of four weeks. I believed that was necessary because according to Erlandson and his colleagues (1993), "much can be accomplished by looking, listening, feeling, and smelling instead of merely talking" (p. 98). My

aim for the first two week phase of the observation was to hone my sense of listening and speaking as receptacles for gathering knowledge.

I also collected and used a variety of available documents that provided vital information. These documents included pictures, students' report cards, students' mid-term slips, school newspaper, school's handbook or policy for teachers and students, students' attendance registers, demerit cards, yearbooks, school counsellors' and school's reports. These documents can be in various forms and were identified by Erlandson and his co-authors (1993):

> The broad range of written and symbolic records, as well as any available materials and data and include practically anything in existence prior to and during the investigation, including historical or journalistic accounts, works of art, photographs, memos, accreditation records, television transcripts, newspapers, brochures, meeting agenda and notes, audio-or videotapes, budget or accounting statements, notes from students or teachers, speeches, and other case studies (p. 99).

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiry is based on the "rigorous methods of a study, the credibility of the researcher, and the philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 553). Guba and Lincoln (1993) identify the qualities of trustworthiness as credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. The credibility criterion is the most important aspect of establishing trustworthiness for the reader or stakeholder of a study.

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Significance of the Study

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There is no research on factors that contribute to the increasing number of high dropouts in Belize. This study is significant because it offers insights to teachers and administrators in Belize regarding what can be done in schools to stem the high school dropout rate. *Statistics at a Glance* (2001) reveals that the dropout rate for Belize's Toledo District was 9.1% and 8.8% for

the Stann Creek District. Findings can prompt school managements, school boards and school leaders to institute a comprehensive review of the education practices and instruction in secondary schools in Toledo. Some of the effects of educational practices on student dropout can be identified. The study is also important to theory because the use of the grid and group theoretical framework offers insights into the culture of two Belizean schools. It can help researchers theorize what grid group orientations are most pervasive or passive in selected Belizeans schools and why. This knowledge can be used to help build or develop school cultures in schools that promote educational success. In contributing to research, this study will be one of the early naturalistic studies conducted in Belize.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and their definitions are used to understand and interpret the study:

Artifacts: Technological devices, works of art ,writing instruments ,tools ,and almost any other physical evidence that help provide insights into the culture's technology, social interaction, and physical environment.

Bureaucracy: An environment associated with rules, red tape, and rigidity.

Collectivist: An environment which places a high value on unity, equal distribution of teaching supplies and space.

Confirmability: The degree to which the findings of a study are the product of the focus of its inquiry and not the biases of the researcher.

Corporate: An environment in which social relationships and experiences are influenced by the boundaries maintained by the group against outsiders.

Credibility: Ensuring an intensive comprehensive interpretation of realities that are affirmed by people in the context of the study.

Culture: The entire educational process, values, beliefs, norms and social patterns of all the members of the school community.

Dependability: Providing evidence that if a study were replicated with the same or similar respondents in the same or a similar context that findings would be repeated.

Dropout Rate: the percent of students who stop attending school during their first or second year of high school.

*Dropout***:** A student who was enrolled at a secondary school but dropped out ("Ministry of Education," 2000).

Grid: The degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a societal system by imposed prescriptions such as role expectations, rules and procedures.

Group: The degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unit.

*Individualis*t: An environment in which the relationships and experience of the individual are constrained by imposed formal rules or traditions.

Member Checks: The use of persons in the context of the study to verify data and interpretations

Naturalistic Inquiry: A research study based on the premise that human interaction is at the heart of research; this research affirms the mutual influence that the researcher and the respondents have on each other.

Participant Observation: A method of observing and participating in the activities of a group under observation.

Peer Debriefing: The use of a professional outside the context of study who has enough general understanding about the nature of the study to debrief the researcher and provide feedback.

Persistent Observation: In depth observation that pursues interpretations in different ways in conjunction with a process of constant and tentative analysis.

Prolonged Engagement: Spending enough time in the context being studied to overcome the distortions that are due to his or her impact on the context, his or her biases, and the effect of unusual or seasonal events.

Purposive Sampling: A sampling procedure that is governed by emerging insights about what is relevant to the study and purposively seeks both the typical and the divergent data that these insights suggest

Referential Adequacy Materials: The collection of different materials that give a holistic view of the context.

Strong Grid Environment: Role and rule dominate the environment, and an explicit set of institutional classifications regulate personal interactions and restrain individual autonomy.

Strong Group Environment: In a strong group environment, specific membership criteria exist and explicit pressures influence group relationships.

Thick Description: A detailed and precise description of data in context that allows judgement about transferability.

Transferability: The extent to which findings can be applied in other context or with other respondents.

Triangulation: The collection of information about different events and relationships from different points of view.

Trustworthiness: Allows for external judgement to be made about the consistency of procedures and the neutrality of findings and decisions.

Weak Grid Environment: Roles are more achieved than ascribed, and individuals are increasingly expected to negotiate their own relationships and professional choices.

Weak Group Environment: In a weak group environment, pressure for group focused activities and relationship is relatively weak.

Summary

Chapter one explained the heightened global concern about high school dropouts. It also included a statement of the problem, explained the purpose of the study, outlined the research questions, and described the epistemological perspective, the theoretical framework, and procedures. The following chapter provides a review of the literature associated with high school dropouts and also explains the role of personal and institutional factors on student dropouts.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The dropout rate of high school students continues to be a global concern. In the United States, the Institute of Education Science (2008) reported that preventing students from leaving school early and academic school failure continue to be two of the most significant problems facing the American education system. This chapter is arranged in the following sequence: a) impact of dropping out on individuals, b) impact of dropouts on the communities, c) personal factors related to dropping out-low student achievement, d) absenteeism, e) alienation and disengagement, f) retention, g) teenage pregnancy, h) behaviour, i) social factors related to student dropout, k) family influence on dropouts, and l) student teacher relationship and its influence on dropouts.

Impact of Dropping Out on Individuals

Dropping out of high school is a serious national concern, because it is most prevalent in schools with high minority populations. Minority groups such as Hispanics have a high dropout rate and have a lower high school enrolment rate than other ethnic groups (Berliner, Barrat, Fong, & Shirk, 2008). With fewer chances of matriculating to higher education, minorities often face bleak economic prospects. Dropping out has had unabated severe economic consequences on individuals as well as on their families or dependents since the 1970's.

The economic status of young dropouts has decreased since the late 1970's. Employment and earnings prospects have declined in absolute terms and are also significantly lower than the incomes of those with more education. The absence of a high school diploma closes the door to

almost every skilled or white color job (Menzer & Hampel, 2009), meaning that students who

drop out of high school are not able to access the higher paying jobs that require the skills they

could acquire while obtaining their high school diploma (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007).

Many students who drop out of school also lack adequate reading skills. The inability of

many dropouts to read and understand written text makes it difficult for them to acquire

information, knowledge, and skills that they can use to gain successful employment in the

modern information economy (Reshly, 2010).

Poverty and poor health also affect students who dropout. Archambault, Janozs, Morizot,

and Pagani (2009) contend that students who drop out of high school are more likely to engage

in risky health behaviors and attitudes and suffer from mental health problems. Twenty-five to

thirty-four year old dropouts also have weaker economic prospects. With limited economic

potential they are often unable to keep or sustain their families. The earnings of dropouts who

work full time for a full year have dropped steadily to averages around the poverty line for a

family with children (ETS, 2005).

Dropouts are likely to live in poverty because they have a higher chance of becoming

parents at an early age (Davis, 2006). Coupled with the inability to raise their children, high

school dropouts often face a life of un-employment and inability to move to a higher

socioeconomic status because they lack the advanced skills or knowledge derived from higher

education.

The dropout rate of students from high school has economic implications. In a study of

high school dropouts, Strom and Boster (2008) inferred that high school dropouts are more likely

to be unemployed, more likely to use drugs, more likely to need unemployment insurance or

welfare, and more likely to be incarcerated. Cassel (2003) states that dropping out of high school

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ought to be a concern because over one million individuals who are incarcerated are unable to contribute to the manpower and thus the economy of the United States. Concern over the number of students who drops out is significant because the economies of countries including Belize are dependent on the contributions of individual citizens. Dropouts are likely to engage in behaviors destructive to self and others. Furthermore, dropping out of high school increases the chances of becoming a ward of the state. Through higher taxes, other citizens are obligated to pay for social programs and the upkeep of the dropout if incarcerated.

The number of students who drop out of high school has dire consequences for communities. Students who drop out impede the abilities of communities to raise financial resources needed for the many social programs implemented to improve living conditions. Even when dropouts get an opportunity to work, their contribution to community resources is often constrained by either their lack of skills or employability. An ETS (2005) report explains the social impact of dropouts is seen in expanding prison populations, limited labour supply and "in the likelihood of raising a new generation with dim prospects of doing better–and perhaps even worse" (p. 44).

Many schools have instituted programs or policies to curb the dropout rate, but they have experienced limited or no success. The high dropout rate of students is not evenly distributed across for schools. Phi Delta Kappan (2011) reported that 15% of the high schools produce more than half of the dropouts and close to 75% of their minority dropouts. Many schools are not doing all they can to reduce the dropout rate. Schools are not meeting their obligation of preparing students, especially minorities, adequately so that they can attain a higher socioeconomic status based on educational achievement. This is alarming because schools can be successful in reversing the high numbers of students who drop out of high school. "Across

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the board changes in instruction will eventually yield fewer students who are lackadaisical, overwhelmed, struggling, and surprised even if we can't eradicate their out of school woes" (Menzer & Hampel, 2009, p. 664).

Tremendous concern exists over schools' abilities to increase students' reading aptitude. "Difficulty learning to read in the first years of school sets students up to fail; these students are more likely to be retained and placed in special education which are, for many precursors or stop-offs on a path to premature departure from school" (Reshly, 2010, p. 84). These findings underscore the primary missions of school in the global concern over dropouts. Schools have a primary obligation to its various shareholders and to ensure the provision of a medium or avenues for success. By failing to provide an environment where students can learn to interpret and understand concepts and ideas through reading, schools may be guilty of promoting failure instead of success.

Cohen and Smerdon (2009) argue that schools must act in definitive ways that serve to alter or reverse the dropout crisis in high schools across the country. Such measures include being accountable to different level of systems and to external funders, service developers, and technical assistance providers. They posit that schools must find ways to keep students on track and in school or those students will never be able to access and experience the increased standards and rigorous curricula executed in schools over the United States. Cohen and Smerdon's research is important in the dropout phenomenon especially as it relates to schools since it clarifies the school's role of being accountable to its partners and shareholders in education.

The plight of the African American males as opposed to their female counterparts is even bleaker. Bracey (2006) reported that the high school graduation rate for African American males

was below 40% as opposed to 57% for African American females. Although the following male dropout statistics are not categorized according to race, they indicate that the rate of boys dropping out of high school is rising gradually in Belize. They also indicate that fewer girls are dropping out of high school although there was a slight increase in the number of girls who dropped out of high school between 2007 and 2010. Recent statistics indicate that 12.5% or 1020 boys dropped out of high school in the 2007-2008 academic year and 12.8% or 1119 boys dropped out in the 2008-2009 academic school year.

Phi Delta Kappan (2011) reports that over the last 10 years about a third of students who enter high school fail to graduate and concludes that 1.3 million students will not graduate with the class of 2010. Those 1.3 million students who dropped out in 2011 is significantly higher than the 600,000 or 1,000, 000 students that other research indicate dropped out of high school in the last decade. These statistics clearly supports research findings that dropout rates are increasing rather than declining.

Efforts to resolve the drop out crisis have taken into consideration the cultural context regarding why students drop out. However, recent studies point to some deficiencies that impede our understanding of the dropout phenomenon. Heinrich (2008) posits that the dropout crisis has not been resolved due in part to the approach that has been used to address the problem. Lee and Burkam (2003) concur with these findings when they say that present research on high school dropouts continues to support an individualistic model, where students and their families are made accountable for dropout behavior. They posited that this position or model abdicates schools of any responsibility. They concurred that such schools may not be doing enough for students at risk of dropping out. These students include those with learning difficulties and those who come from families with weak support for education. Resolving the dropout crisis is

difficult because research has focused mostly on the causes of dropout instead of focusing on resolving the problem.

In Belize, dropout rates are increasing, and the Ministry of Education is persistently striving to decrease student dropouts, yet the numbers continue to rise at a rate of approximately 100 students annually. During the 2007-2008 academic year 10.1% or approximately and 1,728 students dropped out, 1,897 or 10.3% dropped out in the 2008-09 academic school year. This increase is expected in the 2010-11 academic year (Ministry of Education, 2009/10).

Personal Factors Related to Dropping Out

Decades of research are aligned with the individualistic model and attribute students dropping out of high school to many things including poverty or low socio economic status (Entwhistle et al., 2004; Strom & Boster, 2010) as well as retention, low levels of intelligence, family support, and low levels of maternal intelligence (Sommers & Pilliasky, 2004). Research has shown that students drop out of high school due to individual, social, familial, and academic factors (Archambault et al., 2009).

Low Academic Achievement

Students drop out when they encounter low academic performance. "Underperformance is quite naturally a strong predictor for dropping out" (Tieben & Wolvers, 2010, p. 281). Having a weak academic background often results in students underperforming academically at the high school level. Entwhistle and his associates (2004) elucidate that poor urban students have a significant risk of dropping out especially if they have a weak academic background. African American high school dropouts feeling of alienation from the curriculum, perceptions of negative treatment by those in authority at the school and in the classroom, and student

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engagement in the 'blame game' contributed to low academic performance and thus to students dropout (Hall, 2006):

> In an attempt to challenge the barriers that stifle their identity and ways of being, males of color simultaneously construct another obstacle that further impedes their social and academic success. It is an obstacle that faults teachers and other institutional agents for students' lack of achievement, while never once recognizing how students themselves are complicit in their own personal and collective failures. This is called the "Blame Game. It is a long drawn out contest of finger pointing" (p. 23).

Recent research on student dropout magnifies a relationship between student disengagement in schools, low academic performance, and student dropout. Students' feeling of alienation from the curriculum and their negative perceptions regarding how they are treated illuminate disengagement, academic failure and eventual dropout (Hall, 2006). Similarly Archambault and his colleagues (2009) conclude low achievers and those who are unmotivated with the school experience were likely to drop out. Course credit accrual or the number of credits that a student was able to garner in one year is a predictor of low academic performance leading to dropout. Thompson, Warkentien, and Daniel (2009) revealed that high school dropouts achieved fewer credits than on-time graduates in each academic year and that the collective course credit accrual gap increased with each succeeding year.

Absenteeism

Christenson and Thurlow (2004) posit that absenteeism by itself may not be a direct predictor of students dropping out. However, this behavior indicates disengagement from the school and is manifested by feelings of alienation, a poor sense of belonging, and a general

dislike for school. These behaviors which indicate withdrawal result in poor student attendance and dropping out. Archambault and his co authors (2008) contend that student compliance and attendance predict dropout better than student enthusiasm. Student compliance and attendance were also better predictors of dropping out of high school than student effort to learn the curriculum and the pleasure connected with school related issues.

Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007) used three models to determine significant predictors for students dropping out of high school. Results from the study revealed that being absent from school were a significant predictor of dropping out despite the individual's at-risk status.

Alienation and Disengagement

Student engagement can be explained using three dimensions: behavioral, affective, and cognitive. Conversely, only the behavioral dimension seems to contribute to the estimation of dropout. Arcahmbault and his associates (2009) conclude that **"**theoretical and empirical evidence indicate that dropping out of high school represents a complex and gradual process of diminishing school engagement."

Finnan and Chasin (2007) note that disengagement often begins with students disengaging from specific classes, then missing a lot of school, and culminates with students ceasing school attendance altogether. Reshly (2010) concurs when he surmises that many students who eventually drop out have been struggling for years and have experienced many years of difficulty meeting the school's academic requirements. Consequently, the cycle of participation, identification and belonging to the school increasingly diminishes. Since these students demonstrate fewer varied forms of participation in the school environment, they develop feelings of alienation which results in disengagement. Hansen and Toso' (2007) study found that most dropout respondents indicated that they lacked a sense of belonging at school while

others felt dissatisfied with the culture of the school. These responses by students indicated a sense of alienation and disengagement that led to their eventual dropping out of school. Students' responses such as, "I wasn't challenged enough," or "There wasn't anything challenging or exciting to do" also added credence to theory that student alienation or disengagement in the school leads to dropout (p.?). These comments by predominantly white students magnify what present research is indicating: alienation and disengagement, although factors in minority communities that contribute to student dropout, also exist in white communities.

Alienation and disengagement are two factors in the dropout phenomenon that are more prevalent in minority communities as opposed to white ones. Davis (2006) infers that research on marginalized groups such as African Americans predicts that school engagement is a major factor in African Americans dropping out of high school. The study also concluded that African American students had lower college attendance rates than whites. Research by Hall (2006) stated that African American boys are prone to disengagement as a result of their negative feelings towards school and school authorities. "When they feel overlooked by teachers, they will ignore classroom lessons or leave work uncompleted; when they feel unwanted or alienated by the school at large they will in turn disconnect, disengage, and ultimately drop out" (p. 23). Other recent research also concurs with Hall's assertions that minorities often feel a sense of alienation and not belonging. In her research on Hispanic student dropout, Hondo (2008) explains the sense of alienation and disengagement felt by many Hispanic dropouts and magnified through the experience and dialogue of a young Hispanic female dropout, "I was not comfortable in school. Teachers were hostile toward me, and the administrators routinely

disregarded my basic needs. Real learning is difficult to sustain in an atmosphere rife with

mistrust; after years of frustration I dropped out" (p. 17).

Student experience with disengagement or alienation cannot, however, be confined to

them belonging to a minority or racial group. Cohen and Smerdon (2009) indicate that students

may experience alienation and disengagement at school especially in the first year of high school

because they are unable to cope with a challenging transition from primary to high school, and

they are unable to meet the rigorous high school curricula with greater requirements. Since they

are likely to stumble during their first year, they are often unable to recover and so they drop out.

