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By

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HISPANIC DROPOUTS SPEAK OUT:
A STUDY OF HISPANIC YOUTH AND THEIR EXPERIENCES
IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

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IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM**

by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family - who taught me the values of hard work and perseverance - their unconditional love and support throughout my journey has allowed me... to be me.

There are two significant people that have had their transition in life. Their presence through my journey will never be forgotten. To Dr. Phelps, he was an advocate for students and his wisdom will be with me for a lifetime; and my father, I wish he were alive to see me get this far with my education.

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Incorporated. Your excellent training and customer service should be replicated worldwide.

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This study examined the experiences Hispanics had in school that led them to drop out. The researcher employed qualitative methods. Concept mapping was used to analyze the focus group sessions and individual interviews were analyzed using qualitative software utilizing Tinto's theory of student departure as a framework. These methods provided a rich contextual data which supported the findings.

Eleven participants were interviewed and participated in the generation of statements session of the concept mapping process. A cohort group of five participants were in the structuring stage of the concept mapping methodology and four of the five members of the cohort group

participated in the interpretation session, the final stage of the concept mapping methodology.

The findings revealed that Hispanics come to school with the intention of acquiring a high school diploma; however, their experiences in school contribute to their decision to leave school without a diploma.

Based on these findings, a set of recommendations were proposed both to practitioners in the schools and institutions of higher learning. Hence, these findings will add to the current body of literature on dropouts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Concern for the education of Hispanics has been expressed over the past several decades by national organizations, state legislators, and researchers. The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) described "the current state of education among Hispanics as a national crisis." According to their news release, "surveys continue to show Hispanics lagging educationally behind their Anglo-Americans and African American peers. Hispanic students' dropout of high school at twice the rate of African American children and four times the rate of Anglo-Americans" (Navarette, L. & Naranjo, J, 2004).

According to Murdock (1997), the change in the number of students enrolled in Texas elementary and secondary schools will increase. The Hispanic student enrollment in Texas is expected to increase by 166.3 percent from 1990 to 2030 (Murdock, S. H., Hogue, M. Michael, M. Anglo-Americans, S. & Pecotte, B., 1997, p.142). However, one out of three Hispanic youth is a high school dropout (Intercultural Development Research Association, 2002, Stanton-Salazar,

2001, Flores-Gonzales, 2002.) Demographers have been saying that the Texas Hispanic population growth is outpacing other groups, but their education attainment is far behind (Guerra, 2004).

Hispanic students are struggling academically compared to their non Hispanic peers but also Hispanic students are not counted when it comes to dropout rates. School systems in Texas have been audited and criminally charged for incorrectly reporting the number of dropouts (Greene, J. 2003, Alliance for Education 2003, Hood, L., Tijerina, E. S., Hughes, S. K., and Ornelas, E. A., 2001). An urban school district in Texas (with a large Hispanic student population) was placed on probation in 2003. After a state audit, 15 schools underreported dropout numbers. The audit found that 54% of their students should have been counted as dropouts but were not (Schemo, 2004).

The dropout research to date has been comprised of quantitative, qualitative or ethnography studies. Giving voice to the dropout in research is minimal. There is a need to explore the school experiences Hispanic dropouts had in the public schools.

The researcher analyzed the Hispanic dropout's perceptions in the public schools using Tinto's theory of student departure and Trochim's concept mapping methodology, a methodology that has not been used in dropout research. Tinto (1993) stated that students who had positive interactions and experiences at school were more likely to become better integrated and committed to the school.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Recently, the Waco Tribune reported "Texas has the nation's largest dropout rate" (Young, 2004). Newspapers published articles that discussed the dropout problem. The papers reported "High school dropout rates seem to have jumped. Dropout rates in Texas appear to have gone up by as much as the national average" (Rothstein, R., 2002), and "Hispanic dropout rate soared 50 percent in the 90's" (Hispanic dropout, 2002). In Houston, a state audit found that more than half of the students who left the school system were not reported as dropouts (Lewin, T. & Medina, J., 2003). These articles reveal that Hispanic students continue to drop out over time without a resolution from the state or local school districts.

State Level Policy

The Texas legislature has a long history of addressing issues in education particularly in the area of dropouts. State compensatory education began with the passage of House Bill 1126 in 1975. The goal of the state compensatory education program was to assist students at risk of dropping out of school. Between 1977 and 1983, there were major changes to the state compensatory program. Funding was increased and student performance data was used to design and implement local programs (TEA, 2003).

In 1984, House Bill 72 enacted sweeping reforms of the public school system. The compensatory education allotment increased. Tutorial, early childhood and basic instructional programs were targeted as priorities during this time. This new bill revamped the public school finance system in order to channel more money to property poor districts and to improve the academic achievement of students. It established a statewide curriculum, required students to achieve a score of a 70 to pass their high school courses, required teachers to pass a proficiency test and made changes to the statewide testing program (Haney, 2000).

According to Romo and Falbo (1996), after the legislature passed House Bill 72 in 1984, school districts complained that dropout rates continued to increase. Thereafter, the legislature enacted a dropout law in 1987. The law, House Bill 1010, "required each district to identify students 'at risk' of dropping out according to the common statewide definition and notify the students' parents of their status and of the programs and/or services which could help the 'at risk' student" (Romo & Falbo, 1996, p. 4).

After HB 1010 was enacted, several measures to resolve the student dropout problem continued. House Bill 2885 was passed in 1991, the law removed the term supplemental from the state compensatory education program and required that the funds be used to improve and enhance programs and services funded under regular education programs. In July 1991, the State Board of Education adopted additional criteria to assist districts in identifying students at risk of academic failure. School districts were allowed to use environmental, familial, economic, social, developmental, and other psycho-social factors that may

contribute to the student's ability to progress academically (TEA, 2003)

Furthermore, the legislators believed that requiring students less than 18 years of age to prove school attendance would reduce the number of students from dropping out of school. If students were unable to prove school attendance, they were not issued a driver's license. This license ban was called a failure for dropouts by educational researchers because students continued to drop out of school (Obregon, E. J., 1990). In 1990, the state ordered school districts with a high percentage of dropouts to offer GED classes (Asin, S., 1990). During that time, Commissioner Meno told educators that holding students back would continue to escalate the dropout rate proposing instead mandatory summer school for students that were at risk of failing a grade level (Reyes Jr, G., 1991).

House Bill 1261 was set up to create partnerships with businesses, schools, non-profit organizations and parents to keep students in school (Guevara, R., 1991). In the same year, House Bill 681 made truancy a Class C misdemeanor with a fine of up to five hundred dollars (Students, Parents, 1993). Lawmakers continued to address the dropout

problem by requiring students to attend school until the age of eighteen and providing funds to support the Ninth Grade Success Initiative. The goal of the program was to increase graduation rates in Texas public schools by reducing the number of students who were retained in the ninth grade or who dropped out that year (Texas Education Agency, 2000).

Although the 1984 law mandated basic skills testing for students, it also required high school students to pass an exit level test in order to receive a high school diploma. In 1990, changes in the state law required a criterion-referenced test. The tests were designed to test higher order thinking skills and problem solving ability. Results of the new Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) clarified that the test was more difficult. As a result, the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF) brought a lawsuit against the Texas Education Agency to prove that the Exit Level TAAS test was "illegal and discriminatory against African Americans and Hispanic students." The judge in the case ruled that "the TAAS test does have discriminatory impact on African American and Hispanic students, the use of TAAS to withhold diplomas is

not illegal because it is educationally necessary" (Haney, 2000, p.2).

In 1996, Governor Bush passed a new initiative called the Texas Reading Initiative. "The Texas Reading Initiative (TRI) celebrated its fourth year as a scientific; research based educational reform movement that is extremely serious about student success in reading" (Texas Education Agency, 2003). This initiative was designed to have all students reading at grade level when they reach the third grade. In addition, it was designed to put systems in place before the state implemented a new test that would impact the third grade students. The new law stated that if the students did not pass the reading portion of the new Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test in the spring 2003, the students would have to be retained. Students were given the opportunity to retake the test three times and a grade placement committee would be created to decide the child's placement for the following year. This new law would not only affect the students in the third grade in 2003 but also when they take the TAKS test in 2005 and 2008.

As part of the Texas Student Success Initiative, Senate Bill 4 contains provisions to eliminate social promotion. The bill stipulates that students in Grades 3, 5, and 8 who do not perform satisfactorily on certain state-required tests may not be promoted to the next grade. These tests are the statewide assessments in reading at grade 3, reading and math at grade 5, and reading and math at grade 8 (Texas Education Agency, 2003).

Texas has clearly stated its mission and objectives for public education. Below are excerpts from Chapter Four of the Texas Education Code:

The public education mission is to ensure that all Texas children have access to a quality education that enables them to achieve their potential and fully participate now and in the future in the social, economic, and educational opportunities of our state and nation...And two of the objectives are: 1) Students will be encouraged and challenged to meet their full educational potential and 2) Through enhanced dropout prevention efforts, all students will remain in school until they obtain a high school diploma
(<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/statutes/ed/ed0000400.html#ed002.4.002>).

This mission statement is notable and the efforts made by the legislature to improve schools for dropouts are significant, yet Texas is still not meeting the needs of all its students, especially Hispanic and racial minorities. Reyes and Valencia (1993) declared that "the educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s have ignored the

changing ethnic complexity of our nation. With respect to Latino students, school reform efforts had neglected them as a group" (Reyes, P. & Valencia R.R., 1993, p.259).