Another factor in students becoming alienated and disengaged is related to the student's maturity

level. In their article entitled, *The voices of high school dropouts: Implications for research and*

practice, Meeker and his colleagues (2008) reported that disengagement resulted from feeling of

not belonging, due in part to huge age differences. Disengaged students who dropped out

explained that they were older than their classmates and were unable to cope with the maturity

levels of younger students.

Inability to get along with other students or escaping peer disapproval is another factor

that leads to student disengagement and dropout. When students feel inferior, rejected, bullied,

have interpersonal difficulties due to language barriers they can become disengaged and dropout.

Having low self-esteem was also cited as a reason for students becoming disenchanted,

disengaging and dropping out (Terry, 2008). Students' disengagement and dropout are the result

of many factors including wide age gap differences with students and their peers, inability to

cope with transition challenges from middle school to high school, and poor relationships with

teachers and other school authorities.

Retention

Students who are likely to drop out of high school can be identified from as early as kindergarten by differences in intellectual capabilities and aptitudes. Students who experience early academic difficulties are likely to experience academic retention which creates a developmental pathway for dropout early in their academic career (Hickman, Bartholomew, and Mathwig, 2008). A study by Alexander, Entwhistle, and Kabani (2001) state that there is a strong relationship between dropping out and early grade retention, especially if dropping out or grade retention occurred in middle school. Reeshly (2010) contends that students who encounter reading difficulties are often retained. Proficiency in reading becomes more important in students being able to garner new information as they progress through higher grade levels. Students' inability to keep up with these skill requirements and content expectations causes them to fall further and further behind their peers and thus be retained. Retention contributes to a gradual process of withdrawal leading to dropout. Cohen and Smerdon (2009) conclude that dropping out was associated with many high school students failing and remaining ninth graders for multiple years. The inability of these students to gain promotion to the 10th grade often resulted in their dropping out.

Teenage Pregnancy

There is no single or simple profile of the high school dropout although students leave school for a variety of reasons including pregnancy (Strom & Boster, 2007). In a study conducted by Meeker and his colleagues (2008), they found that dropouts left or were prevented from completing high school because they were either pregnant or parenting a child. A similar study of gifted dropouts concluded that these students dropped out of school because they were pregnant or became a parent (Renzuli & Park, 2002). Jozefowiczs (2002) concurs that

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adolescent students who engage in frequent dating and early sexual activity are at increased risk

for pregnancy which is a strong predictor of school dropout. Early commitment to romantic

relationships often interferes with school performance and attendance and can lead to early

school departure.

Behavior

One at-risk factor for students dropping out of high school is for behavior. Bad behavior

often culminates with students being suspended from school. Suh and her co-authors (2007)

noted that suspension from school was one of three predictors of at-risk students for dropout

from high school. Menzer and Hampel (2009) contend that students who were at-risk for

dropping out had twice as many discipline referrals and had also received thrice as many

suspensions. In a study of high school dropouts Hickman and his colleagues (2008) found that

students who were suspended for more than six days were more likely to drop out of high school

than their peers who were suspended on average for one and one-half days. Those students who

were suspended less were more likely to persevere and graduate from high school.

Meeker and his colleagues (2008) found that frequent discipline referrals were one of 15

factors contributing to student dropout. Their research cites specific reasons related to bad

behavior and dropout such as students being unable to restrain their mouth in class and getting

into fights frequently. Archambault and his co-authors (2009) reveal that students with conduct

problems and anti-social peer associations were at the most risk of dropping out. Another factor

associated with student dropout and behavior was student's inability to control behavior.

According to Bradshaw, O'Brennan, and Mcneely (2008) students who were incapable of

regulating their emotions and their behavior were likely to be influenced to disengage from

school which later resulted in their dropping out. Students who were diagnosed with emotional

or behavioral disorders were also more likely to drop out of high school at a rate of 48% (Simbeni -Jozefowicz, 2008).

Social Factors Relating to Student Dropout

According to Entwhistle et al. (2004) and Lee and Burkham (2003) socio economic status is one key factor or predictor of students leaving high school before obtaining a high school certification. Socioeconomic status is a factor in student dropout especially for those from low income families who are more susceptible to dropping out of high school than their white counterparts (Lee & Burkham, 2003).

In explaining the plight of Korean American students and dropping out of high school, Lew (2006) explains that most Korean students who dropped out did so because their families had limited income and the students felt they had no other option than to work. Once in the labor market, these students found it difficult to juggle both the responsibilities of trying to help their families financially and focusing on their studies to do well. Entwhistle and his colleagues (2004) explain, "but when they do work they are more likely than other students to be employed 20 or more hours per week-the so called "high intensity" threshold associated with adverse effects on school performance" (p. 1182).

Meeker and his co -authors (2008) noted that the process of Hispanic students dropping out of high school began with their need to work and to help their parent combat financial difficulties. Strom and Boster (2010) contend that students leave school for a variety of reasons including financial need. Somers and Piliasky (2004) list poverty which is related to low socio economic status as one of the root causes of dropping out of high school. But factors of socio economic status are not limited to traditional students only. Renzuli and Park (2002) conclude that "many gifted students who dropped out of high school were from low SES families and

racial minority groups" (p. 6). They further explained that results showed that SES was one of the important predictors of dropping out. Gifted students who were in the low quartile and medium quartile of SES were more likely to drop out of high school. These results indicate that the lower a student's socio economic status (SES), the higher his or her chances of dropping out, irrespective of personal talents and capabilities.

Archambault and his associates (2009) underscore the importance of socio economic status as one of the many important factors that lead to students dropping out. In the article *Voices of high school dropouts: Implications for research* Meeker and his colleagues (2008) presented the case of a student who explained how her socio-economic origins impelled her to drop out of high school. "They don't let people who are not rich get the electives they have chosen. I quit high school for not been able to get art" (p. 45).

This statement provides two very crucial insights that are important in the discourse regarding socio-economic status and student dropout. The first is that schools may not cater as well to the needs of socio-economically deficient students as they do to those who are more financially privileged. Schools may also be guilty of marginalizing students of low socioeconomic status. By restricting their career choices they may be propelling them towards early dropout.

Family Influence on Dropouts

Research reveals that students from single parent, divorced, or remarried families are prone to experience social and academic difficulties tied to dropping out of high school. They often come from homes where there is limited parental monitoring, lack of discipline, and mental health difficulties. Often they join deviant peer groups, experience disciplinary problems due to behaviour, and dropout (Simbeni-Jozefowicz, 2008). Knesting (2008) concurs with these

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findings when she infers that societal characteristics such as single parent families affect students' decision to stay in or drop out of school. Plank, Deluca, and Estacion (2008) concluded that, "living with one's biological mother only, with one's biological father only, or with a biological parent and a step-parent are all associated with a greater risk of dropping out, relative to living with biological parents" (p.?).

Strom and Boster (2007) argue that "one important contribution to school dropout may be the impact of messages in the home or school about educational attainment" (p.?). They further explain that the expectations and goals that a parent sets for his or her child influences the child's decision to stay in school. Parental expectations of the child are manifested by parents' participation in activities, such as visits for parent teacher conferences and helping with homework. These actions communicate the parents' interest in the students' education and success.

Student Teacher Relationship and its Influence on Dropouts

Strom and Boster (2007) explain that positive student teacher interaction may influence a student's decision to stay in school. Positive student-teacher interactions may serve to reinforce positive interactions in the home about school and reinforce the child's decision to stay in school. The kind of relationship that students have with teachers and with each other has been shown to be a predictor for school dropout. Reshly (2010) posits that students who drop out do not have positive interactions with their teachers or their peers and feel that they do not belong.

Importance of Grid and Group to the Study

Grid and group typology is an effective method for understanding the culture of schools and their impact of students and society. The typology is important in that it explains specific values and belief dimensions that are characteristic of programs and students (Ellis, 2006). This

is significant in the study of high school dropouts because beliefs and attitudes vary in different school environments. It is also important to understand the nuances of school culture as they can be essential in resolving the dropout crisis. According to Kanaly (2000), grid and group typology is a comprehensive approach that can be used to explore influential social interactions. When studying high school dropouts this is significant, because research has shown that social relationships among students, teachers and each other influence their dropping out or staying in school. Since different school cultures might encourage or hinder student success in high school, the use of grid and group is important in analyzing the factors that promote or discourage retention (Waelateh, 2009)

Douglas' (1982) assessment tool of grid offers an explanation that shifts from individualism which much research claims is associated with students dropping out. Harris (2005) posits that educational problems may be the result of four social mind-sets that influence education in schools. Student dropout is one educational problem that can be explained through a cultural framework. Douglas' assessment tool of grid and group helps in understanding social mind-sets. It allows educators to meet the conceptual and methodological challenges that are natural to cultural inquiry as well as educational practice, provides a matrix for classifying school contexts and elicits specific observations about individuals' values beliefs and behaviors.

This cultural framework espoused by Douglas suggests that educational problems are complex and cannot be defined solely on an individualistic paradigm. It is an alternative to research finding by Lee and Burkam (2003) who explain that the prevailing idea in dropout literature and theory is that individuals and their families are responsible for dropout behavior. Douglas' framework also asserts that educational problems are the result of cultural factors that affect educational outcomes. Harris (2005) asserts that Douglas' assessment tool provides a lens

through which to view the world, brings order to experience, and provides a common language

to explain the behaviors and interactions that exist in a culture. According to Harris, grid refers

to the degree to which a person's choices are controlled within a social system by obligatory

prescription such as role expectation, rules, and procedures. Group represents the extent to

which people value collective relationships and the scope to which they are committed to the

larger social unit.

Harris also posits that there are "four distinctive school cultures in which one may find

him or herself, and only two dimensions, grid and group, which define each of these four

prototypes" (p. 34). These four social groups are individualism, authoritarianism, hierarchy, and

collectivism (Figure 1). Individualism promotes competition and personal rights,

bureaucratic/authoritarianism supports strong role classifications and isolationism,

corporate/hierarchical mind-sets promote group allegiance and social incorporation, and

collectivist/egalitarianism encourages free will and equitable opportunities.

Figure 1. Types of Social Environments and Their Social Games

Strong Grid

Bureaucratic Social Game: Authoritarianism

Corporate Social Game: Hierarchy

Weak-Group

Strong-Group

Individualist Social Game: Individualism

Weak Grid

Collectivist Social Game: Egalitarianism
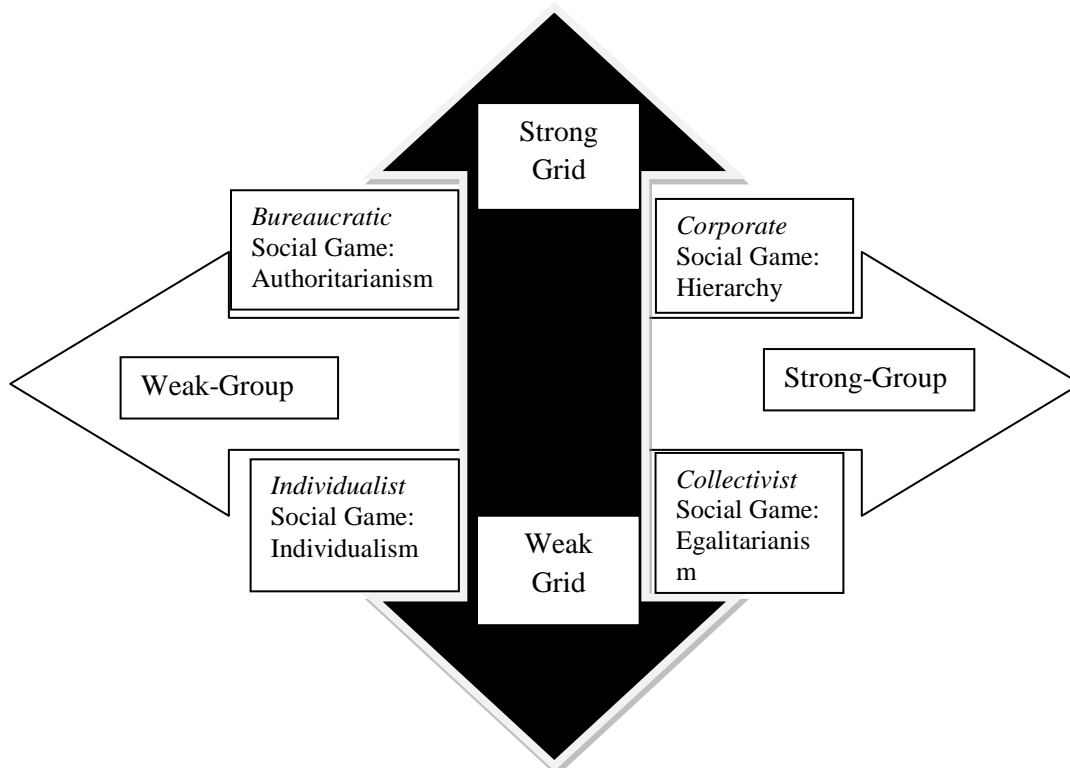
To some degree, all the social mind-sets exist within educational systems and promote or inhibit positive educational processes. In the area of school dropouts, the combination of individual mind-sets and the social mind-sets inherent in the schools may affect school attendance, engagement and attrition. Understanding the various grid and group orientations can help educators adapt appropriate leadership styles that contextualize and improve their schools (Harris, 2005).

Summary

While many factors predict why students drop out, dropping out of high school is a complex social problem. Dropping out of high school is based on a host of reasons and are not exclusive to a student's competence. Specific actions, choices of parents, caregivers, and school personnel, as well as current policies and available programs for youth influence students' decisions to drop out or stay in school (Bradshaw et al., 2008). Improving students' outcomes for those at risk of failure requires explicit attention to social and emotional learning in addition to academics with a focus on cognitive, psychological, and behavioral and academic engagement (Christendon & Thurlow, 2004)

Addressing the dropout problem from an individualistic paradigm provides a narrow focus for resolving the drop crisis. Harris (2005) posits that a cultural framework provides the best medium for addressing educational problems such as dropping out of high school. School improvement requires focusing on the total environment, which includes the school board, central administrations, teachers, and community. None of these components functions in isolation but is a vital part of a unified school. The improvement of our schools through their culture is a key factor in societal improvement.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The chapter includes an explanation of the research design, a description of the participants and sample associated with the study, and methods for collecting data and ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. The chapter also outlines the importance of the study's methodology and procedures.

Research Design

The study employed naturalistic methods to investigate why selected students dropped out of high school. An objective of naturalistic inquiry is to comprehend the intricate world of human experience and behavior from people who live in the environment of interest (Erlandson et al., 1993). This study was conducted to understand and explain why specific students dropped out of high school in two southern Belizean high schools. According to Erlandson et al and his associates "there are basically four general sources that the researcher utilizes in naturalistic research: interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts" (p. 85).

Participants and Sample

The Toledo District is home to six high schools: Toledo Community College, Claver College Extension, Julian Cho Technical High school, Corazon Technical High school, Bethel Seventh Day Adventist High School, and Mafredi Vocational High School. Three of the six schools were chosen for the study and a fourth school, Georgetown Technical High School in southern Stann Creek District was also chosen. The criteria for choosing these schools were the

students and teacher population of the institution. Two schools with more than 10 staff members and 75 students were selected.

The study was conducted in southern Belize as research indicates that Toledo and Stann Creek, the two southern districts, have the highest dropout rate in the nation (Statistics at a Glance, 2001). I received permission to conduct the study in the selected schools by writing a letter to the principals and managers of the schools (Appendix B). Teachers were given consent forms and asked to indicate their consent to participate (Appendix C).

Teachers who had one year teaching experience at the freshman or sophomore level or had taught freshmen and sophomores for one year were chosen to complete the grid and group assessment tool. Where the number of teachers teaching sophomores and freshmen at a high school exceeded 10, the first 10 teachers at that school were selected randomly. Each of 10 teachers from four schools was asked to complete a grid and group assessment that was then used to select the two of four schools who were involved in the study. Ten teachers from each of the four selected high schools were asked to complete the survey. The former students or dropout involved did not complete the grid and group assessment tool because the survey assessed cultural context rather than preference. These students were between 18 and 30 years and dropped out of high school between 2003 and 2010.

Students were identified using purposive sample and snowballing techniques. Initially, a student was identified as dropout and that student helped me to identify other dropouts. I invited them to a pre-interview. After the pre-interview with the dropouts and the 40 teachers had completed their grid and group assessment tool, I analysed the responses and the pre interview scripts of dropouts and chose 12 persons to be involved in the study. Six teachers and six dropouts were selected for a 45-60 minute interview to gather data on high school dropouts.

Dropouts who were selected participated in a taped interview where they reconstructed, recalled, and retold the reasons that led to their dropping of high school. The students selected were those who were not intimidated or emotional in any way that impeded their ability to offer valuable information that contributed to the pool of knowledge on dropouts.

Data Collection

Data for this research was collected from grid and group assessment tool, interviews, observations, and document analysis. These methods of data collection were chosen because they permitted me to explore and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex issues associated with the students dropping out.

Interviews

Pre interviews were initially conducted with high school dropouts who were prospective research participants. The students who were selected for an extended interview were those who could effectively narrate their dropout experience, lived in or near Punta Gorda Town, and had dropped out of high school less than eleven years at the time of the pre-interview. Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2004) explain that purposive sampling is used to comprehend and investigate issues with a small group for the basis of a particular purpose or judgment. This study employed the strategy of purposive sampling known as criterion sampling. According to Erlandson and his associates (1993), criterion sampling consists of picking all cases that meet some criterion.

After the pre-interview, three students from each of two schools were invited to participate in a 45-60 minute interview regarding high school dropouts. Three teachers from each of the two high schools were also interviewed. I invited the teachers and dropouts participants to an interview planning session where we decided on interview dates, times, and

venue. During the planning session, I explained the importance of choosing an appropriate place to conduct the interview. I then verbally sought the permission and collaboration of the participants to check the site to ensure that it was quiet, offered privacy, and had an ambience that was appropriate to conduct the interview.

The aim of the joint planning session was to ensure that the venue for the interview was an environment that was not intrusive for either parties, and allowed the participant to reflect and recall pertinent and relevant information regarding reasons why students drop out of high school. The 45-60 minute interviews were guided by six structured questions and open questions.