According to the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), in Texas, "two of every five students enrolled in ninth grade in public school during the 1994-1995 school year failed to reach and/or complete the twelfth grade in the 1997-1998 school year" (IDRA, 1999, p.7). In addition, African American and Hispanic students were more likely to drop out than Anglo-Americans non-Hispanic students. One of every two Hispanic and African American students from the 1994-1995 ninth grade class never reached the twelfth grade, compared to one of every three Anglo-Americans students (IDRA, 1999, p.7).

The Texas Education Agency has not been held accountable for meeting their mission and objectives. Preventing dropouts, counting dropouts incorrectly and attaching consequences to students dropping out are a few examples of the lack of commitment the state agency has demonstrated the last couple of decades.

A lack of accountability is also found within local school districts. Although each school district is required

to establish a local dropout oversight committee or task force, no independent oversight existed to monitor local dropout prevention efforts (IDRA, 1999). In 2002, the newly appointed commissioner, Felipe Alaniz, reorganized the Texas Education Agency and hired a deputy commissioner for dropout prevention and initiatives. This new assignment demonstrated that the state intended to address the dropout problem. Throughout the state, the new deputy commissioner together with several school districts had scheduled town hall meetings to listen to constituents' ideas on how to better serve the students. The results of these meetings and the active steps the state agency was yet to be seen. In June 2003, the new commissioner resigned his position for personal reasons and was replaced in the interim by a close associate of Gov. Rick Perry. In January 2004, a new commissioner was appointed.

Despite new efforts to address the issue of student dropouts within the state, Texas has been criticized for its reporting of dropout rates. Researchers have noted inaccuracies in reporting dropouts by the Texas Education Agency. According to the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), House Bill 1010 required the state to

calculate longitudinal dropout rates; the state was calculating annual dropout rates. IDRA explained in their report, "TEA had the data necessary to calculate an actual longitudinal dropout rate but chose to explore the calculation of an annual dropout rate" (IDRA, 1999, p. 12). In 1998, the agency finally came out with its first report of a longitudinal study on dropouts, even though the law was enacted in 1987. Jay P. Greene of the Manhattan Institute has stated that less than 75 percent of all eighth graders graduate from high school in five years and in urban schools the graduation rates often are below 69 percent (Alliance for Education, 2003).

An Austin American-Statesman article stated, "Next year, Texas plans to change how it counts dropouts. The new numbers will push the state's official one percent annual dropout rate, which looks at the number of students who leave school in a year, to 19 percent by using what's known as a completion rate" (Suydam, J., 2002). The Texas Education Agency is expected to report the correct number of students dropping out of school by using the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) criteria for

reporting dropouts not only at the state level but also at a national level.

In 2003, the 78th Legislature introduced and passed new bills relating to dropouts. Senate Bill 186 relates to the computation of public school dropout and completion rates. It includes dropout rates and district completion rates for grade levels 9 through 12, computed in accordance with standards and definitions adopted by the National Center for Education Statistics and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us>).

Senate Bill 894 relates to the reporting and auditing requirements relating to school dropouts and to the use of compensatory education funds. The text states that the "commissioner shall develop a process for auditing school district dropout records electronically. The system must be designed to identify districts that are at high risk of having inaccurate dropout records and, as a result, require on-site monitoring of dropout records." (<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us>).

Senate Bill 1038 relates to the Communities in Schools program. This bill requires the state director coordinate efforts of the Communities in Schools (CIS) program with

other social service organizations and agencies and with public school personnel to provide services to students who are at risk of dropping out of school or engaging in delinquent conduct, including students who are in family conflict or emotional crisis (<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us>).

All of these efforts may seem as though the legislature is addressing education; however, nowhere in the policy do the statutes outline systemic change in the local school districts. In 1993, the Texas Education Agency was boasting about the TAKS test "ninety six percent of the third grade students passed the reading section of the tests after the third administration." However, the statistics show that 4,999 Hispanic students had to retake the test compared to 981 Anglo-Americans students (Texas Education Agency, 2003).

Now with the new accountability system in place, it is clear that Hispanic students will be more affected with these new laws. How superficial are these laws? Should we celebrate or should we be concerned? The problem seems to be not only the facts of the number of students dropping

out but also disputed definitions and lack of accountability.

Enrollment in Texas

With a statewide increase of Hispanic student enrollment and the number of Hispanic students dropping out of school, the state needs to take a realistic look at what is occurring in the public school system and how it impacts Hispanic youth.

Ethnic minorities account for the majority of the increase in enrollment within Texas schools (Murdock et al. 1997). Relative to African American and Anglo-Americans, Hispanics will show the largest increase in the public school population. By 2030, the enrollment of Hispanic students in school will soar to 53.4 percent (Murdock et al. 1997). Murdock et al. (1997) explains "the group showing the largest increase in their proportion of all students would be Hispanics" (p.143). The authors demonstrate that the population growth in Texas will largely depend on the minority population with Hispanics having the most increase (Murdock, et. al., 1997). The authors claim that if the relationship between ethnicity and educational achievement does not change, the labor

force of Texas will be less educated. Hence, an educated Hispanic population is imperative for the economic future of Texas (Murdock et al. 1997).

Economic Implications

According to IDRA (2002), school dropouts have a significant effect on the Texas economy. IDRA estimates that the impact of Texas school dropouts from 1987-88 to 2001-02 to total \$488 billion dollars in lost wages, decreased revenues, and increases in job training, welfare, unemployment and incarceration costs (IDRA, 2002).

Dropouts have a more difficult time finding a job and receive lower wages in the jobs they do find. In addition, dropouts have a higher rate of unemployment and lower earnings than high school graduates (Rumberger and Rodriguez, 2002).

Murdock et al. (1997) explains that the proportion of the Hispanic labor force will increase from 22.3 in 1990 to 45.6 percent in 2030. Minorities will occupy most of the labor workforce in our state. With this in mind, the type of education a Hispanic student receives will correlate to the type of occupation he/she will acquire and the earnings

he/she will have in the future (Murdock et al. 1997).

According to Montemayor (2001),

Educational credentials can make a profound difference in earnings. In 1993, Hispanic males with a high school diploma earned 27 percent more than those with just 9 to 11 years of schooling, and those with a bachelor's degree earned 60 percent more than their peers with 9 to 11 years of education. Hispanic females with a high school diploma earned 30 percent more than their peers without a high school diploma, and earnings among those with a bachelor's degree jumped to 82 percent more than the 9- to 11- year group. Overall, Anglo-Americans male college graduates earned 14 percent more than Hispanic male college graduates (U.S. Department of Education, 1995, p. 20). Although a number of factors may affect the earning potential of young adults, it is clear that completing high school can make a significant difference for Hispanics (p.8).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Previous state policies and research studies that addressed dropouts portrayed them as individuals with problems instead of dropouts being a systemic problem. These state policies and body of literature treated the symptoms rather than root causes; and/or the effect of dropping out as an event rather than a process of disengagement. Few studies reported the importance of student integration as the solution to keep students in

school (Wehlage, 1989, Fine, 1991, Tinto, 1993, Valenzuela, 1999, Stanton-Salazar, 2001, Flores-Gonzales, 2002).

The state's systematic under-reporting of dropout rates coupled with the inaction of the state to address Hispanic dropouts was the rationale to conduct this research. The purpose of this study was two-fold. An attempt was made to discover Hispanic dropout's perceptions of their interactions and experiences at school. The researcher analyzed the experiences Hispanic dropouts had in the public schools using Tinto's theory of student departure. Tinto (1993) explained, "institutions and students would be better served if a concern for the education of students, their social and intellectual growth were the guiding principles of the institutional action" (Tinto, 1993, p. 4). The researcher tested a method that may determine why Hispanic youth drop out of school. The researcher analyzed the dropouts' perspectives utilizing concept mapping, a process that has not been used in previous dropout research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was designed to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are Hispanic dropouts perceptions of the internal and/or external factors contributing to their decision to leave school?
- 2) What are Hispanic dropouts' perceptions of the institutional factors contributing to their decision to leave school?
- 3) How useful and applicable is Tinto's theory on student departure to the interactions and experiences Hispanic dropouts had within the public school?

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Hispanic - According to the U. S. Census, persons of Hispanic origin are those who identify themselves to be of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or some other Hispanic origin. People of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Dropout - The National Center for Educational Statistics defines a dropout as a person who meets the following criteria:

- The individual was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year.
- The individual was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year.
- The individual has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district approved educational program.
- The individual has not transferred to another public school district, private school, or state or district approved education program.
- The individual has not taken a temporary absence due to suspension, school-approved illness or death.

Mixed methods research - collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study.

Current research - Research studies, reports, synthesis and reviews of the larger student dropout populations occurring between 1987 and 2003.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As policymakers and school system leaders begin to implement policies impacting students, there will be an increasing need to understand the experiences that Hispanics had in schools. By examining the perceptions of

Hispanic dropouts, this research study offers insight into Tinto's theory of student departure by analyzing the experiences of Hispanic dropouts using concept mapping.

This study was used to generate insights into how schools can better serve Hispanic students. The results of this study will provide a better picture of what Hispanic dropouts experienced in the public schools. These findings attempted to expand the knowledge base for policymakers, school system leaders, administrators and teachers.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The data collection was carefully designed; however, the following elements were beyond the researcher's control: the sample selection, geographical location, important information which participants chose to discuss or withhold, and generalizations are listed as limitations.

Participation was limited to adults that provided consent. Although the number of participants was small, the findings offered insight into the lives of similar students that live in an urban area.

This research study focused on individuals who dropped out of school in Texas. Eleven participants were recruited from within one geographical location. Most of the

residents in the geographical location were Hispanic and low-income.

The study was designed to explore reasons why Hispanic students' decided to drop out. Since this research focused on selected participants, the researcher will not generalize that all Hispanic dropouts have the same experiences as those described in the study.

Some translations are from face-to-face interviews and may contain language that may not appear grammatically correct. The researcher will record the participant's stories as they were told, reflecting the true language of those interviewed. Moreover, this study examined the interactions and experiences Hispanic dropouts had in school. Attention is directed toward Hispanic dropout's perceptions of their interactions and experiences at school. No comparisons were made between Hispanic dropouts and Hispanic students who remain in school.

PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into five chapters. Each chapter is intended to present data relating to Hispanic dropouts within a specific context. Chapter I introduces the context of the study; presents the statement of the

problem, the purpose of the study, research questions; scope and limitations and outlines the significance of the study. Chapter II contains a review of the literature which is relevant to the context of the study, including related studies to dropouts. Chapter III explains the methodology, including the selection of the participants, data collection and the procedures for data analysis. Chapter IV contains a presentation of the data analysis from the interviews and concept mapping methodology. Chapter V will conclude with the summary of the significant findings, conclusions and recommendations and suggestions for future research.

SUMMARY

Public school practices have significant impact on Hispanic students. Policymakers and school system leaders have a moral obligation to implement policies that impact systemic change in order to better serve Hispanic students. Administrators and teachers must create positive interactions with Hispanic students that will lead to high school completion.

Recent local, state and national reports have indicated that Hispanics have the highest dropout rate of

any ethnic group in the country (as cited in Montemayor, 2001). Hispanics are the fastest growing group in the public schools. Systemic change is needed to counteract the dropout problem.

This chapter introduced the context of the study and the need to further explore the perceptions of Hispanic dropouts. In addition, the purpose of the study was presented along with research questions, scope and limitations of the study. This study offers the applicability and usefulness of Tinto's theory of student departure and experiences Hispanic dropouts had in school using concept mapping.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

According to Coley (1995), from the beginning of the 20th century American adults had completed no more than an eighth grade education. More than half of young adults completed high school in the 1940s and 1950s. By 1960, approximately 40 percent of males, 25 years and older still had no more than an eighth grade education and only 40 percent had completed high school. The educational attainment for women was about the same. During the 1960s, there was a rise in the education level of the U. S. population. For males, 25 to 29 years old, educational attainment rose by 1.7 percent between 1960 and 1970 (Wehlage, G.G., & Rutter, R., 1986).

From the 1900s-1960s, public education excluded the Hispanic community. They practiced "deficit thinking" meaning the tendency to overlook a student's assets and the failure to build on them" (San Miguel, 1987, Valencia, 1997). Schools did not respond to the specific needs of Hispanic students. Although school access was available for Hispanics, schools for this population remained inferior.

The schools were not organized to "train minorities to achieve equal status with the dominant culture" (Ogbu, 1978, p. 40, Trueba, 1989, Valencia, 1997, San Miguel, 2003).

According to Ogbu (1978), "inequality exists in almost every society; groups within a society are regarded as unequal because they belong to different races or castes" (p.1). Students of color generally do less well than Anglo-Americans students and they tend to withdraw from school earlier than Anglo-Americans students (Ogbu, 1978).

Ogbu (1978) suggests:

The lower school performance of Hispanics appears to be an adaptation to their castelike status and that it is within the framework of this adaptation that language and cultural problems become pervasive and persistent (p.225). The lower case status of Hispanics affects their education in several ways. Each group has traditionally received inferior education to prepare its members for their inferior social and technoeconomic positions in adult life. In addition, Hispanics have faced the problem of job ceiling and this in turn has reinforced their inferior education and lower school performance (Ogbu, 1978, p.228).

There have been many theories to explain this academic failure or inequality for students of color. The cultural deprivation theory explains that students are culturally deprived when they come from home and neighborhood

environments that do not provide them with stimulation for normal development. This theory was influential in generating compensatory education programs including head start and early childhood (Ogbu, 1978, Trueba, 1989).

Discrimination and exclusionary practices excluded Hispanics from school (San Miguel, 1987). Inequitable access was evident at elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. In the 1900s, prior to mass compulsory education laws, only 25 percent of Hispanics were enrolled. By the 1960s, 90 percent of Hispanics were enrolled; however, consistent participation in schools and attendance continued to be a problem (San Miguel, 1987). Mobility due to residential, immigration, poverty, agricultural migrants, and discrimination due to educational, housing, and employment policies were evident during this time (Trueba, 1987, San Miguel, 2003).

School policies and practices established educational segregation for Hispanics. School staff was poorly trained and less qualified and had lower expectations than those for Anglo-Americans students (Foley, 1994, Valencia, 1997, Valenzuela, 1999, San Miguel, 2003). The institutional deficiency theory supports the notion that some students of

color "perform poorly in school because the public schools are organized to favor middle class and upper class non-minority children and suppresses the aspiration of students of disadvantaged groups" (Ogbu, 1978, p. 48, Trueba, 1987).

In the late 20th century, education for Hispanics emphasized socialization instead of the academics. Instruction in secondary schools emphasized vocational training. The organization of schools did not promote academic success as it did for the dominant group; however, it did promote that minority children acquire the skills necessary to adapt to social and occupational roles (Ogbu, 1978, Trueba, 1987, San Miguel, 1987, Valencia, 2002).

According to San Miguel (2003), administrative bias was evident during this time. Hispanics were placed in classes based on their performances on standardized tests. Hispanics, because of test scores, were placed in either "mentally retarded" or "slow classes". In addition, they were placed in "development-appropriate" classes and tracked in elementary and secondary schools between 1930s-1960s (Valencia, 2002).

Furthermore, they were placed in slow, non-academic classes and vocational classes in secondary schools.

Hispanic students were discouraged from attending academic classes. During this era Hispanic students were assessed, classified and placed (Trueba, 1987, Valencia, 2002).

Valencia (2002) explains that the theory of individual and group differences in behavior was based on genetics. Galton was a believer of hereditarianism and was a key player in eugenics.

Galton's pronouncements about racial differences in intelligence and societal stratification had indirect but significant influence on how American psychologists would eventually view the practice of testing Hispanic children, and how these behavioral scientists attempted to explain the differences in intellectual performance between Anglo-Americans and Hispanics (p.256).

As a result, Hispanic students were regularly deprived of opportunities for success (Valencia, 2002, San Miguel, G. 2003). "There was a good deal of evidence that inequality in student performance existed in terms of educational attainment and other results of formal education. This inequality was noted between minority children and non-minority children" (Ogbu, 1978, p. 52).

San Miguel (2003) explains that in the schools, staff compelled Hispanics to conform to the dominant culture. Schools eradicated the Spanish language and culture from

students. English-only language laws remained in effect during the 1960s. In the social studies curriculum, the Hispanics were viewed either as non-entities or as obstacles to national progress. In textbooks, Anglos were portrayed as good and Hispanics as bad. Many Hispanics changed their names because they were ridiculed. They were excluded from school activities. These practices established poor school performance among Hispanics. Hence, during the early part of the 20th century, the educational trend for Hispanic students was clearly inferior. The results of this inferior education are evident today in the number of Hispanic students that drop out of school (San Miguel, 2003, Trueba, 1987).

According to Coley (1995), dropout rates for Hispanics appear to fluctuate from year to year, but are consistently higher than the rates for African Americans and Anglo-Americans. In 1993, nearly 40 percent of Hispanic dropouts had obtained an eighth grade education or lower (Coley, R. J., 1995). Nearly one in five of our nation's Hispanics between the ages of 16 and 24, who ever enrolled in a school, left without either a high school diploma or an alternative certificate such as a GED (Secada, W.G.,

Chavez-Chavez, R., Garcia, E., Munoz, C., Oakes, J.,
Santiago-Santiago, I. & Slavin, R., 1998).

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, Hispanics were nine percent of the nation's total population. In the U.S., growth in the Hispanic population was largely due to immigration. Hispanic immigrants are an ethnically diverse population. The three largest subgroups are Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Recent immigrants from Central and South America constitute a fourth subgroup (Smith, T., 1995). Hispanics are classified in the current political climate as a "problem" of society and are perceived as a threat to the United States (Romero, A. D., 1998).

According to Perez (2000), Mexican Americans are the least likely to have a high school diploma. The Hispanic population under the age of 18 is growing faster than that of any other racial or ethnic group and the challenges confronting these children have implications for cities and states where they live. Their population's projected rate of growth means that they represent a large share of future workers and taxpayers that the nation will depend upon to sustain and drive the economy. However, too many leave high

school without a high school diploma (Montemayor, 2001, San Miguel, 2003).

A high dropout rate among Hispanics is the logical outcome of the social forces that limit Hispanic roles in society. Many Hispanic students encounter stereotypes, personal prejudice and social bias that are often part of larger anti-immigrant forces in society (San Miguel, 2003, Trueba, 1989). Many Hispanic students live in the nation's most economically distressed areas. They attend overcrowded schools in physical disrepair and with limited educational resources. They see the devastating effects of their elders' limited employment opportunities and glass ceilings at the workplace (Secada et al).