I prepared for the interview by fielding the questions with a few colleagues and volunteers. Pre-interviews were conducted in English. Table 1 is the interview protocol used for the dropouts and teachers.

Table 1. Summary of Interview Protocol for Teachers and High School Dropouts

Interview questions for former student(dropout)	Interview questions for educator(teacher or administrator)
Can you briefly describe your family background?	What experiences have you had that prepared you to be a teacher or administrator?
Describe the school you attended?	Describe the school in which you work?
What are some of the experiences in school that caused you to drop out?	What are your attitudes towards dropouts?
What are some of the experiences out of school that caused you to drop out?	
How could your school experiences have	Why do students drop out of high school?

been improved?

How do you feel about been out of school?	In your opinion, how could schools be more proactive in keeping students in school?
What else can you tell me about being out of school?	What else can you tell me about students who drop out of school?

Observations

Much can be accomplished by looking, listening, feeling, and smelling instead of by merely talking (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 98). I conducted four separate two hour observation. Observation was also conducted to gather data to complement findings in the interview, or to point to new knowledge that was revealed in interviews. The guidelines by Erlandson (1993) that I employed to conduct the observations were:

- The setting: What was the physical environment like? What was the context? What kind of behaviors did the setting promote or prevent?

- The participants: Describe who was in the scene, how many people, and their roles. What brought the people together? Who was allowed here?

- Activities and interactions: What was going on? Was there a definable sequence of activities? How did people interact with the activity and with one another? How were the people and activities connected or interrelated?

- Frequency and duration: When did the situation begin? How long did it last? Was it a reoccurring type of situation or is it unique? If it reoccurred, how frequently? How typical of such situations was the one been observed?

- Subtle factors: Less obvious but perhaps as important to the observation were: informal and unplanned activities, symbolic and connotative meanings of words, nonverbal communications such as dress and physical space, and unobtrusive measures such as physical clues, what does not happen–especially if it ought to have happened.

Documents

Teacher grade books, students' registers, mid-term or mid-semester reports, end of term grade slips, school newspapers, handbook of policies for students, handbook of policies for teachers and student payment records or account were used to collect data. These were analysed to determine the factors leading to student drop out. Students' attendance register was used to determine frequent or persistent absences. Merit and demerit class records were used to track student discipline, and its role in student dropout, and the student bursar record was used to determine whether or not students were able to afford the cost of schooling. The data collected from school records, observations, and interviews helped the researcher to determine the factors associated with students dropping out.

Use and Importance of Trustworthiness in Naturalistic Studies

Naturalistic inquiry must be conducted in a manner in which it can make a reasonable claim to methodological soundness (Erlandson et al., 1993). This study employed qualities of trustworthiness to ensure that appropriate and high methodological standards were used to examine the factors leading to student dropout.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiry is defined by the precise methods of the study, the integrity of the researcher, and the philosophical belief in the worth of qualitative inquiry"

Patton, 2002, p. 553). Guba and Lincoln (1985) explain the qualities of trustworthiness as credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. Credibility is the most important characteristic for establishing trustworthiness with the reader or stakeholder of a study.

Credibility is pertinent or established when there is compatibility between the constructed realities that exist in the minds of respondents with those that are attributed to them (Erlandson et al., 1993). These realities exist in the minds of the people in the context. Attention must be directed to gaining a comprehensive intense interpretation of those realities that will be affirmed by the people in the context (Erlandson et al., 1993). Table 2 provides a summary of the techniques that establish trustworthiness.

Table 2. The Summary of Techniques for Establishing Trustworthiness

Technique	Results	
Prolonged Engagement	Build trust Develop rapport Build relationships Obtain wide scope of data Obtain accurate data	Extended time with research partners Demonstrate respect in all actions Attempt to know people and their social setting Speak with and observe different people, situations Remind self of biases and strive to eliminate interference in study
Persistent Observation	Obtain in-depth data	Strive to know the

Technique		Results	
	Obtain accurate data		organization well
	Sort relevancies from		Devise method for biases an
	irrelevancies		distortions from respondents
	Recognize deceits		wanting to deceive
			Ignore irrelevant data; focus
			on what is important though
			prolonged interaction
			Pay attention to pleasers and
			deceivers
Triangulation	Verify data		Use different data sources to
			ensure data credibility
Referential Adequacy	Provide a "slice of life"		Use data sources such as
			photos, yearbooks, memos
Peer Debriefing	Test working hypothesis		Have a professional colleague
			examine findings and analysis
	Test categories, interpretations		Have people in research
	or conclusion		setting test categories an
	(constructions)		explain/verify interpretation to
Member Checking			you
			Write notes about analyses
			and decisions made

Technique	Results	
Reflexive Journal	Document researcher decisions	Write clear an coherent notes about information gathered in research process
Thick Description	Provide data base for transferability Provide a vicarious experience for the reader	Explain in clear detail so audience can relate
Purposive Sampling	Generate data for emergent design and emerging hypothesis	Look for material that contributes to understanding research
Audit Trail	Allow auditor to document trustworthiness of study	Review all data sources before making conclusions

Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement helps to establish credibility of a naturalistic study. Prolonged engagement aids the researcher to build trust and develop a relationship with respondents (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 133). I spent eight weeks at the unit of analysis studying and analyzing the culture and environment of the school to determine its effects on student dropout.

Persistent Observation

Persistent observation highlights researcher presence and actively seeks out sources of data identified by the researcher's own emergent design (Erlandson et al., 1993). Research today points to many factors responsible for students dropping out of high school. However these reasons dominate the literature and may not totally explain the dropout phenomenon. I used persistent observation to seek knowledge from broad perspectives as opposed to dominant or objective ones.

Triangulation

Triangulation supports credibility through the use of different or multiple sources of data (observation, interviews, videotapes, photographs, & documents). I sought to understand compatible constructions related to students dropping out from different vantage points as a result of multiple data sources.

Peer Debriefing

"Peer debriefing helps to build credibility since it allows a peer who is a professional outside the context and who has some general understanding of the study to help analyze or interpret material and to test working hypothesis and emergent designs" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 140). Peer debriefing allowed me to think aloud and explore various possibilities, to ask probing questions and offer alternative explanations, to vent my frustration and emotions that might cloud the research, to devise coping strategies, to regain or maintain my objectivity, to devise my research strategies and organize my thoughts, and to be honest that gave me a platform to gather ideas for the research through conversations with colleagues.

Member Checking

Member checking helps to ensure credibility by allowing members for the stakeholding group to test categories, interpretations, and conclusions. Member checks were important to ascertain whether I had the same interpretations and conclusions as other people who were stakeholders of the study. I afforded respondents an opportunity to verify interpretations and data gathered in earlier interviews, and corrected immediately errors of facts or challenge interpretations (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Reflexive Journals

A reflexive journal was used in this study to help me organize my decisions in addition to achieving transferability, dependability and confirmability. My reflexive journal contained information regarding schedule and logistics, insights, and reasons for methodological decisions.

Thick Description

Thick description provides details that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings. This study employed thick description to provide the reader with a description to allow him or her to get a feel of what it is actually like to be in the context of the study.

Audit Trail

The audit trail files represent inquiry procedures that include notes regarding the process of inquiry, notes about intentions and motivations, and copies of instruments, tools, and resources. They also include notes about trustworthiness which explain the steps taken to augment credibility, dependability, and confirmability. The audit trail tracks the process of inquiry and the steps to enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability and enabling the researcher to assess the interactions between the original framework of the study and emerging needs. It provides the researcher with the key questions that guided the study at the beginning

and during its implementation. The audit trail was used for two important reasons: to ensure that no fact was reported without knowing its source and to ensure that the researcher did not make assertions without supporting data (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study was continuous, as Erlandson and colleagues (1993) explain, "The analysis of qualitative data is best described as a progression, not a stage; an on-going process, not a onetime event" (p. 111). A primary tool in the investigative and analytic process was field notes obtained after prolonged observation. I wrote and used field notes to record data related to the issues. These notes helped to build categories that pointed to emergent themes and thus grounded theory. Themes were generated by comparing and categorizing bits of data.

Consequently, I was able to determine categories when I observed the recurrence of data incidents, and was able to observe similar characteristics, dimensions, or relationships in units of data. This served as a condition for placing a unit of data into a category. Using a conceptual framework, I was able to mould patterns and themes and thus derived the grounded theory that emerged from the themes.

Summary

The study analyzed how various personal, social, and school culture or environmental factors contribute to students dropping out of high school. Data were gathered from teachers and administrators at study sites as well as from students who dropped out. Prolonged and continuous observations were conducted to determine how social, personal, and environmental factors contribute to students dropping out of high school. I conducted in depth 45-60 minute

taped interviews with the dropouts to gather their narratives regarding the reasons that led to

their dropping out of high school.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE PORTRAITS AND SNAPSHOTS

The purpose of this study was to describe factors that led to selected Belizean students dropping out of high school. In this chapter, narrative portraits of St. Thomas High School (STHS) and Columbus High School (CHS) are presented to promote a deeper understanding of the dropout phenomenon from the perspective of those who participated in the research.

Context: St. Thomas High School

STHS is nestled amid a forest of 20 sprawling acres of hardwood trees bordered by unruly mangroves at the far end of the campus. The eastern side of the campus boasts a tiny, five acres pasture. Most of the land is undeveloped and cattle graze and wander in the enclave amid the tall grass and weeds. At the center of the campus sits the administration building, the hub of the institution that houses the offices of the administrators, bursar, the accounts clerk, and counsellors. This building and another that runs directly north of it are the only two story structures on campus. The remaining buildings are all one story.

A map of STHS can be seen in Figure 2. Several of the rooms in the administration building are classrooms. The other two story building houses classrooms, the Physical Education Department, Science Department, school library, and science lab. A computer lab and other classrooms are located at the south end of the campus, while on the western end the blades of a wind mill lazily spin through the air. Along the western and southern ends of the campus is a tract of land dedicated to the Agricultural Department. Located here are pig pens, cattle pasture, and domestic animal cages. Small plots of land afford students opportunities to engage in planting temporary and permanent crops. It is a beautiful campus that sits amid a sea of green.

Figure 2. Map of St. Thomas High School

St. Thomas High School

Fence

| Computer Lab | Kitchen | Agri.Office | 2X,2C,2W,2E | 4G,(3G1), (3G2) |

Exit

| 1X,4B,3B,1S,1Y | | 1M,2M |

| Upper-4A,3A,1N,1E,1C | Upper Sc. Lab, Kitchen | |
| Lower - Office,2S,4S,3S | Lower 3V,4V | Basketball Court |

Fence

Guard hut

Upper 1W, Library

Lower WoodWork

Entrance

Kitchen

Fence   Kitchen

Fence   Kitchen

LEGEND

Fence	2X,2C,2W,2E	Lower WoodWork
Computer Lab	4G,(3G1), (3G2)	Basketball Court
1X,4B,3B,1S,1Y	Upper Sc. Lab, Kitchen	Agri.Office
Guard hut	Lower 3V,4V	Upper1W, Library
Upper-4A,3A,1N,1E,1C	1M,2M	Lower - Office,2S,4S,3S

According to a school administrator, the school has embarked on many programs intended to curb the dropout rate:

> Some of them begin to travel from about four or five in the morning, and then they might not have had any chance to eat or have breakfast, so we have a feeding program. We have a counselling program. We have homeroom teachers available to give support to these students. We have an assessment council available to assist students and give them support. We also create systems for

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academic files. We have remedial math and English. We network with the social

department, the health department, and various non-governmental organizations

(NGOs) to give our students opportunities. We have numerous programs to keep

students in school (Dr. Joseph).

STHS Narrative Snapshot Number One

One early, warm Wednesday in September, the campus was teeming with life and

students scurrying to their classes. Outside a small campus cafeteria, a young teenager hurried to

class with a juice bottle labelled Caribbean Pride. A short distance from the security booth, two

female teachers dressed in light green blouses and black skirts conversed as they headed to the

main office building where teachers congregated to sign in for duty every morning.

At the gate, a driver honked his horn and entered the compound before quickly

dispatching a student. The chief security officer patrolled the street that led to the main office.

A Caucasian male hurriedly bicycled through the gate towards the bike racks next to the security

booth. With precision, he jumped off his bike, found his lock, turned the knobs to a setting and

locked his bike to a metal rack. Then, he walked briskly to the main office at the center of the

campus.

In a small cafeteria inside the campus, a Mestizo lady in her early 50s was busy

preparing for the day's cooking, and the smell of fried food, especially chicken, was pungent in

the air. From her fryer came the constant crackling sound of frying food in very hot oil.

As the buzzer rang and the principal made an announcement regarding sessions, a few

students remained outside, apparently in no hurry to head to class. At the main cafeteria on

campus, a sign advertised oven baked barbeque for lunch and a young East Indian female teacher

ordered some coffee. Behind the counter an East Indian woman greeted the teacher, while a Mestizo lady served her coffee in a small mug and fried chicken wrapped in foil paper.

In a nearby classroom, 30 students sat in five neat rows of six desks as a teacher dictated some information and students bent over their desk as they attentively listened in an effort to copy every word. Near the administration office, a student conversed with the Vice-Principal of Students Services (VPSS) regarding a report he received stating that the student was exhibiting non-compliant behaviour. The young Mestizo boy was about 14 years old and was dressed in a Dickies' pants two times his normal size. His shirt was neatly tucked into his pants, but his large white shirt hung at least three inches below a belt riddled with numerous holes. A deep dark scowl contorted his face and his black, fiery eyes seemed to burn holes the VPSS. The vice principal informed him that he had been to the office recently for inappropriate behaviour and was now there for the use of obscene language then asked him for his demerit card.

The student responded that he did not have the demerit card, and that it was in his school bag which was in the classroom. The VPPS asked him to return to his class for the demerit card. He left and a few minutes later here returned to the office and handed over his demerit card to the VPPS. When he received his demerit, he exited the room and said, "That Fellow is an asshole. He likes to takes advantage of others." Then he stormed back to his classroom behind the main office complex.

Research Participants

Three high school dropouts and three educators from STHS were interviewed. Of the educators, one was a male administrator, one a male teacher and the other a female teacher. The administrator had over 14 years experience. Two males and one female dropouts participated. I selected participants of different age groups, gender, experiences, and socioeconomic status.

Participating teachers were from different departments. The female teacher was a member of the Vocational Department, while the male was a member of the Science Department. The administrator had worked in several departments including the arts, general studies, science and vocational.

Mr. Erlington

Mr. Erlington, a STHS dropout, is about six feet tall, slim built, and between 27 and 30 years old. For the interview, he was dressed in jean shorts. On the day of the interview, he invited me into the house, directed me to a seat and showed me where to set up my computer. His home was on the western side of the town. The house was a small cement structure, and we sat in the tiny living room that was about nine feet by five feet. A standing fan was turned on in a corner beside an entertainment center that contained a television and music box. Caribbean music was playing on the local radio station, and the atmosphere was festive and upbeat.

He began the interview by telling me a little bit about his family background. He explained that he grew up in a small family with his mother, and his family had difficulty meeting the financial obligations associated with his schooling. Having grown up in a single parent family, Mr. Erlington recounted the cycle of academic failure that had persisted in his family. "My sister dropped out, my brother dropped out, everybody dropped out." He said that he was unsuccessful in school because he "got carried away and didn't follow the rules."

He also said "there were teachers who were alright and others who were not." He described teachers, the vice-principal and principal as people who were "harsh and had a bad attitude." When he expressed those words, his tone of voice seemed resentful, especially when he discussed the school's vice-principal and principal. "You already know the principal will

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give you a demerit first, and then they will warn you, and then you will get suspension. The principal was not interested in talking to you."

In addition to this type of treatment from the administrators, he explained that "teachers were guilty of transmitting negative messages about individual student's success in high school." These included statements such as, "You were not made for school" and "I will give you just one year, and you will drop out." He also described the teachers as constantly picking on him, because they believed that he hung out with the wrong crowd. In a voice filled with pain and resentment, Mr. Erlington noted that his dropping out of high school was because he was unable to get along with two teachers and one of the vice principals at the school. The male teacher often complained about him to the vice principal. Thus, both of them decided to refuse his request for a second chance to continue attending classes at the school.

According to him, a female teacher described him to the vice-principal as "unruly." She also said she found it difficult to teach while he was in the class, and that the teacher picked on him for talking out of turn, getting out of his seat during class without permission, and a host of other infractions. He recounted that these offences led to his first suspension and subsequent expulsion from STHS. He noted the decision to drop out of school was already made for him. His decision to drop out of high school was the result of a letter he received from the vice-principal notifying him that he had been permanently expelled. The interview ended with an emotional Mr. Erlington who asked, "Sir, do you think I could still go to school?"

Mr. Francisco

Mr. Francisco is a male STHS dropout in his early thirties. He stood about five feet six inches tall, had bushy upper chin and wide set face, and was of Mestizo decent. His demeanour conveyed a no nonsense person. For the interview he was dressed modestly in long pants and a

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sleeveless shirt. He invited me into his un-plastered, one bedroom, cement house. A huge table

and two chairs sat in the middle of the small room. He motioned for me to sit on a chair and

asked his wife to go into the adjacent room, because I was there to conduct an interview with

him. He showed me where to set up my computer and turned on a small fan in the corner. The

heat in the small house slowly began to dissipate, and we began the interview. Mr. Francisco

was eager to tell his story about why he dropped out of high school. Throughout most of the

interview, he was courteous, although I sensed some apprehension from him regarding personal

questions especially about his mom or the family.

During the interview I learned that his mom and dad separated, but I was not certain if the

separation occurred while Mr. Francisco was still going to high school. I also learned that his

mother was a stay-at-home mom and that his father worked as a grounds keeper at a local high

school. Mr. Francisco began the story of his dropping out by explaining that most of his

immediate family members had not been successful high school students:

> Most of my family members did not finish school, but some finished primary
>
> school. My brother was one who did not finish and now he is a taxi driver. I have
>
> four sisters. Two of them finished high school while the other two never finished.