Reducing inequality between Hispanics and the rest of society is an economic imperative (San Miguel, 2003). Increasing Hispanic educational attainment and other human capital characteristics is critical for the full integration of Latinos into the future U.S. workforce (Perez, S. M. & De La Rosa Salazar, D., 1993, Murdock, et. al, 1997).

According to Coley (1995),

In 1993, about 381,000 students dropped out of high school. Over their lifetimes they will earn hundreds of thousands of dollars less than their better-educated peers. In 1992, dropouts earned an average of \$12,809, about \$6,000 less than high school graduates. Half of the households on welfare are dropouts, as is half of the prison population. About three percent of those who drop out do so at or before the fourth grade, 20 percent drop out at or before the eighth grade and 61 percent drop out at or about the tenth grade. Nearly 40 percent of Hispanic dropouts have an eighth grade education or less (p.3).

A report from the Condition of Education in 1995, The Educational Progress of Hispanic Students, found that the dropout rates among Hispanics were declining (Smith, T., 1995). However, The Condition of Education in 2002 reports, "The rates for Hispanics have not declined and remain higher than those for other racial/ethnic groups" (Wirt, J., Choy, S., Gerald, D., Provasnik, S., Rooney, P., Watanabe, S., & Tobin, R., 2002).

Many researchers, as well as state and federal agencies have studied the severity of Hispanic dropouts. In the literature, researchers have discovered the difficulty in determining the dropout rate, which has been a significant problem not only at the national level but also at the state level.

DROPOUT RATES

Dropout rates are difficult to obtain because reporting procedures differ across the country (Wehlage, G.G., Rutter, R., 1986). Dropouts have been measured and reported in a variety of ways. The annual high school dropout rate, the dropout status rate, the high school completion rate, cohort dropout rate and state dropout rates have been utilized by national, state and local agencies.

The annual dropout rate is termed an event rate by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and represents the percentage of students from the ages of 15 to 24 who leave grades 10 to 12 in a given year (Kaufman, P., Kwon, J. Y., Klein, S. Chapman, C. D. & MPR Associates, Inc., 1999). Coley (1995) describes that there is "good news from using this measure. The dropout rate has fallen over the last 10 to 15 years, from 6.5 percent in the late 1970s to 4 percent in 1991." This decrease applied to both Anglo-Americans and African American students; however, the rates for Hispanic students were inconsistent and higher than comparable rates for Anglo-Americans and African American students (p.6).

The dropout status rate is the percentage of people, ages 16 to 24, who do not have a high school credential. This rate is composed of dropouts from any grade, regardless of when they dropped out. This rate tends to be higher than the event rate. In 1993, this rate was 11 percent and represented a decline of four percentage points from 1972. The status dropout rate for African American students (13.6 percent) was higher than the rate for Anglo-Americans students (7.9 percent), and the rate for Hispanic students (27.5 percent) was higher than for the rate for African American students (Kaufman et al, 1999, Coley, R. J., 1995, p.7).

High school completion rates are another way to examine rates of high school completion (or the attainment of a certificate of completion or a GED) for a given population. For 21 and 22 year olds, between 1972 and 1993, rates increased from about 82 percent to 86 percent, respectively. The 1993 completion rates for Anglo-Americans (90 percent) were higher than the rates for African Americans (84 percent) and Hispanics (63 percent). Utilizing this measure, African Americans have higher percentage rate in completing a K-12 education; however,

for Hispanics the disparity is significant. Moreover, when looking at the completion rates reported by NCES in 1998, there was not a significant change in the percentage points for all subgroups. (Kaufman et al, 1999, Coley, R. J., 1995, p.8).

Cohort dropout rates are determined by following the same group of people over a period of time. State dropout rates are determined by utilizing the U. S. Census figures for a consistent measure.

According to Greene (2003) there are problems with state and district reporting of dropouts. Many GEDS are included in the data. When students express an intention to pursue a GED, they are not counted as a dropout. These students go missing and their whereabouts become unknown.

Language and blunt methods are other problems. Figuring out how states and districts define and count dropouts is a difficult task. Dropouts are not an annual phenomenon. Terms, such as completion rate, dropout rate, graduation rate, often confuse, rather than clarify, the situation. Most formulas depend upon the tracking of students, but schools don't have the resources to track dropouts once they leave the system. Therefore, the

incentive is to assign benign explanations instead of supplying accurate data (Greene, 2003).

Despite problems with the way the dropout data is presented, the scholarship on dropout rates consistently reveals that Hispanic students do not fare as well as Anglo-Americans and African American students when it comes to acquiring a high school diploma.

HISPANIC DROPOUTS

Literature on Hispanic dropouts cites social and academic risk factors. Underachievement, substance abuse, delinquency and poverty are a few social problems that students face when they enter the public schools. Demographic factors also have been used to identify social factors of students that have difficulty in school. These factors include race, language, minority status, gender, family income, parent's education, and family structure. Researchers and policy makers also cite academic risk factors. These factors are defined as school-related problems that predict difficulties in the school and are related to a student's decision to drop out from school. These include absenteeism, skipping class, truancy,

retention, low grades, discipline problems, and disengagement from school activities.

During the 1960s and 1970s, research focused on student characteristics which correlate with a lack of success in finishing high school. This research was based on the assumption that the students were primarily responsible for dropping out and not the institution or school; hence, a student's culture and community must be held responsible for the problem. Some studies connected dropout rates to factors that translated to specific characteristics of family backgrounds (Tanner, Krahn, Hartnagel, 1995). Placing blame on parents or students was consistent with national research (Fine, 1991; Tanner, et al., 1995, Wehlage, 1989). Gary Wehlage (1989) states that several national studies identified student's personal and social characteristics rather than school practices as responsible for high drop out rates.

Related Studies

In this section, the researcher will engage the evolving scholarly discourse on dropouts in order to build toward the theoretical framework which makes use of Tinto's theory of student departure.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) initiated The National Longitudinal Study (NLS-72) of the High School Class of 1972 to provide data for researchers to study how young people transition from high school to college and/or to the workforce. New education issues arose after NCES began its longitudinal study of the 1972 senior class. Declining test scores and results from minimum competency testing caused concern among parents and educators alike. The rate at which many students dropped out of school before graduation was also a concern. To examine this further, NCES initiated a second longitudinal study, High School and Beyond(HS&B), to complement the first. The difference with this study is that it addressed many newer elements of the educational process and it included a sophomore, as well as a senior cohort. The sophomore cohort was added to address the issue of high

school dropouts and to study changes and processes during high school (D'Amico, n.d.)

The findings of the HS&B study concluded that students from the bottom of the quartile in measures of socio-economic status are three times more likely to dropout than students from higher socio-economic statuses. In addition, states with a high number of minority students have the highest dropout rates (Usdan, 1986).

Researchers from the Educational Testing Service used data from the HS&B database to determine who dropped out of school. Their descriptive analysis labeled those who stayed in school as "stayers" and compared them to those who did not complete, who were labeled "dropouts." These students had lower school grades, lower test scores, did less homework and were reported to have discipline problems at school (Ekstrom, R. B., Goertz, M. E., Pollack, J.M. & Rock, D. A., 1986). Although this quantitative research was conducted in the 1980s, their findings did not differentiate much from the research that was conducted in the 1960s and 1970s.

Rumberger and Rodriguez (2002) reviewed the dropout literature and determined that much of the research

employed quantitative methods. They explained that most of the studies could only show associations or correlations between dropout behavior and a host of other factors, such as family background or school experiences. However, those studies could never prove cause and effect. They also suggested that many sophisticated studies were unable to determine causality. For example, because one is of Hispanic descent does not necessarily mean that one will choose to dropout or being poor will cause you to drop out.

Late in the twentieth century, researchers began to include ethnographic and other qualitative methods in their research designs. One such study was The Five City School Dropout Study (1989), in which researchers sought to answer why Hispanic students stay in or drop out of school. Ninth grade students from five of the nation's largest high schools were randomly selected to participate in the questionnaire study. The study was conducted in 1987 and it is one of a few studies during this time that focused on Hispanic students. The researchers were able to find similarities and differences between the 700 students. It provided a framework to inform policy makers and guide future research. Other recommendations that came out of the

study was to conduct a seminar in which policy makers, school practitioners, and others could together seek solutions for Hispanic dropouts (Fernandez, R.R., Henn-Reinke, K. & Petrovich, J., 1989).

Fine's ethnographic study at an urban high school is one of the few in the field that actually gave voice to actual dropouts (1986). The researcher discovered that out of 1,221 students in the ninth grade cohort at the urban high school, two-thirds of the students never graduated. The researcher assumed that the system reproduced social inequalities while allowing only the elite 20 percent to benefit from the public school system (p.397). Her findings were important because she took her research beyond previous studies on the issue by locating the dropouts, analyzing school records and exploring why the students dropped out. In addition, she analyzed what kind of school processes were in place that may have contributed to the students dropping out.

Romo and Falbo (1996) also incorporated an ethnographic study. They interviewed 100 students and their parents. The researchers reviewed school records and conducted fieldwork in the schools and their respective

communities. The researchers "acknowledged that most of the solutions to the dropout problem come from individual school districts dealing with individual students. The researchers explored the nature of the dropout problem and its possible solutions" (Romo & Falbo, 1996, p.2).

Stanton-Salazar (2001) conducted an ethnographic study to identify the social support networks and the experiences economically disadvantaged Mexican origin youths had in their neighborhood. He used an ecological framework to analyze his study. Within the microsystem, he wanted to determine whether the Mexican American youth have face to face contact with others at home, school or with peers. Was the student regarded positively? Was the student accepted? Did the student have an active role in reciprocal relationships? At the mesolevel, were the relationships between members of one's microsystem with each other respectful? Did the settings present basic consistency in values? He wanted to understand the development of relationships Mexican American youths had relative to class, race, gender and ethnic forces that were available to them. In his study, students had a strong preference for teachers that spoke their language and understood their

culture. His findings confirmed that the school's organizational culture was interpreted by his participants as exclusive. He described the relations of distrust and lack of social support for some of his participants that prevented optimal development (p.254). In his words "schools are charged with reserving the best resources for those that are more deserving. The school is charged with the task of sorting the "saved" from "the damned" and with channeling the best of its institutional resources to the former" (p.216).

Flores-Gonzalez (2002) conducted an ethnographic study in Chicago. Her concern was that only 67 percent of Hispanics were graduating from high school compared to 94 percent Anglo-Americans and 87 percent African Americans. She wanted to discover how school practices contributed in the development of identity among Hispanic students when they attended an urban high school. She classified her participants as "stayers", "leavers" and "returners." Throughout her study, she was able to determine how the students either identified with having a "school identity" or a "street identity." The researcher elaborated in her book by writing "kids who act out in school are acting out

or who have trouble becoming school kids are not just naughty. They may be acting out in school because of their frustrations and the school does not ameliorate their pain. Instead, negative school experiences tilt the scale toward street oriented identities among students who are already vulnerable" (p. 47). According to Foley (1994), "schools are middle class bureaucratic organizations dedicated to stripping kids of their ethnic identity and replacing it with an institutional, mainstream identity. Students rebel and create their own identities and spaces. The working class ethnic kids are particularly subjected to the most relentless stripping and resocialization" (p.161).

Valenzuela (1999) conducted an ethnographic study in Houston in which she describes "schooling as a subtractive process. It divests youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure" (p.3). The researcher addresses the need for teachers to teach authentically and care about their students genuinely in order for students of color to be successful.

An authentic caring pedagogy would not only cease subtracting students' cultural identities, it would also reverse its effects. It would build bridges wherever there are divisions and it would

privilege biculturalism out of respect for the cultural integrity of their students (Valenzuela, 1999, p.266)

In the book, Reducing the Risk: Schools as Communities of Support, researchers conducted case studies of fourteen schools that provided students with opportunities to earn a high school diploma. These schools utilized intervention strategies that prevented students from dropping out of school. The researchers developed a theory of school membership, or "ways in which schools can promote a supportive school community with the potential for holding students who might otherwise drop out" (Wehlage, G.G., Rutter, R. A. Smith, G. A., Lesko, N. & Fernandez, R.R., 1989, p. 113).

Wehlage and Rutter (1986) took the dropout research a step further by suggesting that "new research should focus toward the understanding of the institutional character of the schools and how this affects the potential dropout. They narrow the focus to those policies and practices that have an impact on the institution's holding power" (p.376).

Recent research emphasizes that an institution is as much responsible for students dropping out as other factors. Researchers further suggest that a reciprocal

relationship exists between the personal and social characteristics of students and school environments. Hence, they demonstrate that the background characteristics of students determine the kinds of schools and educational processes to which they have access, and the characteristics of schools play a role in attracting students that drop out (Natriello, G., Pallas, A. M., & McDill, E. L., 1986). Valencia (2002) explains that school failure for Hispanic students has largely been shaped by educational inequality. He explains that school failure is not only in one location. Wherever there are schools with large Hispanic enrollment, there is also a trend that one will find low academic achievement among the Hispanic students (Valencia, 2002, p.4-6).

Wehlage, Rutter and Fine explain that it is important to look at the impact of school processes on students if we want to understand the causes of dropping out. Most researchers have based their studies on interviews with students who were currently enrolled in the public school system, their parents and school personnel. Most studies did not examine the experiences of actual dropouts who were no longer in the school system.

The researcher would like to build on existing scholarship by deploying Tinto's concept of student integration conceptualized herein as the nexus between institutional and individual level socio-cultural factors by using a different approach in the research. Not only, did the researcher interview Hispanic dropouts who are no longer in the school system but she also conducted focus group sessions. Together, in focus group sessions, the participants and the researcher analyzed attributes in a public school that may lead to their decision to drop out by using the concept mapping process. The concept mapping process requires the participants to brainstorm a large set of statements relevant to the topic, attend structured focus group sessions, and interpret maps that result from the data analysis in a meaningful way (Trochim, 1993). In addition, by using Tinto's theory of student departure as a framework, the researcher was able to make recommendations to school practitioners, policymakers and researchers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature on the impact of student integration into the institution is extensive Wehlage, 1994, Tinto, 1993, Valenzuela, 1999, Stanton-Salazar, 2001, Flores-Gonzalez, 2002). The purpose of this section is to review a theory relevant to dropouts in the context of the public schools.

The analysis is based on the writings of Vincent Tinto (1993), who developed a theory on student departure at the college level. He stated that students enter school with academic, personal and family characteristics and skills, including preconceived ideas about personal goals and school attendance. During school, interactions between individuals and the institution's academic and social environments influence these preconceived ideas. He stated that as the student's positive interactions and experiences increase, the more integrated the student becomes into the system and the more committed he/she is to the institution. Hence, greater commitment and integration increase the likelihood that the student will remain in school. However, if the student has a lower commitment to the institution, the more likely he/she will drop out of school (Tinto, 1993).

Wehlage (1989) also uses the concept of student departure to examine high school dropouts and the effectiveness of programs in retaining dropouts. Tinto's findings were that voluntary departure from school is due to institutional experiences after a student arrives rather than prior experiences. Wehlage confirms this claim through his research on high school dropouts. This theory is based on the quality of interactions between the student and the institution (Wehlage, 1989, p.12).

Tinto's theory of student departure can be explained as the "how and why it is that a particular individual and institutional attributes come to be associated with student departure from school" (Tinto, 1993, p.34). Individual experiences, institutional attributes and external factors correlate with students' decisions to either stay or withdraw from school.

Tinto uses the terms "intention" and "commitment" to describe the primary roots of departure from the standpoint of the individual. Family background, skill and ability and prior schooling influence individual goals and commitments (Tinto, 1993, Seidman, 1996). Students are understood to arrive at school with various levels of goal commitment

(for example, to graduate with a certain degree) and institutional commitment (for example, to remain in school), which are then increased or decreased in accordance with their level of academic or social integration. Over time the individual's goals and commitment interact with institutional experiences, such as the formal and informal academic and social systems of the school (Seidman, 1996). Tinto (1993) describes the institutional attributes that affect departure. He uses the terms "adjustment," "difficulty," "incongruence," and "isolation" to describe experiences the individual has within the institution.

"Adjustment" is a requirement for students to develop school membership. This attribute is apparent as students transfer from middle school to high school. This transition appears to be a major source of academic failure and "alienation from the institution" (Tinto, 1993, Wehlage, 1989, p. 12). With this transition, students are asked to meet new standards and expectations. High school teachers tend to distance themselves from students in an effort to encourage them to become more responsible and grown up. This distancing becomes a major source of stress and

frustration for the students. Many need a more personal and supportive relationship with adults than what the traditional high school provides (Tinto, 1993, Wehlage, 1989).

"Difficulty" refers to academic difficulty as a means of explaining academic failure, or the "difficulty in sustaining interest and effort" in learning (Tinto, 1993, Wehlage, 1989, p.13). Students complained that teachers made learning dull and boring, and related this mainly to a lecture-discussion format based on class readings (Wehlage, 1989).

"Incongruence" is concerned with the cultural match between the student and the institution, in essence, "how well they fit into the school" (Tinto, 1993, Wehlage, 1989, p. 13). "Incongruence" describes all students who identify themselves as existing outside of the mainstream in some way. Other characteristics that are considered to be a part of this attribute are physical, social, racial, and/or ethnic factors, which might also make students feel outside of the mainstream. Consideration of "incongruence demonstrates the need to examine student perceptions and

feelings while analyzing the culture of the institution (Tinto, 1993).

"Isolation" refers to both academic and social experiences at the school. Social isolation can refer to a lack of interactions with other students as well as with adults. The central tenet of school membership involves the need to have quality interactions between adults and students (Tinto, 1993).

The importance of academic integration (or an interest and focus on learning and academic activities, quality interactions with faculty, classroom participation and academic performance) and social integration (or involvement in the school's social activities, a sense of social belonging, and the development of friendships) are critically important. The extent to which an individual becomes integrated into the formal and informal academic and social systems of the school determines the individual's departure decision. Students who successfully integrate into the academic and social subsystems are more likely to stay in an institution (Tinto, 1993).

The two external factors that may contribute to the student's decision to drop out are "obligations" and "finances" (Tinto, 1993, p.37-38). Some studies have determined that students who have dropped out of school have cited financial reasons, family or job responsibilities, and/or personal problems for leaving (Horn & Carroll, 1998).

Tinto's theory of student departure was used as a framework in understanding the school's attributes in the dropout process. The researcher utilized the framework to help explain why Hispanics dropped out of school.

SUMMARY

The changing demographics in the student population can have serious implications if the public school system does not address the under-educated population in our communities. Researchers, policy makers and community partnerships have addressed dropouts for several decades. With the increase of the Hispanic student population and the persistence of students withdrawing from school, public schools need to design their systems to keep students in school. If developed and nurtured, relationships between the student and students, the student and the faculty, and the student and the institution will assist students in completing their K-12 education.