Mr. Francisco explained that he only got to ninth grade, the first year of secondary

school, before dropping out. He surmised that his problem was mostly teachers who would pick

on him, because he "did not dress properly or according to standard." Often he was sent to the

principal's office for talking too loudly when he felt disrespected by his teachers. He said that he

often got into trouble with two teachers: one male and one female. The male teacher with whom

he often got into trouble with, he explained, "had a strong attitude, was often angry," and

approached him in a manner he found "distasteful." He said he reacted to this behaviour by

being loud, because he did not like anyone pushing him around. Mr. Francisco also explained that he faced difficulties with one female teacher mostly because of problems with how he dressed. These problems included him not tucking his shirt into his pants before coming to class and coming to class with the back of his shirt dirty.

The second offense, he explained, was often the result of riding his bike through roads that often became muddy, especially in the rainy season. His behaviour caused him to get many demerits, and he spent most of his time serving detentions. He said that during the detentions he was given "hard labor" that required him working on the school farm cleaning and weeding the cocoa patch or chopping in the field. His decision to drop out of school was a gradual process that began with him having difficulties with two teachers, being sent to the principal's office and receiving no support or assistance from the schools administrators. Mr. Francisco recalled that he appealed to his dad to intercede on his behalf with the school principal, since his dad was an employee of the school. The principal's unwillingness to review his case was thus recounted:

> Most of the time when you go talk to the principal he did not say much. All he did was ask you why you were there and after a while he gives you demerits or put you on suspension. He did not try to find out what the problem was, why it was happening or why it happened. He was just like a dictator. He just told you what will happen. So you just got a detention, or suspended or something. Then you have to go and chop or something.

Mr. Francisco recalled that the last incident that led to him dropping out of school started when a female teacher with whom he had prior problems, grabbed him in his shirt and told him that he needed to learn to dress properly. He said "She just got me to the point where she pissed me off, and I end up pushing her away, and the principal got on my case for that, and I went on

suspension." During that time his grades began to decline rapidly, and he found it difficult to keep up. In the end he decided to drop out:

> Well, I figured if that was the way my life at school was going to be, it was best I if I dropped come out. It was better if I dropped out and start to work. I stayed in school for a couple of months; then I told my father I wouldn't go back again and I stopped.

Ms. Cruz

Ms. Cruz a petite Mestizo female STHS dropout is about five feet and two inches tall and at the time of our interview, was dressed casually in a short brown pleated skirt and T-shirt. The interview was conducted at her home as was pre-arranged. She explained that she still lives with her parents, but has her own apartment in their home. Her apartment consisted of an open space that was not separated and showed different quarters of the home. It was a well-kept tiny apartment where everything appears to be in its proper place. In one corner was a large bed and, in the opposite corner adjacent to the street, there was a long sofa seat. She was holding a young baby, and he began to cry, so she told me she was going to let him stay with her mom for the duration of the interview.

She revealed that she was from a middle class family and explained that her family was engaged "mostly in merchandizing, selling small gifts and trinkets to tourist." She also revealed that at least one of her brothers "dropped out of high school due to academic failure." She said that she had some problems with how the teachers behaved. "They used obscene language, and they talked in a harsh manner." She also explained that teachers were physically abusive to students. "Yes, and taking you to the office they would rub you on your shoulder and take you to the office. I was upset because my parents never use to do that to me."

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Apart from the physical abuse, Ms. Cruz explained that some teachers had poor relationships with students, because they were often unable to advise students to make proper decisions. Instead those teachers would engage in unprofessional behaviour such as teasing the students:

> I did not feel like going to school anymore because of the way they treated students. When a student passed beside them the teachers would talk about them. Sometimes when you get into trouble, they would tease. Instead of giving advice, they would tease.

Ms. Cruz concluded that her dropping out of high school was also related to her relationship with teachers and the amount of demerits she amassed in her years at school. She was often given demerits for "failing to wear her P. E. uniform, not having on socks, failing to produce a demerit card, and for being late to class." These offences led to at least one suspension. In addition, she claimed that they created a poor relationship between her and the teachers, and thus, she began avoiding teachers. Later she became pregnant, and eventually dropped out of high school. She claimed that when she sought the intercession of the vice-principal, "he didn't accept what I was saying; he listened to and accepted what the teachers said." She said that at other times the principal dismissed her, as he perceived her as "a trouble maker person at school." After she sought the intercession of administration but got no help, Ms. Cruz said she sought consolation in the arms of her boyfriend:

> Well, I just stayed with my boyfriend, because of the way they use to treat me, and I use to not go to school, because of the way they treated me. Instead of going to school, I use to go to my boyfriend's house instead.

As a result of staying away from school for days at a time, she began to face academic difficulties and found it very hard to catch up. "Well sometimes when the teachers were teaching the subject, I did not understand, because I had missed too many classes, and it was difficult to catch up." She attended school for a month before realizing that she was pregnant, and decided to drop out of school. She ended the interview by advising, "Young girls should have safe sex and avoid becoming pregnant."

Dr. Joseph

Dr. Joseph is a male high school vice-principal at STHS, about five feet and nine inches tall with a light brown complexion and an athletic build. At the time of the interview, we convened in the school library. The library was housed in the upper portion of a building northeast of the administration building. Dr. Joseph has taught at STHS for 27 years and was one of the pioneers of the institution, having taught there from its inception in 1983.

He began his teaching career at the school shortly after earning his associates degree in chemistry and biology from St. Johns College in Belize City. At STHS, he has taught numerous subjects including arithmetic, Spanish, social studies and biology. His experience in administration included head of the Science Department, vice-principal for 14 years, and member of the Belize Regional Council for Education.

In his years as vice-principal, he garnered a wealth of knowledge on social and economic factors related to the students' homes and the school that can help to prevent student from dropping. According to Dr. Joseph, there are several reasons why students quit high school, including:

> academic failure, inappropriate behavior, financial difficulties, cultural beliefs;
> meaning that parents were, no longer in favor of the education and prefer the

students to go into agriculture, into subsistence farming, teenage pregnancy and marrying early which was a part of the culture.

He further explained that one of the school related factors that contribute to student dropout was behavior that contravened school policies related to discipline. "Students who engaged in this behavior acquired many demerits in a short span of time which led to suspensions or expulsion." Some examples of these inappropriate behaviors included "teasing, bullying, fighting, and trafficking of marijuana." Students also dropped out of high school because of socioeconomic or home related factors:

Sometimes parents are unable to pay the 300 or 350 dollars bill per year because the father might not be working and the rice or corn harvest might not have turned up well, or night also have found it a bit difficult to find work and cash making.

He noted that there are cultural beliefs that contributed to students dropping out of high school very early. These beliefs tend to affect girls more than boys. Some young girls in rural Mayan communities leave school at age 14 or 15 because they had been handed over to a male in a promise of wedlock.

Another factor contributing to females leaving school was messages transmitted in the home stating that males, not females should go to school. Dr. Joseph concluded that boys and girls drop out for different reasons. While boys dropped out because of behaviorial or academic reasons, girls dropped out because they were forced to adhere to cultural norms and practices, such as leaving school early to get married and begin a family.

Ms. Sanchez

Ms. Sanchez is a female high teacher at STHS, about five feet and five inches tall. The interview was conducted at her home on a very warm evening. Ms. Sanchez began the interview

by recounting how she developed her interest in teaching. She explained that her first job teaching was working with older people in rural communities. Her interest in teaching took root when she realized that:

> Change could be more effected more easily through the younger generation, ... and that inspired me to change my focus where change should be effective … Whatever change you would like to make is better if it is started through the younger generation.

Ms. Sanchez described teaching as "very fulfilling for me, very satisfying." She noted that her training in teacher education helped her to manage disruptive behavior that would interfere with student learning. Additionally, she said it helped her to develop an avenue better for student-teacher communication. She stated that these avenues for communication helps students and to teachers focus on learning and on educational goals:

> It helps you to better understand your teenagers and you help them to understand themselves. This minimizes disciplinary problems during the class time, because you see something disruptive you are able to identify it because of your training. You are then able to calm the situation down and it doesn't escalate. In this way management is much easier because of that knowledge. If you are aware of types of disciplinary problems that can come up you can work with the adolescents to help. So it's more of a proactive type of management.

When asked about her attitude towards dropouts, she exclaimed that it was the fault of the entire system. She also explained that the school could reduce the number of dropouts if more staff were involved. The absence of collaboration, however, would result in students dropping through the cracks. She further explained that a lack of collaboration between schools and

communities had resulted in some parents not being aware of or understanding the expectations of schools. This inability to understand their roles and functions as parents has led to parents been unable to ensure that students carry out their responsibilities as related to the school. The inability or reluctance of parents to ensure that students did assignments was one factor that led to academic difficulties or deficiencies and thus drops out:

> They end up dropping out because most assignments have to do with reinforcing what they have learnt in school. When they don't do their assignments they are unable to keep up in class. When students fail to do their assignments, they are ill prepared for tests.

She stated that students who disliked a teacher or a subject, especially a core subject that was important for promotion, were also at a greater risk for dropping out of high school:

> When a student cannot master the content for a core subject or they don't want to take the subject then that may be a cause for dropout. This is because they do not participate in class and sometimes they simply decide not to go to class or to avoid dealing with that particular teacher. When they do this they end up failing that subject. This is very harmful to the student's academic success and often lead to dropout.

According to Ms. Sanchez, negative attitudes towards teacher correction were another reason why students dropped out of high school. Some students feel teachers have no right in pointing them in the right direction and continue to display negative behaviors such as drinking, fighting, and causing harm to others. These behaviors resulted in the school taking "disciplinary actions which led to the student being expelled." The lack of interest or motivation to continue

school also results in students displaying negative behaviors, compelling schools to ask students to leave:

> Some students don't want to be there. It is not what they want. This is not the student's goal. Somebody wants this student to be at school. So the student does whatever he or she needs to do to get out of school; drinking or fighting. Sometimes they resort to grievous harm so they are expelled.

In addition, some are not prepared to meet the rigors of the secondary school curriculum, "Dropouts also occurred because of a lack of proper preparation. There are a lot more dropouts in first form than all the other forms. These students are ill-prepared and are unable to successfully transit to high school."

Mr. Mendez

Mr. Mendez, a male high school teacher at STHS, is about five feet five inches tall. It was a very warm afternoon when we conducted the interview in a science lab upstairs in a building adjacent to the administration building. Mr. Mendez has spent more than 15 years at this high school and understood the dropout phenomenon.

Inside the lab where we met, various tubes and pipes that carried gas and water hung exposed against the walls or ceiling. There were about six tables, three in each row, with end table containing a white sink and an assortment of burners, funnels, tubes and microscopes that occupied the spaces around the sink in the middle of the lab tables. It was there that Mr. Mendez invited me sit as he explained the knowledge and experience he gained at STHS, particularly as it related to high school dropouts.

He began by explaining that he had always had an interest in the hard sciences. He said that many of his studies focused on training in the biological and medical sciences, although his

Associate's Degree was in chemistry and biology. Prior to teaching at STHS full time, he earned

a master's degrees in advanced science with a concentration in organic and inorganic chemistry

in addition to fish pathology. Complementing his training in science were courses in pedagogy

that helped to define his approach to students, teaching, and learning:

> When you deliver content materials, you want to be mindful of the level of the
>
> students so you tailor your planning and your delivery according to their needs
>
> and previous knowledge. It is important that when you walk into the classroom
>
> you are able to adjust your lessons to meet the various learning styles and needs.
>
> When students are sick or experience problems of abuse at home it difficult for
>
> them to perform well in class. Then, there can be so many other problems that
>
> influence your ability to teach well despite your elaborate and well thought out
>
> plans.

Over the years, he has observed students dropping out of high school and describes his

attitude towards dropouts in these words:

> I pity them because I have seen many cases, I believe, where dropouts occur needlessly.
>
> One reason why students drop out is because they have parents who don't place a high
>
> value on education.

He also mentioned that financial difficulties were another reason why students drop out

of high school. When parents face financial difficulties, they often feel that the only option they

have is to pull the students out of school. The inability to tap into alternative sources of funding

or to seek financial assistance outside of personal resources has also led parents to withdraw their

children from school.

Parental neglect constitutes another reason why students drop out of high school:

The lack of parental involvement is a reason for student drop out. The female student gets involved in a relationship and the parent takes her out of school. The parents do not get involved; neither do they speak to the male about getting the child to stay in school. Sometimes a child with good grades drops out even though she was only two or three months away from graduation. Although this is common it is very painful.

He further explained that lack of discipline constitutes another reason why students drop out of high school:

In some cases students accumulate too many demerits. If they commit some infraction, are negligent or display some inappropriate behavior, their conduct card is marked. If they accumulate 25 demerits on their conduct card, they are suspended from school for a week. According to the rules if a student accumulates more than four suspensions during their four years of high school, we would ask the student to leave.

While boys often drop out of high school due to discipline, girls are more prone to drop out because they become pregnant or they enter relationships into where they cohabit with a male:

From what I've been seeing over the years the boys usually drop out due to disciplinary problems. The girls usually drop out because they are either pregnant during the school time or they fall in love and live with a man and leave school to go and live with him.

STHS Narrative Snapshot Number Two

It was 7:30 a.m. on a school day at STHS and the buzzer had already rung to indicate that homeroom sessions were beginning. Inside the cafeteria several students who had purchased breakfast from the vendor sit on plastic chairs or on benches and eat their breakfast. Over the intercom the vice-principal makes an announcement about exams and detention. None of the students seems in a hurry to get to their classes to hear the announcement about exams, schedules, dates, and times.

At the table nearby, a teacher casually munches on her burrito. The second buzzer sounds, indicating that homeroom period is now over and classes are beginning, but the students still sit inside the cafeteria. Outside, a few students are conversing under the canopy of a huge shade tree. The teacher inside the cafeteria walks by and heads to her class, but the students continue their discussion under the tree in front of the cafeteria.

Context: Columbus High school

Columbus High School (CHS) is a single, two-story, cement structure. This massive building sits on the eastern seashore of the town on a very busy major street. It is one of a series of buildings situated on the campus of a large Catholic primary school. North of the campus is the Catholic Church complex where the parish hall, church, and residence of the Catholic priest who offer daily mass are located. On the western and eastern side of the school are numerous buildings which comprise classrooms for the Catholic primary school.

North of the main school building is the local community comprised of residences, grocery stores, and a few restaurants and cafes. Only the upper floor of the building houses the high school. This high school is divided into three classrooms approximately 35 by 25 feet. Inside the building on the north side is a computer lab, a science lab, and a restroom for males. To the south are classrooms and a men's restroom, and in the middle of the building is the

director's office that also houses a room that doubles as both a staff room and resource center, where teachers can research information for their classes. At the very center of the building is a huge entrance made of corrugated steel bars. On the opposite side of the entrance is an exit facing the east and the beautiful Caribbean Sea. See Figure 3 for a map of the school complex

Figure 3. Modified Map of Columbus high schools

Columbus High School

caribbean sea

Legend

Basketball Court
Back Step
Computer Lab
Class Room
Bath Room
Science Lab
Prin.Office/Staff
Class Room

Basketball Court

Back Step

Class Room | Computer Lab

Corridor

Bath Room | Class Room | Class room | Prin.Office/Staff | Science Lab | Bath Room

Front Step
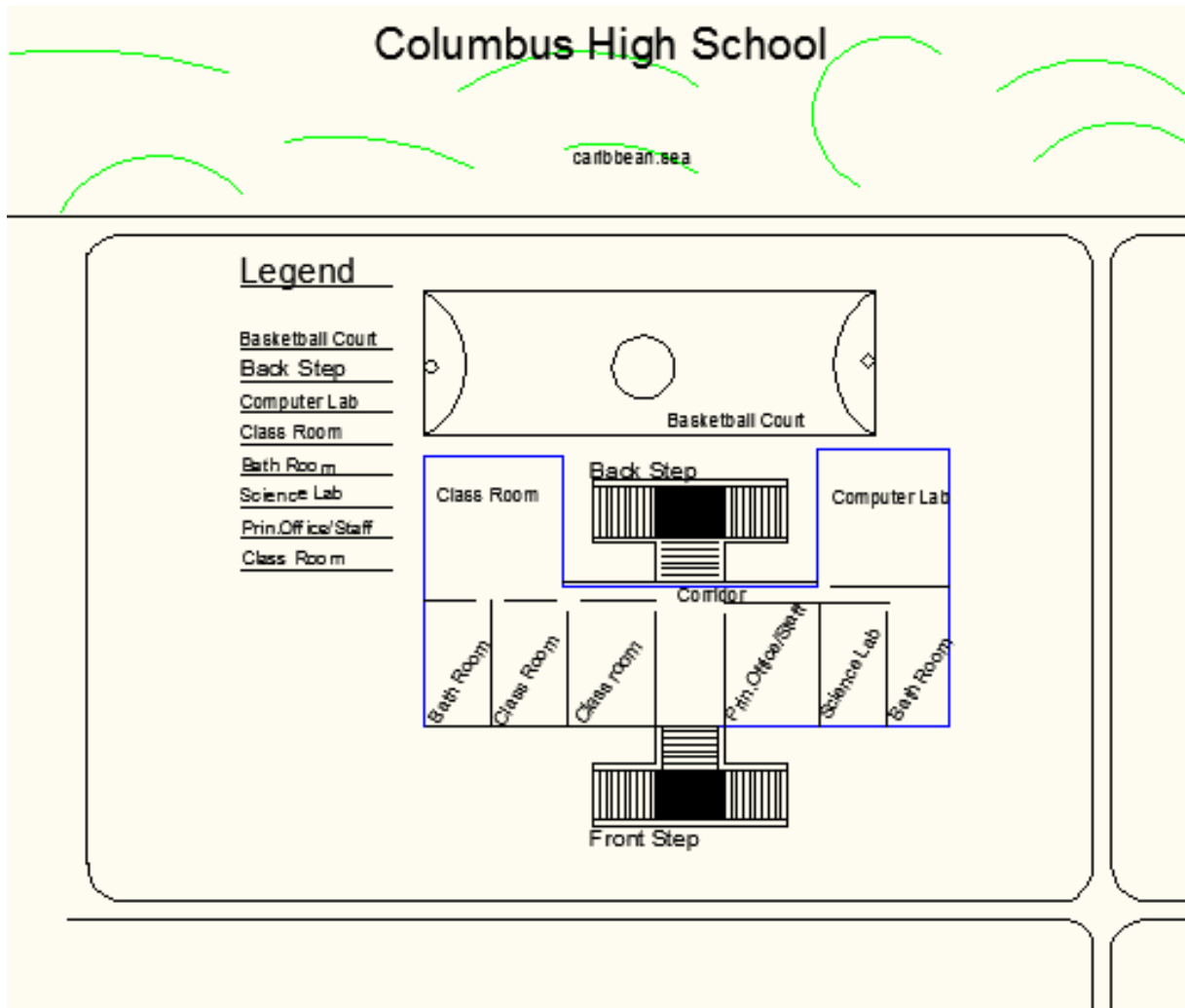
themselves as Garifuna, Creole or East Indian. Other students describe themselves as Ketchi Maya or Mopan Maya. A small number of students identify themselves as Mestizos or of mixed parentage. With a population of 82 students, the school is one of the smallest high schools in the country. Most of the CHS students are older than students in a traditional high school because

most are dropouts from other high schools. Many were unable to deal with the rigors of

academia and thus ended up dropping out of school for a second or third time. Over the years,

the number of students who drop out of CHS has not declined; however, the school's director

recognizes the significance of the problem and offered the following insight:

> Since we are teaching adults, we need to approach teaching from another point of
>
> view rather than the high school students' point of view. I think that's one of the
>
> biggest things that we have to learn. Even if they act like high school students,
>
> they are adults. I think if we treat them like adults it will definitely make them act
>
> more responsibly.

CHS Narrative Snapshot Number One

At CHS, dusk is approaching and the street in front of a large primary school building is

filled with cars for students attending class sessions in one of the three classroom buildings at the

high school. At the entrance to the gate, a young black man in his early twenties and dressed in

baggy jeans and a red T-shirt with the emblem of the school imprinted on his shirt talks on the

phone. In the main office, the director is busy photocopying some information, and a male

teacher comments about the amount of information that students needed to know that day. In the

background a teacher talks about assets and dividends in a business class.

Inside the building, is a huge corridor that runs adjacent to each class. Bicycles of

different shapes, models and make adorn the hall. Across the corridor on the north eastern end

of the building are three classrooms with students dressed in the standard red uniform T-shirt and

dark trousers or jeans.

Inside the third year classroom, students sit in small groups and listen attentively to their

teacher who is lecturing about assets and capital. In the second year classroom that is located

next door, the teacher engages students in a discussion. In another part of the classroom a boy traces something on his desk and plays nervously with his fingernail.

Back at the entrance to the building two black girls about seven or eight years run up and down the stairs of the building. To the left of the entrance and near the director's office is a huge white table loaded with an assortment of food and snacks. Near the table a tall lady sends a text messages to someone as she waits for the break time and the exit of students. The buzzer breaks the silence at 6:59 p.m., and the teacher in the third year class quickly wraps up her lesson. Suddenly there is a stream of voices as the students headed to the vendor's table and begin their purchases.

Fifteen minutes after the first bell, another buzzer sounds again to remind students that class has resumed. A few students head back to class. A single female teenager walks through the corridor with a plastic foam plate full of fried chicken. Out on the street many students are still standing aimlessly although the buzzer has rung. At the vendors table, a female teacher approached, smiles at the vendor, and requests a cold drink. At the end of the table and near the door of the director's office, the director and assistant director engage in small talk and inquire about each other's day before parting ways.

Research Participants

Three high school dropouts (two females and one male) and three educators (two males and one female) from CHS were participants in this study. Of the three educators one was the director of the institution. I purposely selected participants of different age groups, gender, experiences, and socioeconomic status. Although there were no departments at CHS, the

teachers who were interviewed included a Spanish teacher, an English teacher, and a Social Studies teacher.

Mr. Figaroa

Mr. Figaroa a high school dropout from CHS, is a young male Garifuna approximately five feet and six inches in height. It was a very warm early evening when we met at his residence to conduct the interview. His modest home with limited furniture is located on the western side of town. Except for a medium sized sofa and a table with two chairs, the house is conspicuously devoid of any furniture.

Mr. Figaroa grew up in a single parent family with his mother, brothers and sisters. When he was a young boy going to school, he said that his mother inspired him and taught him morals. Despite the good moral values he learned from his single mother, he became involved in a life of crime. He told me that while he was attending CHS, he had a case pending for handling stolen goods. He said that some teachers at the institution, who became aware of his involvement with the law, developed an attitude that discouraged him from wanting to pursue his education further. When teachers told him to stop drinking and to finish school, he said, "it was not done in way in which it would be regarded as advice, but rather as a put down."

He said that another factor that contributed to his dropping out of high school was his financial status: "Well, not going back was not the thing, but I just couldn't afford it like I said. Yeah, I had financial difficulties plus I had no job." In addition to those challenges he said that some teachers denied his requests for a make-up test. He finally dropped out of school, because he was convicted for handling stolen goods and was sent on remand to the prison: "At the time I was going to school, I had a case pending and the case went to trial, and I was convicted and sent to prison. I served eight months in the penitentiary at Hattieville for handling stolen goods."

Ms. Gonzales

Ms. Gonzales is a Garifuna female high school dropout from CHS, about five feet three inches tall. The interview took place at her home, which is a small, single story, wooden building. We sat in a small living room approximately 10 feet wide and 10 feet long. The walls of her home are adorned with pictures of family members, some had long sense passed away. It was a warm afternoon, but the heat was tempered by the cool breeze that blew through ample doors and windows.

In explaining why she dropped out of CHS, she said her relationship with at least one of her teachers contributed to her decision to quit school. "I had different teachers. I think I stopped because of one of them. He used to get on my nerves, and maybe I was just thin skinned and didn't want to listen." She recalled that one day she went to school when final examinations were being held, and she was denied the opportunity to sit her exam, because she had not finished paying her tuition:

> I had a balance for tuition that I couldn't pay, and they didn't want to give me my exam when I went to school. I didn't really have a problem with him but that day I went to school well prepared to take my exam and he turned me down. That got to me, and I stopped. It didn't feel good at all. I just turned around, came out and went home. That was what caused me to drop out. I felt disrespected. The way in which the teacher spoke to me did not make me feel good, so I decided to stop.

Ms. Sandoval

Ms. Sandoval is a young Garifuna woman in her early 20s. I conducted the interview at her home on the mid-western area of a southern Belize town. Her home was a medium-sized, cement, green block building that occupied most of a tiny yard. Inside the house were a few

worn sofa seats and a medium sized round table where we conducted the interview. The home was well lit and was hot.

Ms. Sandoval explained that she grew up in a very large family with six brother and two sisters, all of whom were either self-employed, gainfully employed in public service or teaching. Her mom was a stay-at-home mom, and her dad was a fisherman. In describing her parents, she said:

> They were very conservative and unwilling to discuss certain topics which were considered taboo. They never really told you know what would happen if you had sex. They were very secretive. It wasn't about getting in trouble. They were not open to children. They did not teach us about family planning.

She claimed that because she was ignorant about sex and other social issues, she made poor choices. In her second year at another school, she realized that she was pregnant and stopped attending school. "When I was supposed to be in second form, I got pregnant and that causes me to, you know, quit school." Some years later she enrolled at CHS but was unable to continue school due to a host of personal problems, such as being unable to focus and being late to or absent from classes:

> Well, I went to school, and sometimes I stopped at a bar and drank, and before I realize it, the time was six o'clock, and that was the time when classes begin. Sometimes I got to class at seven o'clock when I should have been there at six. Sometimes I have to attend to the kids. My gentleman lives in Placencia, and sometimes he helps, sometimes he doesn't come, and all of that got me distracted.

Her decision to drop out of school, however, was affected mostly by her lack of finances, not only to pay her school fees, but also those for her children:

The real problem was I had two kids going to school, and I couldn't afford to pay $50.00. They gave you until the end of the semester to complete the full payment, but I couldn't handle it. I had additional expenses with the two children at home, so I would say finance was a real issue. I got discouraged and stopped.

Ms. Torres

Ms. Torres is a female teacher at CHS with brown complexion and five feet four inches tall. Ms. Torres is a veteran teacher who has taught at the institution for about 10 years. She obtained her bachelor's degree in education from the University of Belize and a master's degree in education from the University of North Florida. She described her feelings towards dropouts as disappointing and explained how she had reacted to the phenomenon in the past:

I kept talking to their teachers at the institution, and we tried as much as possible to see what we could have done about the students who were dropping out of school. Sometimes it's obvious they don't come to school regularly, so we discussed with the students to get them involved. During our discussion we tried to find out what the problems were and saw how much we could assist them to stay in school.

Ms. Torres said that some of the reasons she believed students dropped out were due to a "lack of motivation, financial problems, and peer pressure." She also explained that students who were overwhelmed by suddenly becoming the head of their family were likely to drop out. Motivation from home and at school was also a contributing factor. Students who failed to perform satisfactorily and repeated grade levels often opted to stay out of school:

Some of the students just attended school. They felt that just being there made a difference in their lives. They felt that by attending school they would be

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promoted from one class to the next, so they were not motivated enough to do

their work and go on to another level.

Female students who failed to retain consistent babysitting services dropped out of school, because they had no one to take care of their young children while they attended school. Dropping out of high school was also related to students' finances or access to financial resources:

Some students who were attending school did not have enough finance, and they

depend on other people to help them financially. Sometimes those people

disappointed them and didn't pay their fees, so they had to leave school.

Sometimes the students felt that it was their obligation to pay the institution, and

then they left since they didn't have any money to pay their expenses.

Ms. Torres believed that messages from peers about school that constituted peer pressure were another reason why boys were prone to drop out of high school:

There were times when boys noticed that their friends were not going to school,

and these friends tried to influence them. They would ask them why they have to

go to school when they are out here and that they don't really need an education

to live or survive.

Lack of motivation, lack of self-esteem, and the inability to transcend negative messages about themselves contributed to the dropout of some female students who had previously dropped out of another high school. Students who dropped out under these circumstances were seen as lacking motivation and self-esteem. They were also often unable to cope with negative messages about themselves:

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Most of the girls who dropped out felt that if they had one child their life is ruined. Often their parents would encourage them to go to school , but they lack of the self-esteem to go back and try. They were not motivated enough to want to stay in school, so they would attend for a few months, and then they left school.

Mr. Johnson

Mr. Johnson is a male high school teacher at CHS, about five feet six inches in height. Before coming to teach at CHS over 11 years ago, he was an engineer by profession and received his engineering degree and training in Cuba. He was also a trained Spanish language teacher who received his teaching certification in Cuba. The interview took place at his place of work in an air conditioned room. Halfway through the interview, the building lost power due to the loss of electricity from the Belize Electricity Limited. Nevertheless, we continued with the interview.

He explained that while student dropouts presents a significant problem, it cannot "be totally eliminated, but rates can be reduced." He further explained that students drop out "because of parents, peer groups, teachers, and financial reasons." Regarding parents, he elaborated:

> They cannot afford to give their children money for school. When there is a school trip, they cannot afford to pay the expenses.   The child would stay at school while his or her classmates go on the trip. Parents often send their children to work on the farm rather than sending them on a school trip may. During break, many of the students cannot afford to buy a snack.

Poor student-teacher relationships significantly contribute to the problem:

> The way teachers treat students in the classroom and the type of punishment we give contributes to student dropout. When teachers are rude to students, use

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inappropriate language or body languages that communicate negative messages to

students, they encourage them to drop out.

. Mr. Johnson concluded that such messages lead students to make the following

conclusions about themselves and their academic careers: "He or she says I am nothing, I should

have done better than that. I am not qualified to be here, so why should I even go to school?"

Finally, negative messages in the home also add to the problem:

> Some people, for example relatives of the students would make comment about
>
> not attending school but having more money than their father who graduated from
>
> school. They would convince the students that nothing was wrong with the way
>
> they are making money, and so it was not necessary to go to school. Some
>
> students follow the advice and dropped out.

Mr. Vejerano

Mr. Vejerano is the director of CHS and about five feet and five inches in height. His

office is located at the center of a huge cement block building that is more than a hundred feet

long and about fifty feet wide. The building is located on the north-eastern end of the town where

CHS is located , just off the Caribbean Sea. The office is large by most standards and divided

into two sections. One section is the office space of the director and houses a copy machine, and

old computer, and other electronic gadgets.

The director's table where we sat to conduct the interview is a long table that could seat

10 to 12 teachers, and it was cluttered with computers, cables, a printer and a host of books on

various content areas. We had to create a space large enough for us to conduct the interview.

The director said he is "a re-hired teacher" who had more than 25 years of teaching experience.

He explained that he first came to CHS 10 years ago, and two years ago he became the director

of the institution.

Mr. Vejerano has an earned degree in Teacher Education and a diploma in Educational

Administration from the Belize Teachers' College. He describes his attitude towards dropouts as

one of the deep concerns and reiterates that student dropouts should not happen with the scope

and breath with which it occurs in this small town:

> I believe that if our females are going to succeed more than our males, then our
>
> males will have problems becoming the father figure they should be in the home.
>
> They will also suffer from an inferiority complex, especially if the female is more
>
> educated. It will be hard to maintain a relationship and communicate well when
>
> the female is educated and the male is not. The male may always be suspicious.
>
> He may not understand the words that the female used and will feel intimidated.

He noted that one of the primary reasons why students drop out of high school is because

of their inability to meet financial obligations. Often these students have low-paying jobs and

young children who are also attending school. Faced with a choice of paying the cost of going to

school or paying expenses related to their children's schooling, students usually choose the latter

and often drop out. "They have families to support, and they have to support their children who

are going to school. This is hard for an unqualified person who doesn't make enough money to

support their family."

Another reason why students drop out of high school is their inability to cope with the

discipline associated with meeting the academic rigours of schooling:

> Many students believed the institution would have allowed them to go through the
>
> motions of attending class everyday but they don't really have to do any work and

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they would be promoted from one form to the next. They didn't realize that there

was so much work to do, and they found it difficult to adjust to the new

environment they found themselves in. So they did not do their homework or

prepared for tests. They thought that in the end all was going to be well. They

weren't realizing that even if they were absent, they were still responsible to

prepare for a test.

The kind of messages students received at home has also impacted their' decision to stay

in or leave school. Students who heard negative messages at home were likely to drop out.

These negative messages, he concluded, "are more prevalent in homes and families where

poverty flourishes." He contended that females who dropped out of high school often did so

because they became pregnant or because their husbands forced them to drop out of school:

> Women normally dropped out because their husbands often forced them to
>
> discontinue going to school. They think that their partners are away from school
>
> for an extended period of time when they should be at home with their husbands.
>
> A number of them are not supportive of their wives.

CHS Narrative Snapshot Number Two.

At 5:54 p.m. on a Friday evening at CHS, a group of four female teenagers enter a third-

year classroom. Among the girls, is a tall lady pushing a stroller with a female child about two

years old. In a classroom, a teacher is busy engaging the students in a Spanish lesson on

conjugation of verbs. The other girls quickly find their seats, and the mother with the stroller

heads to a front seat in the second row of the classroom. She parks her stroller with baby

strapped inside and turns her attention to the teacher and the students who are conjugating

various verbs from the chalkboard.

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Suddenly the baby begins moving in the stroller and removes the blue flap that straps her down in her seat. She makes an awkward attempt to stand but the stroller remains in place, as the mother has set the brakes on the stroller, so it did not move. Then the baby begins touching her mother's face and murmuring sounds in an effort to get her mother's attention. She says, "ado ma." The mother holds her hands and tried to keep her at bay so she will not distract the other students or interrupt the teacher's lesson.

Getting no attention, the child climbs out of the stroller and begins to parade between the rows of students. The lesson continues and the majority of students inside the classroom seem unaware of the child. In the background, the mother whispers to the child to sit down. The baby says, "Mommy, Mommy" and begins to cry. The mother walks over and picks her up, takes her back to her seat, and cuddles her. The mother then turns her attention to her teacher and classmates and the lesson.

In another classroom, a female student with huge silver earrings stares at the chalk board in a demeanour that communicates she does not understand the day's lesson. Then she returns to her seat. She glances back at the board and then shoots her hand in the air to get the teacher's attention. The teacher nods, and she says she does not understand the lesson. The teacher smiles and says, "You need to review past books. You need to watch the news, watch novella, and speak to people in Spanish. The student responds by saying, "Sir, you are cursing me" to which the teacher said "my best advice is to go back to book 2." Then he requests that the other students in the class get into groups for group work. The female student appears unsatisfied, but she turns to the other students near her and follows the teacher's instructions.

Summary

The narrative portraits presented provide a context for understanding the values, commitments and institutional culture and character of constituents at STHS and CHS. The information outlined in the portraits provides the data that will be used to explain high school dropout in the next chapters.

CHAPTER V

DATA ANALYSIS

The previous chapter portrayed the cultural contexts of STHS and CHS. The narrative portraits were constructed after persistent observations, interviews and reviews of school documents. This chapter presents the analysis of the culture of the two schools to explore whether their environments contribute to or hinder the retention of students.

St. Thomas Strong School (Corporate: Strong-Grid, Strong-Group)

Grid Considerations

The analysis of the grid and group assessment tool revealed that 46 responses were strong, 19 were mid-strong, nine were mid-low, and 46 were weak-grid**.** The following items indicated strong-grid:

- Item1 (*I prefer a work atmosphere where authority structures are centralized and hierarchal.*)

- Item 8 (*I prefer a work atmosphere where instruction is not personalized for each student.*)

- Item 10 (*I prefer a work atmosphere where hiring decisions are made without teacher input.*)

- Item 11(*I prefer a work atmosphere where class schedules are determined without teacher input.*)

- Item 12 (*I prefer a work atmosphere where rules and procedures are numerous.*)

A grid assessment of faculty members at STHS revealed that they preferred a strong-grid work environment, where role and rule dictate and regulate personal interactions and restrain individual independence (Harris, 2005). Survey results also indicated that STHS faculty members preferred to work in a centralized, hierarchal work environment where rules and role structure the work environment. Faculty members preferred instruction that is not necessarily personalized for each student. They also favoured situations where hiring decisions are made and class schedules are constructed without their input. According to Harris (2005), in strong-grid environments, rules and regulations govern most activities and work arrangements, and provide significant control features.