This chapter reviewed literature on dropouts, including Tinto's theory of student departure and Wehlage's concept of school membership. Dropout research studies were cited that incorporated ethnographic and other qualitative methods. Some problems with the calculation and reporting

of dropout rates were also discussed. Chapter II has laid the foundation that will guide the analysis of the data in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Previous policies and research studies that addressed dropouts portrayed them as individuals with problems instead of dropouts being a systemic problem. These policies and body of literature treated the symptoms rather than root causes; and/or the effect of dropping out as an event rather than a process of disengagement. Few studies reported the importance of student integration as the solution to keep students in school (Wehlage, 1989, Fine, 1991, Tinto, 1993, Valenzuela, 1999, Stanton-Salazar, 2001, Flores-Gonzales, 2002).

The state's systematic under-reporting of dropout rates coupled with the inaction of the state to address Hispanic dropouts was the rationale to conduct this research (Valenzuela, 1999, IDRA, 1999, Haney, 2004). The purpose of this study was two-fold. An attempt was made to discover Hispanic dropout's perceptions of their interactions and experiences at school. The researcher analyzed the perspectives of Hispanic dropouts and their

experiences in the public school using Tinto's theory of student departure. Tinto (1993) explained, "institutions and students would be better served if a concern for the education of students, their social and intellectual growth were the guiding principles of the institutional action" (Tinto, 1993, p. 4).

More specifically, the researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

(1) What were the internal and external factors that contributed to Hispanic dropouts' decision to leave school?

(2) What were Hispanic dropouts' perceptions of the institutional factors contributing to their decision to leave school?

(3) How useful and applicable was Tinto's theory on student departure to the interactions and experiences Hispanic dropouts had within schools?

The researcher tested a method that determined why Hispanic youths dropped out of school. The researcher analyzed the dropouts' perspectives utilizing concept mapping, a process that has not been used in previous dropout research.

The dropout research has been comprised of quantitative or qualitative studies; giving voice to the dropout is minimal. Past research on dropouts focused on quantitative data that was collected through surveys from students that were in school or qualitative data from ethnographies or interviews with students, parents and administrators in the school setting. There is an apparent gap in the research on the school experiences Hispanic dropouts had in the public schools. In addition, previous research studies did not use concept mapping as a method for research.

This chapter presents the methodology of the study. Because the researcher used mixed methods, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are described as is the sample for the study.

METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this study was to ascertain the experiences Hispanic dropouts had in the public school. The researcher wanted to explore what led Hispanics to drop out of school. The dropout rate among Hispanics is high compared to Anglo Americans and African Americans. One out

of three Hispanic youths is a high school dropout (IDRA, 2001, Stanton-Salazar, 2001, Flores-Gonzales, 2002).

The researcher conducted individual interviews with eleven participants and held three focus group sessions utilizing concept mapping methodology. Concept mapping is a group process that uses a structured facilitated approach.

Mixed Methods

The mixed methods approach focused on collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study. The researcher utilized the Sequential Exploratory Strategy in her mixed methods approach.

According to Creswell (2003),

The sequential exploratory strategy is conducted in two phases, with priority given to the first phase of qualitative analysis which is followed by a phase of quantitative data analysis. Priority is given to the qualitative aspect of the study. The findings of these two phases are then integrated during the interpretation phase (p.215).

The researcher conducted both individual interviews as well as focus group sessions. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000),

qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. The qualitative data is

extremely varied. It includes any information that can be captured that is not numerical in nature. The data collected described routine and problematic moments and meanings in the individuals' lives (p.3).

The focus group sessions were organized to collect data for the concept mapping methodology. It was a structured facilitated approach utilized in small group settings to gather ideas and grasp the understanding of the input articulated from the participants (Trochim, 2003). The researcher conducted three focus group sessions to generate ideas, structure the statements and interpret the maps created by the Concept Systems® software.

The core of concept mapping consists of several state of the art multivariate statistical methods that analyze the input from all the participants and yield an aggregate group product. The method required the use of Concept Systems® software that handled the data from this type of process and accomplished the correct analysis and mapping procedures. Richards and Richards (2000) explain "that computers easily offer assistance in the management of complex data. Computers can be used in the discovery and management of unrecognized ideas and concepts through the

construction and exploration of explanatory links between data and emergent ideas" (p.446).

DESIGN

Using a posttest-only nonexperimental design, the researcher studied the effects of the public school by interviewing eleven dropouts and conducting three focus group sessions. In this design, the researcher did not have a comparison group. The researcher gained valuable information by conducting interviews and focus group sessions with former students who attended public schools in Texas. According to Trochim (2003), this research design will show how all of the parts of the research project, i.e. the samples and methods, work together to try to address the central research questions.

The researcher utilized Tinto's theory of student departure as a framework to analyze what happened in the public schools that caused the participants to withdraw without acquiring a high school diploma.

SAMPLE

The researcher limited the sample to young adults who were 18 years of age or older and who dropped out of school. The researcher met with community representatives

and requested their assistance in using their facilities and identifying Hispanic dropouts within their communities.

The study participants selected met the following criteria: young adults who are 18 years of age or older, young adults who dropped out between the 1994-1995 through 2002-2003 academic years and young adults who attended public schools in Texas.

The community representative provided the researcher with a list of names of the young adults who live in the area and who met the sample criteria. The researcher wrote a letter (see appendix A) in English that requested participation from the individuals on this list. The letter was one page in length. Enclosed in the package with the letter was a resident survey (see appendix B) and research consent form (see appendix C). Fifty two letters were mailed to residents in two communities. Three letters were returned undeliverable from the post office. Five interested participants completed and returned the forms in a postage paid pre-addressed envelope to the researcher. One of the interested participants did not meet the criteria to participate in the research. The researcher received a phone call from a perspective participant

requesting information about the research project; however, this individual did not participate in the research study.

The researcher met with the community representative regarding the results of the letter invitation. The researcher and the community representative conducted home visits to receive informed consent for the actual study. From the home visits, seven residents agreed to participate in the study. They completed the resident survey and the consent form. Since the researcher also utilized snowball sampling, residents were asked if they knew of any Hispanics that met the criteria for the research project. If so, they were requested to contact the community representative or the researcher. Extra surveys and consent forms were distributed to the residents with instructions to deliver the completed forms to the community representative or mail them in the self addressed stamped envelope provided. Five more participants were recommended from the residents.

Table 3.1

Results of total participants during the first phase of
data collection

	Total	Consented	Met Criteria	Interviewed
Mail distribution	52	5	4	2
Home visits	7	7	6	5
Snowball sampling	5	5	4	4
Total	64	17	14	11

DATA COLLECTION

The researcher arranged to interview two of the interested participants that replied from the original mail distribution, five interviews were scheduled from the home visits and four interviews were scheduled from the participants that were recommended by the residents. A total of eleven individual interviews were conducted to collect data. The interviews explored the participants' experiences in the public schools. According to Glesne (1999),

the intent of interviewing is to capture the unseen that was, is, will be, or should be; how respondents think or feel about something; and how they explain or account for something. This approach is directed to understanding phenomena in the fullest possible complexity (p. 93).

Listening to the voices of those that dropped out of school and allowing them to describe their experiences was very important for the study. Not only did this process meet the goals of the research but it also gave the participants an understanding of why they dropped out of school.

Data Analysis for Individual Participants

Interviews were conducted with each participant at a location agreed upon by the participant and researcher. The location was provided by the community representative. Upon arrival at the site, the researcher greeted the participant and offered him or her refreshments. Each participant was given a brief orientation. The interview was no longer than forty five minutes. The researcher used a tape recorder to record the participants' responses. Participants were compensated for their time with a twenty-dollar gift certificate to the HEB supermarket or Wal-mart.

A colleague of the researcher transcribed the tapes from the interviews. Once the researcher received the

transcribed documents, she met with the participants to review the documents to verify that the participants' taped responses were accurately written in the transcripts. Member checking solicited feedback from the participants. It was an important procedure to verify findings and ensure they are valid (Schwandt, 2001).

The researcher analyzed the data using Tinto's theory of student departure as a framework. The researcher used the statements from transcripts that were similar to each other and placed them in a cluster. From this, themes emerged from the text. Once the researcher analyzed the data, she met with the participants to review the framework and the text from the interview transcripts. In order to validate and gain confidence in the research, the researcher conducted member checking. The researcher shared the interview transcripts and the draft of the text in order to make sure that their ideas were being represented (Glesne, 1999).

CONCEPT MAPPING

Concept mapping is a method developed by William Trochim. Concept mapping is a group process and uses a structured facilitated approach from the focus group

sessions. The researcher elicited input from participants and organized that input into specific themes. The core of concept mapping consists of state of the art multivariate statistical methods that analyze the input from all of the individuals and yield an aggregate group product. The method required the use of a specialized computer program Concept Systems® that can handle the data from this type of process and accomplish the correct analysis and mapping procedures (Trochim, 2001).

The process typically required the participants to brainstorm a set of statements relevant to the topic of interest, individually sort these statements into piles of similar ones, rate each statement on one or more dimensions, and interprets the maps that result from the data analyses. The result shows the individual statements with more similar statements located nearer each other and grouped into clusters. Additionally, the ratings provide the data to compute an average for each individual item and for each cluster of items. These rating results can then be added to the map. The result is multiple maps that are then interpreted by stakeholders in a facilitated session. Participants are actively involved in interpreting the

results to ensure that the maps are understandable and labeled in a meaningful way.