The principal's authority over teachers and other subordinates at STHS was clearly visible in a number of ways. For example, on a visit to the vice-principal of academics, I requested some information from the school records. She explained that I would have to go through the proper chain of command and could only have access to information that has been approved by the principal. In this case, the principal directed the policy on access to school information. In a similar case, I requested a copy of the school newspaper from the principal, who instructed the head of English Department to provide me with the information.

At STHS, rank determined the space available to each member within the group. While most teachers in the departments worked in small cubicles apportioned to them, the principal and the two vice- principals had their own offices and other amenities such as a fan, a phone, a computer and a printer. The best space was apportioned to the principal, whose office had sparkling white tiles, was air-conditioned, and had a beautiful mahogany desk and higher priced furniture than any other office on campus.

The physical management of the classrooms also depicted a strong-grid environment. Students sat in rows of mostly five or six, and the teacher's desk was often in the left right hand corner of the classroom. Teachers' responses on the grid and group assessment tool indicated a preference for instruction that was not personalized for each student. Data from observation and interviews indicated that teachers often taught using the lecture method, and their expectations were that students stayed and worked in their assigned space. The arrangement of students in neat rows in often overcrowded classrooms made it difficult or impossible for most teachers to provide the students with individualized instruction.

Information from observations, documents, and interviews revealed that there were clear differences between the roles and responsibilities of teachers at STHS. The teacher's handbook, a school reference book, used by teachers and other employees, explains the responsibilities of the teachers in explicit details. Clear role distinctions between subject and homeroom teachers are also explained. The role distinction between other personnel such as the school counsellor, bursar, accounts clerk and administrators were also clear.

The staff at STHS was also classified according to rank. At the base were teachers followed by heads of the various departments (HODS), and their two vice-principals. As expected, the principal was the highest ranking teacher at the institution. The adherence to rigid rules or red tape was clearly visible during several school visits by the way the teachers and students behaved during an announcement over the intercom.

In one classroom, the teacher who seemed first alerted to the announcement directed the students to listen to the vice-principal's announcements on the upcoming beach school sporting activities. In another instance, both the teacher and the students immediately stopped what they were doing and focused on the announcements. It was evident that the students were attentive

because some focused their eyes directly on the speakers that were attached to the wall, while others had their eyes on the tiny red light on the announcement box and did not change their focus until the light went out.

Group Considerations

Forty-five responses denoted strong-group, 20 mid-strong group, 17 - mid-low group, and 38 weak-group. Items that magnified strong-group were:

- Item 1 *(I prefer a work atmosphere where the chain of command is all educators working collaboratively)*

- Item 5 (*I prefer a work atmosphere where my teaching performance is evaluated according to group goals, priorities, and criteria*)

- Item 7 (*I prefer a work atmosphere where curricular goals are generated collaboratively)*

- Item 10 (*I prefer a work atmosphere where people hold much allegiance/loyalty to the school)*

Results indicated that STHS' teachers preferred a collaborative work environment. Teachers also believed that their teaching performance should be evaluated according to group goals, priorities, and criteria. In addition, they believed that teachers must strive to work collaboratively and they should hold much allegiance and loyalty to the school.

To determine how the participants perceived the cultural environments of the school, after completing the grid and group assessment tool, their responses were rated on a continuum of weak to strong for both grid and group. Responses categorized as one, two, or three were rated weak-grid or group; a response of four was mid-weak group, while a response of five was rated mid-strong group. Responses that were categorized as six, seven, and eight were rated as

strong-grid or group. Table 3 summarizes the responses of the participants from the two schools according to grid and group classification.

Table 3. Summary of Grid and Group Assessment Tool Responses According to Grid and Group Classification

School	Weak Grid	Mid Weak	Mid Strong	Strong	Weak Group	Mid Weak	Mid Strong	Strong
St. Thomas	46	9	19	46	38	17	20	45
Columbus Strong	54	15	12	39	49	21	14	36

The analysis of teachers' responses indicated STHS's culture was strong-grid and strong-group. The additional analysis of school documents and observations, however, indicated that some teachers view the school as weak-group. Harris (2005) contends that one feature of weak-group environments is that work schedules are prioritized over social interaction. Observation of several teachers working in their respective departments revealed that the teachers gave more priority to grading papers, completing SBAs, or preparing for the next session over interacting with each other or students. Teachers knew that at the end of the semester they would be evaluated on an individual as opposed to group performance, so it was important for them to focus on accomplishing personal occupational or teaching tasks.

Thus, some teachers were strongly connected to the work environment and others were not. Assemblies on Tuesday mornings at STHS provided an important social forum where school leaders, students and teachers had the opportunity to communicate on matters pertaining

to the school. During these events, while in attendance physically, many teachers and the majority of the students sometimes did actively participate.

Furthermore, many teachers did not see the assembly as an important school event because many did not stand near their homeroom students during the event and many were noticeably absent while the event was taking place. One teacher, Mr. Mendez who was interviewed, provided the following insight regarding poor allegiance to the collective school:

> Sometimes … sporting events … don't proceed as smoothly as they should. For example, when students are to assemble at a certain area for sporting events you find that only a few students would assemble at the area where the sporting event is occurring , and often many of them are wondering around and unattended. (Sometimes) supervision is poor and whoever coordinates supervision doesn't seem to be aware of, or doesn't seem willing to be bothered about monitoring and ensuring that there is proper supervision of these vital programs. (Mendez)

AT STHS, some teachers worked in large groups and others worked in small groups or alone. Most worked in small groups when they were planning a test or preparing materials for students who would sit the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) exams.

Data from the interviews concurred with other data that poor relationships between teachers or persons in positions of authority and students was a key factor in the students' decision to exit academia or drop out of school early. Students' inability to cope with the many rules of the school was another factor causing students an early exit from school.

Data also indicated that student drop out may be tied to role expectations in the school environment. Direct instruction for example, places students in a subservient role with limited authority over learning outcomes, limited opportunities to collaborate and socialize in the context

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of the learning environment, and limited opportunities to interact with teachers in and outside the classroom.

The data also revealed that dropouts resented teachers talking down to them and treating them as subservient with limited rights in the hierarchy of school authority. In hierarchical schools, some constituents may be placed in their ascribed cultural roles unwillingly (Harris, 2005). Because they are placed in a subservient role unwillingly, some students refuse to confirm to rigid rules or teachers' expectations or behavior which they perceive as unreasonable.

Triangulation of the data revealed that role and status ascription, especially as it relates to relationships between students and teacher and students and persons in authority, was a key factor in students choosing to leave school early. Mr. Francisco, a dropout, revealed his frustration over the poor relationship with teachers and administrators in the following way:

> With the male teacher, it was mostly it was because he always came to class with a strong attitude and I don't know if he was vex or what his problem was. He often approached me in a way I found distasteful. He acted like he could make any request and I had to comply. Often he did this in a rude way and I am someone who doesn't like to be pushed around. If he has asked with respect, I would have been more cooperative, but he was very disrespectful. He was rough and wanted to scold me.

Due to their subservient position and their inferior status in the school's authority structure, students were often unable to secure recourse from the principal or his two vice-principals even when they perceived they had been unfairly treated by teachers. One dropout explained it this way: "Yes sir, but he didn't accept what I was saying. He listened and accepted

what the teachers said. This statement indicates that students felt that they could not be treated reasonable or fairly once a teacher was involved.

Activities and Interactions

Evidence from school documents, teacher interviews, and observations indicated that the practice of adhering to defined rules and roles as consistent in many hierarchical schools. The recording of dropout data by school officials and the use of this data to develop counselling programs for students who were at risk of dropping out because of academic deficiencies or disciplinary problems indicated that school authorities had made some effort to arrest the problem. Where students were compliant, rigid rules and defined roles and expectations are helpful in keeping students in school. To the contrary, however, analysis of interviews, observations, and school documents indicated that the structure in bureaucratic schools such as St. Thomas must be aligned with more flexibility than rigidity.

The use of direct instruction at STHS, for example, ensured that the teacher was able to accomplish his or her teaching tasks. However, this method limited student mobility and social interaction, and often led to disciplinary problems in the classroom. When students acted beyond the norm of acceptable behavior, rigid rules and penalties were instituted against them to ensure compliance. Figure 4 summarizes the grid and group orientation of STHS.

Figure 5.1 STHS Strong-Grid/Strong-Group Corporate Culture and Dropouts

- **Group's interests prioritized over individual's**
- **Minimal autonomy**
- **Specifically defined roles, rules, and responsibilities**
- **Centralized power and authority**
- **Hierarchical authority structure**

Strong-Grid

Weak-Group

Strong-Group

Weak-Grid

Manifestation of Factors Contributing to Student Dropout

- Strong focus on teacher-centered rather than learner-centered instruction

- Role and status ascription leading to labeling "problem students"

- Weak allegiance to school among dropouts

- Disconnected social interaction among teachers and students

Adapted from *Key strategies to improve schools: How to apply them contextually*, by E. L

Harris, 2005, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Columbus Strong School (Individualistic: Weak-Grid, Weak-Group)

Grid Considerations

The assessment tool revealed that fifty-four of the teachers' responses were in the weak-grid category, 15 in mid-low, 12 in mid-high and 39 in strong- grid. The questions that signified weak-grid were:

- Item1 (*I prefer a work atmosphere where authority structures are decentralized and non-hierarchal*

- Item 2 (*I prefer a work atmosphere where job responsibilities are ill- defined.)*

- Item 8 (*I prefer a work atmosphere where instruction is personalized for each student.)*

- Item 10 (I prefer a work atmosphere where hiring decisions are made with teacher input.)

Results indicated that teachers preferred an environment where structures were decentralized and non- hierarchal, job responsibilities were ill defined, instruction was personalized for each student, and their input regarding hiring decisions was required. Graph 3 explains the individual responses of teachers on the grid and group assessment tool.

Forty-nine of the teachers 'responses were weak- group, 21 were mid-low group, 14 were mid-high group and 36 were strong-group. The questions that signified weak-group were:

- Item 4 *(I prefer a teaching atmosphere where teaching and learning are planned and organized around individual teacher interest.)*

- Item 5 (*I prefer an atmosphere where teaching performance is evaluated according to individual teacher goals and priorities*.)

- Item 6 (*I prefer an atmosphere where teachers work in isolation towards goals and objectives.*)

- Item 7 (*I prefer an atmosphere where curricular goals are generated individually*)

- Item 11 (*I prefer an atmosphere where teacher and administrator responsibilities are ambiguous /fragmented with no accountability*)

Data obtained from the grid and group assessment tool of CHS indicate a weak-grid and weak-group social environment. The weak-grid environment is magnified by the types of role distinction. Weak-grid environments reflect few role distinctions and few institutional rules restrain individual autonomy (Harris, 2005).

Mr. Vejerano, the school's director, was clearly the leader of the school, yet his position was not viewed as. A review of his numerous conversations with teachers indicated that most teachers saw him as "another colleague on staff, rather than the director." According to Harris (2005) one feature of individualistic schools is an open door policy where teachers, students, and school leaders have limited restrictions on interactions due to roles or status within the school organization.

At CHS, students freely interacted with the director in and outside his office as they did with the teachers. Students did not need to seek permission from their teachers or others in authority to speak with Mr. Vejerano. Like the interaction of teachers with Mr. Vejerano, they were free to have informal conversations with him about matters pertaining to their schooling without rigid rules preventing such interaction. In individualistic environments, relationships and experiences are not bound by obligatory official rules of tradition (Harris, 2005).

Teachers in an individualistic context generally reject formal organization and structure (Harris, 2005). Data from multiple sources indicated that the school had limited organizational structures.

A weak-grid environment is further characterized by the limited number of roles and positions held by individuals in the school. Only two persons at CHS, the director and assistant director had distinct roles. The other roles of the other 13 members of staff were unclear. The analysis of school documents and observations indicated that the lack of consistent clear organization structures was responsible for the increasing number of students who dropped out of this school. With only two persons having positional power, there was no indication that one teacher had the responsibility, for example, to record the number of students who were dropping out and to plan intervention programs or enact policies designed to curb student dropout.

One feature of individualistic schools is that they encourage or promote the development of informal channels of communication (Harris, 2005). At CHS, informal lines of communication were encouraged as teachers often gathered in the director's office for informal conversations regarding their individual concerns before hurrying to class. Teachers also have unrestricted access to the director's office. The informal communication lines were also extended to students who could walk in and talk with the principal without a formal appointment or permission from other people in authority at the school. Informal lines of communication such as these may be helpful in keeping students in school because they permit students to engage in discourse with teachers and school leaders regarding problems that might lead to their exit from academia early.

Teachers also indicated that they preferred flexible job responsibilities and autonomy to define their job responsibilities with little interference from school authorities. Teachers in

individualistic schools prefer an environment where autonomy reigns and where power and authority are in the sphere of control of teachers (Harris, 2005). The autonomy of teachers was evident in the environment because there were few restrictions on them to use school resources such as the computer, printer, or photocopier in the director's office. Consequently, it allows teachers to effectively plan and prepare well for students who might be at risk for dropping out. However, without defined and structured parameters where reporting responsibilities and accountability are concerned, it is easy for teachers to fall short of preparing well for students who are at risk of dropping out.

For example, although students were obligated to wear uniforms, there were no rules restricting them to the type of footwear they wore or to the kinds of clothes they could wear to school. Again, the absence of structure and defined rules and roles made it harder for students to remain disciplined and focus on academic pursuits.

CHS teachers also preferred instruction that was individualized or personalized for each student. The review of data from observation and interviews revealed that the majority of teachers at CHS, for example, allowed female students to bring their young children to class with them while they learned in class. In this way, instruction was personalized to meet the educational needs of the mother who would otherwise be unable to attend class if she had to stay home to care for her child. Harris (2005) contends that the school facility is viewed as a vehicle for teaching the individual rather than as a symbol of community interaction.

Personalized instruction thus facilitated students remaining in school. Although the young children brought to class were often a distraction, their presence indicated that this permissive environment allowed at least two things to happen. First, students were afforded the opportunity to learn despite their babysitting challenges. Second, service to individual students

was paramount in this environment. Finally, survey results indicated that teachers preferred to have no input in hiring decisions. Data from observations and teachers interviews indicated that teacher preferred that these powers be vested in the hands of the director.

Group Considerations

As indicated through the grid and group assessment tools, CHS is a weak-group environment. Teachers preferred teaching and learning environments that were planned and organized around the individual teachers' and students' goals and interests. Teachers reported an overwhelming preference for teaching performance evaluations according to individual teacher goals, priorities, and criteria. Although teachers were provided with general rules for classroom management and instruction, they practiced their craft based on their experience, knowledge, and cooperation with others. Strong performance goals are consistent with individualistic environments, which allow freedom to exercise autonomy in determining the best strategies for their classroom (Harris, 2005). At CHS, teachers believe that accountability is tied chiefly to personal responsibility.

Although the director often spoke of teacher accountability, there was no evidence that teachers had to provide lesson plans to school administrators. Neither was there any evidence that teachers were evaluated on performance, nor asked to leave or remain at the school. Limited accountability of school leaders and the students at CHS allowed students to drop out without direct intervention from school management, because there was no structure in place to arrest the factors in the school environment that may have been contributing to the problems.

Activities and Interactions

A review of limited school records found no evidence of the term dropout in school records or documents although teachers who had taught at CHS for more than two years and

students who had dropped out of the school for a comparable period of time understood what the term meant. One primary feature of individualist schools is personal responsibility which includes being proactive, making ones choices consciously and carefully, and being responsible for what one does or fails to do (Harris, 2005).

No rigid rules governed student-student or teacher-student interactions. Instead, there are limited rules that are permeated by respect for the individual teacher-student existed at CHS. Classes were taught mostly by direct instruction, but most students are free to move about in class and learn in unrestricted small groups or clusters. According to Harris (2005), teacher and student productivity is derived from the motivation to personal responsibility and goal setting. Figure 5 summarizes the grid and group orientation of CHS.

The individualistic weak group environment is evident by social interactions. Harris (2005) notes that individuals in individualistic environments are not constrained by imposed formal rules or traditions. While some teachers at CHS chose to interact freely and frequently with each other and the director, other teachers came minutes before they were scheduled to teach and did not interact with other members of staff. When they arrived, they were courteous and polite, but immediately moved on to their classes to teach. They visited the director's office only when they needed chalk or some other resource or when they needed to copy hand-outs for their class. It appeared that teaching at CHS was merely a job for them. In individualistic schools, there is no real sense of ownership or swell of allegiance from their constituents (Harris, 2005). Similar affiliations were demonstrated among the student population at Columbus Strong School.

Students, for example, who often were employed, came to class when they had completed the work day, and there was often no real urgency to start classes at the same time with the rest

of their colleagues. Most students had little time to cooperate or collaborate with others since

they were occupied otherwise and chose to cooperate individually with others at a time and place

most convenient to them.