Concept mapping helps people think more effectively as a group without losing their individuality. It helps groups capture complex ideas. This was very important in creating an environment where Hispanic dropouts felt safe and comfortable in sharing their experiences about the public schools.

The researcher participated in a comprehensive training course on these procedures and software at Concept Systems Incorporated on February 27, February 28, and March 1, 2002 in Ithaca, N. Y. As a result, the researcher is a certified Concept Systems Facilitator. The researcher purchased a package which included the training as a certified Concept Systems facilitator, licensing to conduct the project using the Concept Systems software and limited technical assistance and support.

The researcher activated the project for this study when the research study began. She set up the project and identified herself as the project administrator. The researcher entered the data in the Concept Systems software using the statement master list, sort recording sheet and

rating sheet. In this study, the researcher took the role of the facilitator that managed and guided the concept mapping process. The concept mapping process involved six steps: 1) preparation, 2) generation, 3) structuring, 4) representation, 5) interpretation, and 6) utilization (Trochim, 2001).

Concept Mapping Data Collection

Preparation

This stage accomplished three things; first, the researcher identified eleven participants that participated in the generation step. Second, the researcher worked with the participants to develop the focus statement. The focus statement guided the generation of statements in order to analyze the perceptions of Hispanic dropouts. The focus statement read, "Generate statements that describe one specific thing that happened in school that caused you to withdraw from school." Third, the researcher worked with the community representative on an appropriate schedule for the research study.

Generation

The researcher and the participants met on a weekday that was convenient for the participants. The researcher held two generation of statements sessions. We met at a location provided by the community representative. The researcher provided snacks and beverages. The researcher greeted the participants and told them the purpose of the meeting. The researcher reviewed the focus statement. During this stage, the participants brainstormed statements that addressed the focus statement. Some of the participants were shy to brainstorm statements out loud, the researcher handed the participants paper and a pen to write down statements they thought addressed the focus statement. The participants brainstormed 80 statements.

After the two generation of statement sessions, the researcher reviewed the day and time of the next meeting. At the next session, the participants reviewed the statements to make sure the researcher captured their statements clearly. The researcher reviewed with the participants the final set of statements to ensure clarity of meaning for each. The researcher inputted this process into the laptop computer.

The researcher reviewed the day, time and location for the second phase of the concept mapping process. Each participant was given a flier with the location, date and time of the next meeting and contact information for the researcher. Participants were compensated for their time with a twenty-dollar gift certificate to HEB supermarket or Wal-mart.

The researcher entered the master statements into the computer. After this process was completed, the researcher then conducted a separate data entry check for each participant. Once the data entry was completed, she was able to generate the statement list and the rating list with the master statements. The researcher printed the statements in business like cards.

Structuring

The participants did two things during the structuring phase. First, each participant sorted the statements into piles of similar statements. They did this by sorting a deck of cards that had one statement on each card. Then, each participant rated each statement on some scale (Trochim, 2001).

This step of concept mapping was held at the same location following the completion of the generation of statements. The researcher arranged two sessions and provided snacks and beverages. During the structuring step, a cohort group of participants rated and sorted the brainstormed statements in which provided information about the importance of each of the statements.

From the master list of statements, the researcher created a packet with materials required to complete the rating and sorting phase of the concept mapping process. The packet consisted of a rating sheet, a set of statement cards, and a sort-recording sheet. The packets, the rating sheets and the sort recording sheets were in a folder for each participant (Onken, 2000).

Upon arrival at the site, the researcher greeted the participants, gave them their packet and offered them refreshments. Each participant was given a brief description of the day's agenda. The researcher asked each participant to individually complete the rating sheet. The rating sheet lists each statement according to a Likert-type response scale in which 1 = relatively unimportant, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = very important,

and 5 = extremely important (as cited in Onken).

Participants were instructed to rate each statement in terms of how personally important that statement is to him or her. The researcher provided assistance to individual participants.

Once the rating scale was completed, each participant was instructed to sort the set of statements into piles. Each packet contained a set of business-sized cards that were printed with a separate statement. During this procedure, the researcher instructed each participant to sort the statements into piles that made sense to him or her. Once the participant completed the sorting, the researcher encouraged him or her to name each of the piles. The researcher filled out the sort recording sheet, specifying each separate pile, the pile name and the statement numbers that were included in each pile. After the task was completed, the researcher placed all the material in the folder and labeled the folder with the participants' initials.

When the participants completed the tasks, the researcher reviewed with the participants the third step of the concept mapping process. The participants were told

that the researcher would notify the participants in writing, by making a home visit and/or by a telephone call. The researcher gave each participant another twenty-dollar gift certificate to Wal-mart for their attendance.

The researcher entered the master statements into the computer. For each participant, the researcher coded the participant's name and then entered the participant's sort information from the sort-recording sheet and that person's rating information from the rating sheet. The software tracked each sort and rating assignment and report any duplicate entries.

The rating and sorting of data collected was critical to the study. It provided the critical data for analysis. Approximately ten weeks lapsed between the third and fifth steps in order to effectively analyze the data. The concept mapping process used the data collected in steps one, two and three to develop maps in steps four (representation) and five (interpretation) and six (utilization).

Table 3.2

Results of total participants during the concept mapping stage

	Total	Consented	Met Criteria	Interviewed	Generation	Structuring	Interpretation
Mail distribution	52	5	4	2	0	0	0
Home visits	8	7	7	5	6	2	2
Snowball	5	5	4	4	5	3	2
Total	65	17	15	11	11	5	4

Representation

The Concept System software used multi-dimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis to integrate the sorting information from each participant and developed a series of easily readable concept maps. These maps showed the perspective of the entire group of participants. In effect, the Concept System software obtained the unique perspectives of the participants, preserved the best thinking of each individual and integrated the individual detail to produce a coherent picture of the entire group.

The researcher entered the master statements into the computer. For each participant, the researcher coded the

participant's name and then entered the participant's sorted information from the sort-recording sheet and that person's rating information from the rating sheet. The software tracked each sort and rating assignment.

After this process was completed, the researcher then conducted a separate data entry check for each participant. Once the data entry was completed, she was able to generate the statement list, cluster list, point map, cluster map, point rating map and the cluster-rating map for the entire data set.

The researcher followed the software instructions to create a cluster tree. The printout reported clusters that are merged at each step going from twenty clusters down to six. In addition, the researcher displayed the cluster replay maps to observe how all the statements and clusters were merged together. She used this information to complete the first two columns in the cluster selection worksheet. She printed out the statement list in the twenty-cluster arrangement.

According to Trochim (2001), this is the process where the software takes the sort and rating input and it is represented in map form.

Two major statistical analyses are used. The first, multidimensional scaling; takes the sort data across all participants and develops the basic map where each statement is a point on the map and statements that were piled together by more people are closer to each other on the map. The second analysis, cluster analysis; takes the output of the multidimensional scaling (the point map) and partitions the map into groups of statements or ideas or clusters (Trochim, 2001, p. 29).

Interpretation

Trochim (1989) identifies a specific sequence of steps, based on experience, to follow in selecting the final number of clusters, naming the clusters, reviewing the assignment of statements to the cluster, and interpret the overall pattern of the final map. Each of the materials that the researcher had generated up to this point (that is, the statement list, cluster list, point map, cluster map, point rating map and cluster rating map) are relevant to this step as each provides important information about the major ideas and how they are related. In essence, they reflect different sides of the same underlying conceptual phenomenon (as cited in Onken, 2000).

Procedures for Selection and Interpretation of the Final Map

A letter was mailed to all the participants who took part in the rating and sorting activities. The letter reminded the participants of the date, time and location for the final group meeting and informed them that the purpose was to review and interpret their work. The letter provided information on how to contact the researcher. The letter informed the participants that they would be given another twenty-dollar gift certificate to HEB supermarket or Wal-mart for attending. In addition, the researcher made home visits and telephoned each participant to secure his or her participation in the final phase of the concept map development.

Before the final group meeting, the researcher prepared a packet for the session. It included the following items: (a) the clusters selection worksheet that report which clusters were merged starting at twenty and topping at six clusters, and (b) a list of the twenty clusters with each cluster followed by the statements forming that cluster. The researcher set up a laptop

computer and a computer projector to project images of the point map, cluster map, point rating map and cluster rating map for the entire data set.

The third phase of concept mapping was held at the same location as the other sessions. The sessions were scheduled on a day that was convenient for the participants. Two interpretation sessions were scheduled. The researcher greeted the participants and offered them refreshments.

The meeting began with a brief review of the day's agenda. In reviewing the sequence of steps, the researcher showed a projected computer image of the twenty-cluster map. She briefly explained how the Concept Systems software created the twenty clusters and then directed the participants to the cluster selection worksheet.

The researcher pointed out how the software merged the clusters. As a group, the participants and the researcher reviewed the statements in the clusters. They discussed and then reached a consensus as to whether the merge made sense. Once a consensus was reached, the researcher recorded their decision in column three of the cluster selection worksheet. Then the participants reviewed each

statement in the new cluster to identify any that did not fit. The researcher recorded their comments in column four of the cluster selection worksheet. This process was repeated for each cluster merge. After reviewing their work, participants decided that a six cluster map made the most sense to them in grouping the statements (Onken, 2000).

The researcher then led the participants through a review of the statements in each of the clusters. They identified a word or phrase to describe a particular cluster. After discussion, the group reached a consensus for naming a particular cluster. The group worked cluster by cluster to achieve consensus on cluster names. There was universal agreement that the map made sense and was comprehensive in capturing their perceptions. Once the task was completed, the participants were compensated for their time.