Figure 5.2. STHS Strong-Grid/Strong-Group Corporate Culture and Dropouts

- Teachers reject formal organizational structures
- Limited number of roles or positions held by individuals
- There is an informal channel of communication
- There is a high level of teachers autonomy
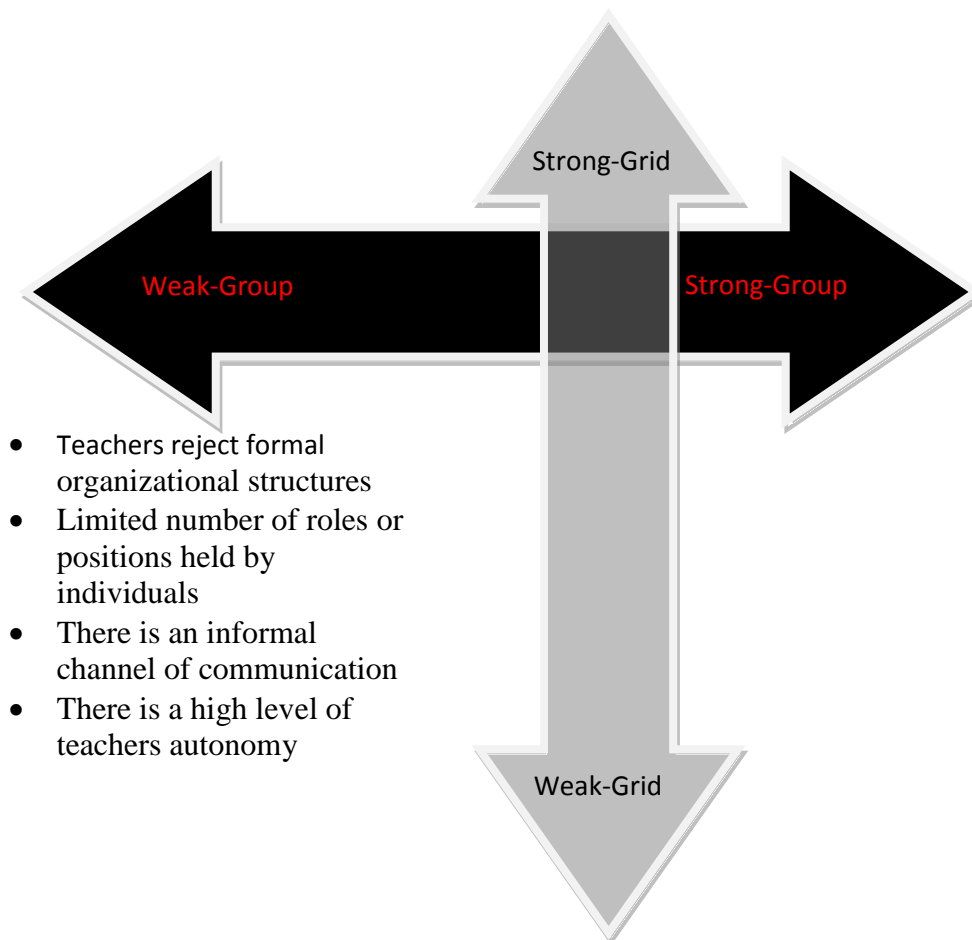
Manifestation of Factors Contributing to Student Dropout

- Teachers decide best practices for instruction and teacher control
- Limited organizational manpower to address educational problems
- Teachers are less accountable to management stakeholders or their wards.
- Planning, preparation and decision making are done mostly individually

Adapted from *Key strategies to improve schools: How to apply them contextually*, by E. L Harris,

2005, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

Comparison and Contrast of St. Thomas Strong School and Columbus Strong school

St. Thomas Strong School and Columbus Strong Schools were the focus of this study on high school dropouts. Table 6 displays the student enrollment, number of faculty members, level of participation in this study and school cultural prototype of the two participating schools.

Table 6. Comparison of STHS and CHS

School	Enrollment	Faculty	Survey Response	% Received	Culture
STHS	862	57	10	100	Corporate
CHS	96	13	10	100	individualist

Grid Considerations

A review of the data for both STHS and CHS determined that the former was a strong grid environment while the latter was classified as a weak grid environment. While STHS teachers worked in a hierarchal and centralized environment, it was clear that at CHS teachers preferred to work in an environment where there were limited or no formal organizational structures.

The rigid red tape rules and structure of STHS curtailed teacher autonomy. By contrast, teachers at CHS were able to exercise a strong degree of autonomy. The distinct presence of many well defined roles and rules was also clearly on display at STHS. At CHS, however, roles and rules were ill defined and only two individuals held official positions at the school.

Another pertinent distinction between the two schools was the method of communication. At STHS, communication between school constituents was described as formal and structured. To the contrary, consistent communication at CHS was often informal and situational.

Group Considerations

One striking contrast between STHS and CHS was how the teachers focused on teaching and student learning. STHS teachers focused primarily on teaching and learning task, while CHS teachers focused primarily on individual student's development. Both schools also differed in the extent of autonomy teachers had in determining best practices for classroom management and instruction. At STHS, rigid rules and roles descriptions determine how teachers teach and manage discipline in their classrooms. However, at CHS teachers had more autonomy to decide best practices to use for classroom instruction and control they utilized in their respective classrooms.

Another notable difference between the schools was accountability. At St. Thomas, teachers were accountable because rigid rules and role distinctions demanded accountability. However, at Columbus High School, accountability was often tied to autonomy and personal responsibility. Constituents at both schools displayed a weak allegiance to the collective school and engaged in limited collaboration with other members of their schools.

<center>**Drop Out Overview**</center>

Poor Relationships and Insensitivity

According to students' responses, the most significant reason why students dropped out of school was because they had poor relationships with teachers or other authority figures in the school, such as the school counsellors or principals. Dropouts claimed these poor relationships with teachers were developed because school leaders and teachers were "insensitive, harsh," or lacked the tact to address sensitive issues. For example, reminding students that they had not paid their bills or talking about their personal problems, such as in the case of one student who was facing remand to prison, created contentious relationships between teachers and students. When students felt disrespected, they acted out, were disciplined and eventually dropped out.

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However, there were no consequences for teachers even when it seemed obvious that their insensitivity to students created an environment that encouraged students to drop out. Due to the absence or enforcement of written school standards governing treatment of students when they broke school rules, teachers often independently decided how they would deal with these infractions. Many teachers were ill equipped because of limited education or experience and often resorted to disciplinary measures that were punitive rather than corrective.

Naturally punitive measures of discipline acted to push students out of the school system. In a school where high numbers of students are likely to drop out because they lack discipline, the onus is on teachers to behave differently. Minor infractions such as not having uniform, talking out of turn, or disrupting classes unnecessarily can be dealt with using alternative measures of discipline that correct the infraction and remediate behaviour, but keep the student in school. It is also important that teachers use emotional intelligence to understand their wards more fully.

If teachers adapt emotional intelligence in dealing with students, it is less likely that they will be perceived by students as harsh and insensitive. School administrators also have a role to play in this issue. They must promote better ways to treat students among their faculty and they must insist on consequences for those who don't even as they keep a watchful eye for those students who have run afoul of school rules and demand unwarranted justice.

Teacher Behaviour

Teachers who were considered "harsh" or "impatient" often seemed to resort to punishing students for the slightest of infractions. Punishment usually resulted in the accumulation of demerits and thus distrust and lack of communication between students and teachers. When

students received strong numbers of demerits they were suspended or expelled, and this often resulted in them desiring to cease their educational pursuits.

Personal and School Discipline

Another reason why students said that they stopped attending school was because they lacked the discipline required by their respective institutions. Fighting, bullying, not tucking in shirt, talking back to teachers, talking out of turn and getting out of their seats during instruction were some infractions mentioned that resulted in students accumulating a strong numbers of demerits. They viewed themselves as not having the requisite skills necessary to be successful in school.

Students also dropped out because they had academic challenges or difficulties that prevented them from successfully completing school. Many found it difficult to catch up in their classes after they were consistently late or absent. Disciplinary measures instituted by the school where students were placed on suspensions resulted in them missing sessions and falling behind their colleagues. Students also faced academic difficulties, because they learned at a slower pace than the rest of their classmates and therefore had a hard time catching up.

Financial Difficulties

Financial difficulties or challenges were also cited as causes of students dropping out. Older strong school students with children, for example, stopped attending, because they could not meet their educational expenses plus the added cost of sending their own children to school. Others could not meet the financial obligations, because they were unemployed. Taking over as head of the family because a parent had died or parents were divorcing created financial difficulties and was cited as another reason for leaving their academic quest. Some dropped out

because their parents could not afford tuition costs and the day to day expenditure of sending them to school.

Negative Messages

Direct or implied messages that conveyed to students that they were "not made for school" created ill feelings in students toward teachers. Dropouts and teachers indicated that negative messages from teachers and family members contributed to students disengaging from school and eventually dropping out. Messages from home, school and their peers that place a weak emphasis on education or encouraged students to depart academia early resulted in students' nonattendance. "You don't need school to survive" is one example of a negative message that dropouts said they received consistently.

Lack of Family Support

The lack of family support was cited as another significant reason why students dropped out. Young females who were married or in common law relationships often dropped out because their spouse discouraged them from attending school or did not support them in their academic pursuits. Some students dropped out because they did not receive support or assistance in meeting academic deadlines for academic tasks. This led to academic difficulties, which resulted in the students making the decision to drop out.

Transitional Difficulties

Transitional difficulties were also listed as a reason why students dropped out of strong school. Students who could not adjust to strong school because of academic weakness often dropped out. Students also dropped out because they could not adapt to the social climate or culture of Strong school.

Summary

An analysis of STHS indicated that it is a strong-grid and strong-group environment. The analysis also indicated that CHS has a weak-grid and weak-group environment. Data yielded that the presence or absence of structure and the extent of the autonomy of teachers in each school were related to factors that either inhibited or prevented students from dropping out or staying in school. The following chapter will discuss the findings as it relates to dropouts, explains the implications of this study, and makes some recommendations regarding high school dropouts.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RRECOMMENDATIONS, AND BENEFITS

The student dropout problem has consequences for communities, countries and the world. The problem needs urgent attention because high school dropouts are vulnerable to unemployment, drug use, and incarceration in addition to being recipients of welfare (Strom & Boster, 2007)

Although the plight of high school dropouts has increasingly gained attention from researchers and educators worldwide, many schools and educators have had little or no success in reducing the numbers of students who drop out of high school each year Davis (2006). According to Harris (2005) most problems in school are rooted in school culture, and Douglas's typology of grid and group can help in understanding the interrelationships that exist among school constituents in their educational environment.

In this study, in order to understand why selected students dropped out of Belizean high schools, I used naturalistic inquiry to study two southern Belize high schools with different school environments. I also used multiple data sources, including survey, observations, interviews, documents and artifacts.

Summary of Findings

Four research questions guided the research study:

1. What factors lead to high school dropouts in Belize?

2. How does grid and group theory explain these factors?

3. How effective is grid and group assessment tool in explaining why high school student's dropout in Belize?

4. What other realties are revealed outside of grid and group assessment tool?

Discussion Regarding Research Question 1: What factors lead to high school dropouts in Belize?

The analysis of the data indicated that teachers and students had different opinions regarding why students dropped out. Teachers explained that students dropped out of high school due to financial difficulties and negative messages heard in the home or from peers. In addition, teachers cited the lack of family support and academic challenges as two other reasons why students dropped out of high school.

Unlike teachers, dropouts believed that the main reason they dropped out was due to weak or poor relationships with teachers or persons in positions of power. The inability to surmount academic challenges was another reason dropouts decided to leave school early. Both teachers and dropouts explained that the lack of discipline contributed to students dropping out. Both dropouts and teachers also agreed that the students' inability to cope with academic challenges, rules, and regulations were reasons students stopped attending high school.

Discussion Regarding Research Question 2: How does grid and group theory explain these factors?

Grid and group can be used to explain how environmental factors affect student dropout. STHS was a rigid role and rule bound corporate school. Although this type of environment may provide structure for some students, it can push out non-compliant students. Adhering to rigid rules or relying on discipline or punishment stiffled creative classroom management. Since students were often placed in subservient positions with limited rights in the hierarchy of school authority, they perceived that they could not obtain recourse from those in authority. Thus, they became disillusioned, rebelled, and dropped out. Finally, a review of different data sources

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indicated that STHS provided limited opportunities for collaboration among constituents in the learning environment. Weak students who need scaffolding, learning enrichment and nurturing may be disadvantaged. Consequently, they may experience academic challenges, and dropout.

At CHS, limited organizational structure in an individualistic environment provided challenges for school constituents to plan together and to enact policies aimed at curbing dropout numbers. The absence of rules and regulations that tie accountability to job description performance and yearly appraisal may also be related to the continuing numbers of students who dropped out of high school. In individualistic schools, accountability is tied to personal teacher responsibility and this may encourage some teachers to strive for the highest standard. However, lax rules may create loopholes for serving students at risk of dropping out. In the case of St Thomas High school, which the grid and group assessment tool determined to be corporate, it is important to note that there was also weak allegiance to the school by many, as well as limited collaboration among constituents.

Figure 6 and 7 below provide the summary of grid and group for each school and the supporting evidence regarding how each of these two school either encourage students to remain in or affect their drop out of school.

Figure 6. Relationships of St Thomas and Cultural Context and Manifestation of Dropouts

Corporate Culture (Strong-Grid/Strong-Group)

- Group interest prioritized over individuals
- Minimal Autonomy
- Specifically defined roles ,rules ,and responsibilities
- Centralized power and authority
- Hierarchal authority structure

Manifestation of factors contributing to dropout
- There is a strong focus on teacher -centered rather than learner-centered instruction
- Role and status ascription leading to labeling "problem students"
- Weak allegiance to school among dropouts.
- Disconnected social interaction among teachers and students

Adapted from *Key strategies to improve schools: How to apply them contextually*, by E. L

Harris, 2005, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Figure 7. Relationship of Columbus High School Context and Manifestation of Dropouts

Individualist Culture (Weak-Grid/Weak-Group)

- Teachers reject formal organizational structures
- Limited number of roles or positions held by individuals
- There is an informal channel of communication
- There is a high level of teachers autonomy

Explanation and Manifestation of dropout

- Teachers decide best practices for instruction and teacher control
- Limited organizational manpower to address educational problems
- Teachers are less accountable to management stakeholders or their wards.
- Planning, preparation and decision making are done mostly individually

Adapted from *Key strategies to improve schools: How to apply them contextuall,y* by E. L

Harris, 2005, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Discussion Regarding Research Question 3: How effective is grid and group assessment tool in explaining why high school student's dropout in Belize?

Grid and group assessment was very helpful in describing and analyzing how different schools operate and function due to organizational structure and culture. The analysis of different data sources indicated that different organizational factors were responsible for either inhibiting or encouraging students to stay in school or drop out. Although grid and group was helpful in explaining how school culture influenced the number of students who dropped out of high school, I could not use grid and group to explain how ethnic culture influenced dropout. I could not also use grid and group to explain the effects of geographic student origin on dropouts.

Discussion Regarding Research Question 4: What other realties are revealed outside of grid and group assessment tool?

An analysis of data from interviews indicated that that some cultural norms or beliefs contributed to the dropout of some students from specific ethnic populations. Although I was unable to use grid and group to further explain this phenomenon, the influence of family culture and the larger society on students as it relates to dropouts deserves more attention. Data gathered from teachers and dropouts indicate the existence of culturally accepted norms in some communities or cultures. For example, it is generally accepted in some Mayan communities that boys not girls should be given first preference when it comes to receiving an education.

This bias is often magnified in these communities, for instance, by the way some parents react to male or female children who drop out. If a male child fails or drops out, he may be given a second chance to continue. To the contrary female students are rarely given the same opportunities.

It was also difficult to use grid and group to explain how the passive resistance of many

constituents to the school principal contributed to students dropping out. Triangulation of

different data sources also indicated that the culture at STHS was influenced by sometimes overt

or subtle political forces. Grid and group assessment tool, however, could not be used

adequately to explain definitively whether these factors had any bearing to student dropout.

Conclusions

The analysis of data from STHS and CHS revealed differences in the cultural

environments of both schools. This study used the grid and group assessment tool to determine

the schools' cultures. The analysis of STHS school culture determined the school to be

corporate. Triangulation of several data sources indicated a high grid culture. For example,

space was apportioned according to rank. While teachers had to share a department room and

others facilities such as fans, computers, and printers; each of the three principals had their own

offices and they did not share facilities with anyone else.

At STHS, teachers worked in large or small groups or sometimes alone although the

majority worked in small groups. Teachers often worked in groups when they were planning a

test or preparing materials for students who would sit the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC)

Exams. This is indicative of a corporate strong-group culture where the school's or group's

interest are prioritized over the individaul's one.

The analysis of different data sources also indicated that administrators and teachers were

interested in reducing the number of students who dropped out of high school. This was

manifested by the initiatives and programs undertaken by school leaders and teachers. The

recording of dropout data and its use by school authorities intimated that schools leaders were

interested in resolving the problem. The involvement of administrators and teachers in this

school initiative indicate that teachers understood that collaboration was essential in reducing the number of students who dropped out. In a corporate school team goals and game plans are vital to success (Harris, 2005).

However, there were some cultural factors that continued to either inhibit or promote students to drop out. A heavy reliance on discipline or punishment was one of these factors. Apart from rigid structure and rules, two other cultural factors provided insights regarding students staying in school or deciding to exit academia early. The first was how students were taught and the second was how they socialized in the classroom. Data from the observation, school documents, and student interviews also indicated that student dropped out because of role expectations. For example students were often placed in a subservient position with limited authority over learning outcomes, limited opportunities to collaborate and socialize in the context of the learning environment, and limited opportunities to build relationships with teachers and peers based on trust and respect. Data from interviews and observation indicated that students resented teachers talking down to them and treating them as subservient. They also resented what they perceived as a school structure where they had limited rights in the hierarchy of school authority.

The grid and group assessment tool was also used to determine the school culture at CHS. Data obtained from the grid and group assessment tools of CHS indicated an individualistic school culture. Individualistic school cultures promote a social environment that is weak grid and weak group. The weak-grid environment is magnified by the types of role distinction. Weak-grid environments reflect a few role distinctions and a few institutional rules that restrain autonomy (Harris, 2005). Triangulation of the data at CHS indicated that the position of director was occupational rather than hierarchal.

The individualist environment at CHS was also magnified by a few restrictions on mobility or access. In this environment, teachers and students exercised a lot of autonomy over mobility and access to information. This weak-grid environment at CHS was also magnified by authority structures in the school. CHS had limited organizational structures. One feature of this limited organization structure was the limited number of roles and positions held by individuals in the school. The analysis of school documents and observations indicated that the lack of consistent, clear, organization structures was responsible for the increasing number of students who dropped out of this school.

With limited school structure, the school administration was ill equipped to plan intervention programs or enact policies designed to curb student dropout. CHS was an individualist school that promoted informal communication. Data from interviews indicated that one reason why there were poor student teacher relationships was because some teachers were tactless in their approach to get students who were having financial difficulties to pay their bills. Instead of talking to their teachers about these issues, students often resorted to cutting or skipping classes. In most cases, this led to students encountering academic difficulties and dropping out of school. Promoting informal lines of communication is helpful in encouraging students to exercise their autonomy to engage teachers and school leaders who they perceived as willing to help them resolve their difficulties. This can be helpful in reducing the number of students who drop out. It is also important to institute a structure, of reporting responsibilities where teachers are held accountable for preventing students who are at risk from dropping out.

CHS was a weak-group environment. A review of the grid and group assessment tool indicated that teachers at CHS preferred teaching and learning environments that are planned and organized around individual teacher's goals and interest. Observation and a review of school

documents, for example, provided limited evidence of rules or structures that required teacher accountability. Limited accountability to school leaders and the students at CHS was one reason why students dropped out without direct intervention from school management.

The analysis of data also indicated that there were many reasons why students dropped out. These reasons include poor relationships with teachers or other persons in authority discipline, and financial challenges. Negative messages from teachers or family members were another key factor in student dropout. Peer pressure was cited as another reason why students dropped out. A review of teacher responses on the grid and group assessment tool indicated that teachers at CHS preferred teaching and learning environments that are planned and organized around individual teacher's goals and interest.

Another factor that was directly tied to student dropout at CHS was teacher accountability. Observation and a review of school documents, for example, provided limited evidence of rules or structures that required teacher accountability. Limited accountability to school leaders and the students at CHS was one reason why students dropped out. There was no direct intervention from the school management. This happened since there was no structure in place to mitigate the factors that contributed to student dropout.

Benefits

The findings of this study has implications to research, theory , and practice . Following is an explanation.

Research

In contributing to research, this study provides insights on reasons why students may be dropping out of high school from a cultural perspective. This study is also important to research because it may point to other research frameworks that would more adequately explain the

dropout phenomenon in Belize. It is further significant to research because it is one of the first studies that contribute to the body of literature on student dropout in Belize.

Since the research findings indicate that families and relationships are important, further research can be conducted to determine the influence of the larger society and family on students' decisions to remain in school. A theory by Granovetter (1973), for example, may benefit research by showing or explaining the relationship of strength of ties and social networks on student dropout.

Theory

The study was important to theory because the use of the grid and group theoretical framework offered insights into the culture of Belizean schools. It was useful in theorizing what grid and group orientations were most pervasive or passive in selected Belizeans schools and why. This knowledge can be used to help build or develop cultures in schools that promote educational success. The study was also important to theory since the use of the grid and group theoretical framework pointed to other frameworks that can also explain high school dropouts in Belize. Two other frameworks that may complement grid and group findings are religious and political frameworks.

Implications for Practice

The grid and group findings can be used by teachers, administrators, school boards and other stakeholders in education to agitate either for or to implement policies and procedures that promote school environments and practices that encourage students to remain in school. This study was also important since its findings may prompt school managements and leaders to

institute a comprehensive review of school cultures using the grid and group prototype to determine the effect of practice on students either staying in or dropping out of school.

The findings in this research study indicate that poor student teacher relationship was a major factor in students dropping out of high school. Because there are few or no standards regarding how teachers should address behavioural or disciplinary problems, it is recommended that national standards be developed to address proper ways for treating students. It is also recommended that schools develop programs or policies that address the transitional difficulties that students encounter when they enter their first year of high school in Belize.

This study is important in determining the root causes why selected students in southern Belize dropped out of secondary schools. The information can serve as a catalyst for secondary schools in Toledo and Stann Creek to begin assessing their school environments to determine their effect on high school dropout. The information may also prompt school leaders to promote cultures in their schools that reduce the dropout rate.

Recommendations

It is imperative that teachers in Belizean secondary schools use instructional methods that complement more collaboration and social learning. This is important especially in environments where students are likely to disengage because of rigid or lax rules and organizational structure. Beck, Hart, and Kosnik (2002) explain that collaborative learning activities are essential because they magnify real life and thus teach collaborative skills that are needed in the real world. It is also important that attention be given to how information is taught in Belizean secondary schools.

Although it is prudent to adhere to standards of the national secondary school curriculum for the purposes of ensuring student competence nationally and regionally for CXC purposes, the

time has come to give serious attention to how the curriculum in secondary schools is taught. Today, teaching the curriculum has become complicated by different student backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles. Triangulation of data indicated that two issues about the secondary school curriculum which must be resolved adequately to increase the number of students who succeed and decrease the numbers who drop out. The first is to provide many learning experiences that allow students opportunities to manipulate, explore, and experiment. The second is to afford students learning opportunities where they are allowed to use technology, tools and gadgets that they are familiar with to stimulate learning in the classroom. Prensky (2001) explains: "They've been networked most of their lives. They have little patience for lectures, step-by-step logic, and 'tell-test' instruction" (p. 179). The use of modern technological tools in the classroom may help to reduce the number of students who drop out due to discipline or behavioural problems. A curriculum that is focused on student learning, rather than instruction and discipline, can help to minimize disciplinary problems that lead to drop out. This curriculum would further be beneficial because it would provide structure and ensure minimal disciplinary interruptions, since students would otherwise be occupied.

Findings from the study indicated that students believed that they dropped out because they had poor relationships with teachers and other persons in position of authority such as vice-principals and school counsellors. Thus, teachers and leaders in Belizean secondary schools must communicate and employ emotional intelligence aimed at engaging students in the discourse regarding what can be done to improve their learning experiences. This will help to keep students in school. School leaders must afford teachers and student opportunities to dialogue informally. These opportunities for discourse, which build and strengthen relationships between these two groups in the school, must form an integral part of the school's culture

Stronger relationships will provide informal opportunities for staff and students to interact and socialize outside of normal class hours. In this informal setting, school constituents can begin to reduce any perceived notions of mistrust or lack of communication that exist.

Finally, secondary schools in Belize will benefit from the institution of peer mentoring and tutoring programs that will develop nurturing and rewarding relationships between all constituents in the school. Peer mentoring and tutoring programs are effective methods for making schools attractive and for preventing student dropout (Somers & Pilliasky, 2004).

But the study of high school dropouts has other areas that must be explored. Thus, it is recommended that a study using grid and group be replicated in a rural high school in Toledo. It would also be useful to do the study using some other framework than grid and group. Because of the diverse ethic cultures in Toledo, a study using a cultural framework might provide insight regarding how ethnic culture influences student drop out. Because of my experience as a high school dropout and my challenges overcoming the hurdles of persistence, I recommend a study using a persistence framework to explain student dropout.

Reflection

There is growing interest in the factors that encourage students to avoid or drop out of school (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). Although much is known about why students drop out, many schools are still grappling with curbing the numbers of students who drop out of high school. The use of grid and group theory in this study was important in distinguishing what constituents perceived as their schools culture verses what was manifested in the school's true culture. For example, teachers at STHS indicated strong allegiance to the school, but further analysis of data indicated weak allegiance. Similarly, constituent indicated positive social interaction and relationship management, but the study concluded that teacher collaboration and

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social interaction in these environments were weak. It also concluded that teachers collaborated in groups smaller than 4 participants.

The study found similar contradictions at CHS. Whereas, CHS focused on individualizing instruction, some of its cultural practices were responsible for increasing student dropouts. These include teacher insensitivity, limited organizational structure, and limited teacher accountability. The use of multiple data sources was effective in strengthening credibility and trustworthiness of the study. The use of grid and group was an effective tool for summarizing the realities of school construct and culture.

Despite the findings on high school dropouts, this study cannot be concluded without underscoring the importance of teachers who care. More than two decades ago, poor teacher student relationship was responsible for my dropping out of school. While it was harsh or rude teachers and school leaders that encouraged me to disengage and drop out; it was sensitive , empathetic , and caring teachers that gave me the will to succeed against all odds after returning to school in 1985.

Almost 30 years later when I think of my own dropping out of high school, I am convinced that more students can succeed in high school if teachers are well trained and they have emotional intelligence to relate to students at the most basic level.

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Grid and Group Cultural Awareness Tool

Please enter the name of your school site:

Total years of service at this school site:

INSTRUCTIONS

Below are 24 items. Each item reflects a continuum from 1 to 8. For each item, read the entire item and choose the statement that you think best represents your **school site** (i.e., *not the school district*). Then, on the continuum, mark the button that represents the degree to which that statement applies to your **school site** (i.e., *not the school district*).

There are no "good" or "bad" responses to these items. The numbers 1and 8 represent extremes along a continuum, with numbers 2-7 providing a continuous scale between the two extremes. For example, if the statement were:

In my school we drink: Weak Coffee (1).......Strong Coffee (8), the strength of the coffee

could be indicated along the continuum of 1 through 8; however, one answer would not be better than another.

GRID CONSIDERATIONS

1. Authority structures are:

Decentralized/   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Centralized/
non-hierarchical   hierarchical
                      1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

2. Job responsibilities are:

Ill-defined   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Well defined
              1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

3. Individual teachers have:

Full autonomy in   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   No autonomy in
textbook selection   textbook selection
                    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

4. Individual teachers have:

Full autonomy in
generating their   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   No autonomy in
educational goals   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   generating their
                                                             educational goals

5. Individual teachers have:

Full autonomy in
choosing instructional   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   No autonomy in
methods/strategies   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   choosing instructional
                                                                  methods/strategies

6. Students are:

Encouraged to participate/take ownership of their education   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Discouraged from participating/taking ownership of their education
                  1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

7. Teachers obtain instructional resources through:

Individual negotiation   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Administrative allocation
                1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

8. Instruction is:

Personalized for each student   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Not personalized for each student
              1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

9. Individual teachers are motivated by:

Intrinsic/self-defined interests   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Extrinsic/institutional rewards
              1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

10. Hiring decision are made:

With teacher input   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Without teacher input
             1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

11. Class schedules are determined:

With teacher input   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Without teacher input
             1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

12. Rules and procedures are:

Few   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Numerous
      1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

GROUP CONSIDERATIONS

1. Chain of command is:

Individual teachers working alone   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   All educators working collaboratively
      1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

2. Educators' socialization and work are:

Separate/dichotomous activities   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Incorporated/united activities
      1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

3. Extrinsic rewards primarily benefit:

The individual   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Everyone at the school site
      1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

4. Teaching and learning are planned/organized around:

Individual teacher goals/interests   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Group goals/interests
      1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

5. Teaching performance is evaluated according to:

Individual teacher goals, priorities, and criteria   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Group goals, priorities, and criteria
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

6. Teachers work:

In isolation toward goals and objectives   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Collaboratively toward goals and objectives
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

7. Curricular goals are generated:

Individually   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Collaboratively
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

8. Communication flows primarily through:

Individual, informal networks   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Corporate, formal networks
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

9. Instructional resources are controlled/owned:

Individually   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Collaboratively
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

10. People hold:

No allegiance/loyalty to the school   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Much allegiance/loyalty to the school
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

11. Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are:

Ambiguous/fragmented with no accountability   ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4   ○ 5   ○ 6   ○ 7   ○ 8   Clear/communal with much accountability

12. Most decisions are made:

Privately by factions or independent verdict   ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4   ○ 5   ○ 6   ○ 7   ○ 8   Corporately by consensus or group approval

[Submit Form]   [Reset Form]

Appendix B

Grid and Group Template

GRID AND GROUP TEMPLATE

GRID   Bureaucratic / Authoritarian   Corporate / Hierarchist

8								
7								
6								
5								
4								
3								
2								
1								
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 GROUP

Individualistic / individualism   Collectivist / Egalitarianism

Appendix C

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Interview Protocol

Interview questions for former student(dropout)	Interview questions for educator(teacher or administrator
Can you briefly describe your family background?	What experiences have you had that prepared you to be a teacher or administrator?
Describe the school you attended?	Describe the school in which you work?
What are some of the experiences in school that caused you to drop out?	What are your attitudes towards dropouts?
What are some of the experiences out of school that caused you to drop out?	
How could your school experiences have been improved?	Why do students drop out of high school?
How do you feel about been out of school?	In your opinion, how could schools be more proactive in keeping students in school?
What else can you tell me about being out of school?	What else can you tell me about students who drop out of school?

Appendix D

Institutional Review Board Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Thursday, April 07, 2011
IRB Application No	ED1161
Proposal Title:	High School Dropouts in Belize: A Grid and Group Explanation

Reviewed and Processed as:	Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 4/6/2012

Principal
Investigator(s):

Kent Leo Arzu	Edward Harris
Belize	308 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia M. Kennison

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Appendix E

Educators Letter of Informed Consent

Educator Informed Consent Document

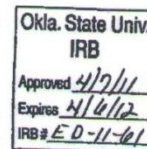**Project Title** : High school dropouts in Belize: a grid and group explanation

Investigators: Kent Leo Arzu (Graduate student at Oklahoma State University)
B. Ed (English Education), University of Belize (2000)
M. Ed (Educational Leadership) University of North Florida, (2005)

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to describe factors that lead to high school dropouts in Belize. I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University pursuing a doctoral degree in Higher Education. You are being asked to take part in a **research study** of factors that lead to high school drop outs in Belize. **We are asking you to take part in this study because it provides a forum for expressing and explaining the factors you believe lead students to drop out of high school in Belize.** We also believe that you have some valuable information that can lead to a better understanding of why students are dropping out of high school in Belize. Please read the form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part.

Procedures : If you agree to be in this study , you will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will help to classify your school into one of four grid/ groups (bureaucratic ,corporate, individualist or authoritarian) If you and your school are chosen as a part of this study, we will conduct a 45- 60 minute interview with you. The interview will include questions about your teaching experience, the school you work in, your opinion about drop outs, your ideas on how schools can be proactive in keeping students in schools, and how or whether school environment influences students staying or dropping out of school. With your permission, we would like to tape –record the interview. Additionally, I will be doing observations at your school for eight weeks. During the observation I will be taking notes that will help me better understand the culture of your school and the reasons why students are dropping out. Furthermore, you may be asked to provide materials that you usually use such as lesson plans, minutes of meetings, and other artefacts. The responses you provide from questionnaires, interview, and observation will not affect your regular school activities.

Risk of participation: There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your job conditions or your opinions about drop outs to be sensitive. We do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day to day life.

Benefits: There are no benefits to you. Southern Belize has the highest rate of high school dropouts, and we hope to learn about the factors that lead students to drop out.

Okla. State Univ.
IRB
Approved 4/7/11
Expires 4/6/12
IRB# E D -11-61

Appendix F

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Dropouts Letter of Informed Consent

Project Title: High school dropouts in Belize: a grid and group explanation

Investigators: Kent Leo Arzu (Graduate student at Oklahoma State University)

B. Ed (English Education), University of Belize (2000)

M. Ed (Educational Leadership) University of North Florida, (2005)

Purpose: The purpose of this Research Study is to describe factors that lead to high school dropouts in Belize. You are being asked to take part in a Research Study of factors that lead to high school dropout in Belize. We are asking you to take part in this study because it provides a forum for expressing and explaining the factors you believe lead students to drop out of high school in Belize. We also believe that you have some valuable information that can lead to a better understanding of why students are dropping out of high school in Belize. Please read the form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct a short pre-interview with you to determine whether you meet the criteria to be a part of the study. If you are selected, we will conduct a 45- 60 minute interview with you. The interview will include questions about your family background, the school you attended, your experience that caused you to drop out, your opinion on how your school can be improved, and your feelings about being out of school. With your permission, we would like to tape –record the interview.

Risk of participation: There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your family background and your reasons for dropping out to be sensitive. We do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day to day life.

Benefits: There are no benefits to you. Southern Belize has the highest rate of high school dropouts, and we hope to learn about the factors that lead students to drop out.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private .Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

Compensation: There is no compensation for taking part in this study.

Contacts: The researchers conducting this study are Kent Leo Arzu and Dr. Ed. Harris. If you have question you may contact Kent Leo Arzu at Kentarzu@yahoo.com. or at 501-631-2084. You can reach Dr. Ed Harris at Ed.harris@okstate.edu or at 405- 744-7932. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Sheila Jackson, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Participants Rights: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions in the questionnaire or decline to answer any questions in the interview that you do not want to answer, and it will not affect your relationship with the researcher. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Signature:

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. I have been

provided with a copy of this consent form.

------------------------   ------------------------

Signature   Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign

it.

--------------------------------   ---------------------------

Signature of Researcher

VITA

Kent Leo Arzu

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctorate of Education

Dissertation: HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN BELIZE: A GRID AND GROUP EXPLANATION

Major Field: Higher Education

Biographical Information:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctorate of Education in Higher Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2012

Completed the requirement for the Master of Education in Educational Leadership at University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida in May, 2005

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Secondary Education at University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida in July, 2005

Completed the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts in English Education at University of Belize, Belize City, Belize, in May, 2000

Experience:

Vice Principal of Academics, Julian Cho Technical High School, Toledo District, Belize 2010-Present

Acting Principal, Julian Cho Technical High School, Toledo District, Belize 2011

Professional Memberships:

Belize Shotokan Karate Association

Name: Kent Leo Arzu   Date of Degree: July, 2012

Institution: Oklahoma State University   Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN BELIZE: A GRID AND GROUP
EXPLANATION

Pages in Study: 133   Candidate for the Degree of Doctorate of Education

Major Field: Higher Education

     Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this qualitative study was to use grid and
group theory to investigate and explain the factors that led to selected students' to dropout of two
southern high schools in Belize. The study used purposive sampling to select six dropouts and
six educators from each of the two schools that were a part of the study. The study used
interviews, observations, and school documents to collect data about the dropouts and about the
schools .This data was analyzed, coded, and reviewed and emerging themes were identified. The
grid and group theoretical framework was the medium for creating the study's design and for
collecting and analyzing data.

     Findings and Conclusions: After analyzing interviews, field notes, and documents, the
researcher determined that the following factors were responsible for students dropping out of
high school: poor student relationships with teachers and other persons in positions of authority
at high schools, Lack of personal discipline or student aptitude or desire to comply with school
rules, peer pressure, lack of family support and financial difficulties. Additionally, six common
themes related to school environment that either inhibit or promote dropout were also identified:
how students were taught, how discipline was applied or reinforced, the way the curriculum was
presented, and the levels of interaction and socialization students were allowed in the classroom,
a lack of consistent, effective, organizational structures, the absence of a strong school structures
that enforced or monitored teacher accountability and limited accountability to school leaders
and students.

          ADVISOR'S APPROVAL: _____
                                  Dr. Edward Harris