Reliability

According to Onken (2001), in concept mapping, there is no correct statement or correct sorting or ranking of statements. What is assumed is "that there may be some normatively arrangement of the statements that is reflected imperfectly" in the sorts and rankings of the participants

(as cited in Onken, 2001). The selection of participants is a critical part of this assumption in that the goal is the creation of a relatively homogeneous group with respect to the focus of the study. In this research study, all the participants were Hispanic, dropouts and most of the participants had similar experiences. For example, one of the participants was dropped out because of her pregnancy related problems at school. A couple of other participants dropped out for similar reasons. Onken explains "reliability assessment focuses on the consistency across the assumed relatively homogenous set of participants" (as cited in Onken, 2001).

Validity

Participants selected the final concept map during the interpretation stage. They assessed the face validity of the concept map when they examined a resulting map and discussed whether or not it made sense. In this study, four participants were involved in the interpretation step and were in agreement to the six clusters that made sense to them. Among the four participants, there was agreement toward the statements and the resulting six clusters. The resulting concept map had validity to the participants

since they produced the statements, sorted the statements and then selected and named the clusters (Onken, 2001).

Trustworthiness

The researcher ensured credibility during the study by providing the participant's an opportunity to express their view of why they dropped out of school. The researcher represented the data collected. The researcher confirms that the research project processes were logical, traceable and documented and the data and interpretation of the data was not a figment of the researcher's imagination (Swandt, 2001).

SUMMARY

The methodology and procedures for the study were presented in this chapter. This study was comprised of a mixed methods approach. The selection of the sample of the study was described as was the concept mapping methodology. The data collection and analysis processes were also described.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

This study involved collecting data from Hispanic youths to explore what happened in the public schools that caused them to drop out. The purpose of this study was two-fold, to give voice to Hispanic dropouts and to utilize concept mapping, a methodology that has not been used in dropout research. Tinto's theory of student departure was used as a framework to answer the essential research questions for this study. 1) What are Hispanic dropouts' perceptions of the internal and/or external factors contributing to their decision to leave school? 2) What are Hispanic dropouts' perceptions of the institutional factors contributing to their decision to leave school? 3) How useful and applicable is Tinto's theory on student departure to the interactions and experiences Hispanic dropouts have within the public school? This chapter begins by presenting a description of the study participants, the

interpretation of the results from the concept mapping methodology, and the research findings of the study.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

This section provides a brief description of each of the participants that were interviewed. Pseudonyms for names were used to preserve the confidentiality of the participants. In order to maintain the anonymity of the school districts, the names of the school districts and the names of the schools the participants attended were changed. During the interviews, the participants shared their experiences in the public schools. They discussed their experiences from elementary, middle school and high school until they dropped out. They told their story and how their experiences made sense to them (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Following a description of each of the participants, a short segment of their interview offered an opportunity to begin to hear their voices (Montemayor, 2001). A description of their participation during the research project was explained.

Tati

Tati is a twenty five year old Hispanic female who attended elementary school in Texas. She moved to the current location to attend middle school and high school and dropped out of high school when she was in the eleventh grade. She is not pursuing a GED. Tati participated in the initial interview and was invited to attend the other sessions; however, she was incarcerated after the interview and was unable to continue with the research project.

Elementary...uh, I went to school in Cleveland, Texas...kinder, pre-K ...it's one thing, I've blocked my childhood out through therapy, for personal reasons. I know I was happy only in second grade. That was the only time that I recall ever being happy. In fifth grade, I never accomplished anything because they thought I could just speak Spanish because of where I came from. But, they tried to stick me in English as a second language but I turned them around because I was teaching the Spanish people from Puerto Rico to know English and I was there as a tutor and an interpreter. Sixth grade wasn't that good. When I came to Las Vegas, I went to Clifton Middle School, an Anglo school. There was nothing but Anglo-Americans. From the East side there were only three school buses, just on

the East side. There was a lot of prejudice over there." When I hit 9th grade that was when I hit the books. I also was taking ____ classes at night at Edward High School. That was good...they would help me out. Edward was the one school that helped us Hispanic people out. There was nothing but Hispanics. But it was very good.

Miriam

Miriam is an 18 year old Hispanic female. She attended schools in California and Texas. She dropped out of school in the ninth grade and she is not pursuing a GED. Miriam participated in the initial interview; however, due to family problems and her illness she was unable to attend the other sessions. Miriam notified the researcher in advance that she was unable to participate in the other sessions.

Elementary school basically I didn't have any trouble. When I got into middle school that's when I started getting into a lot of trouble and stuff like that. I started getting kicked out and stuff like that. I had a lot of family problems. I had lived with my mom in California. She had took us to California and at that time my dad had passed away and my grandmother wanted us to come back with her here in Cleveland. Then I started school, the end of my sixth grade year I

started at Fine Middle School. From Fine M. S., I started getting into a lot of fights and stuff and then I passed and in seventh grade I started getting into more trouble with gangs and drugs and stuff. I started going to Taft M.S. and they let me go back into a public school. So when I went into Taft, I was still drug dealing and stuff like that and involved heavily in the gang. I got into a lot of fights and stuff and then I got kicked out of that school too. Then I finally went back my second year for seventh grade and when I did I decided I was going to turn around and I wasn't going to get into anymore trouble. I wasn't getting anywhere. So my second time in seventh grade I started getting good grades and stuff like that.

Rose

Rose is a twenty three year old Hispanic female who also dropped out of high school when she was in the eleventh grade. She attended schools in Florida and Texas and she is pursuing a GED. Rose participated in the initial interview; however, she did not participate in any other sessions for the research project.

Well the reason that I dropped out of high school is because they put me on probation because I missed a lot of school. And me and my mom went to

talk to a judge. I don't know how many months I was on probation. But after that, I went to school every single day. I was in school and doing my work, but the thing about it is that I was tardy a lot. I was fifteen minutes late and because of my tardies, they counted it as though I was absent. They added all that up and they still made us pay the fine for me not going to school. Even though I was in school and doing my work, I was late. Because they had that policy, after three tardies you're absent. You know what I'm saying. That just didn't work for me. I got pissed off because my mom and me had to pay for that. If they going to charge us 5 something. If they are going to charge us, might as well drop out anyway. Now six years later, they are coming out saying that I didn't pay when my mom and me worked out a payment plan to pay it. My mother passed away last year now I have warrant for tardies.

Julia

Julia is a twenty seven year old Hispanic female. She dropped out of high school when she was in the ninth grade. She attended schools in Texas and she is pursuing a GED. Julia participated in the initial interview; however, she did not participate in any other sessions for the research project.

In elementary I moved here for elementary for awhile. My parents were always getting into fights and my father was an alcoholic. So we kept moving back from Carrizo Springs, Texas to Cleveland. It was back and forth. So I went to a few different schools. I went to Ana Elementary, Lara Elementary and Sara Elementary. I guess when I went to fourth and fifth grade, in Carrizo Springs it's different. They have like first through third and then fourth and fifth in one school and then sixth through eighth and then ninth through twelfth. All I remember really from junior high, we elementary really, fourth and fifth grade, uh, people used to make fun of me because I grew up faster than everybody else. I had huge breasts so that kind of gave me really bad self-esteem. It wasn't a bad thing but guys make fun of you, whatever. So when I got to sixth grade a lot of girls didn't like me that were in junior high, like eighth graders and seventh grade. They didn't like me for no reason at all. I was a nice girl. I had good grades back then and everything. Every single day I would get on the bus and they would torment me. They would torment me and they would pull my hair and they would kick me. They would do all kinds of weird stuff to me. They put gum in my hair. They were just really, really mean to me. I came over here for the summer and you know, I was with

my cousins and stuff and things changed. I went back to school in seventh grade and I was just like raging fury because these girls used to like chase me home. They would beat me up every single day they would torment me. So in seventh grade I went back to school and it was a whole other story. I got into a fight at least thirty times that year.

Barbie

Barbie is a thirty one year old Hispanic female who also attended schools in Texas. She dropped out of school when she was in the eleventh grade. During the time of this study, Barbie was pursuing a GED. She notified me during the interpretation session that she stopped going to her GED classes. Barbie participated throughout the entire research project. She was interviewed and she participated as a cohort member in the generation, structuring and interpretation stage of the concept mapping methodology.

Elementary, it was pretty good...I went to three different elementaries. My first two elementary schools were good. The other one was kind of okay. The people over there thought they were better. Some of the girls over there were like, oh, I'm better than you. I ignore everything. In junior high it was kind of hard too. A lot of

girls wanted to fight me...you think you're better than me. I'm a fighter type girl. You know, and people used to always...lied to... Elementary was pretty good. High school was where it started getting kind of, freshman year was kind of hard, you know, everybody was like, you've got to do this, you've got to do that. I skipped like for maybe six months...that wasn't good. I got caught by my dad. He said, you've got a choice. I made my choice and I ended up going... My sophomore year, it was pretty good. It was kind of hard though, teachers were not very good with me. I had a hard time in science and math. My junior year, it was pretty good. Whatever. ...my dad passed away...it was my last final and I had to leave. The principal came and got me and told me my dad had passed away. I got my stuff and I left. I tried to come back the following year and the principal wouldn't let me. I had to go and do 11th grade all over again. I was like, I was only one final...I said, forget it. It was already the last day of school. It was at the end. All I needed was my final so I went back the following year, and all I needed to take was one more exam and they wouldn't let me. They said no, you can't, you have to go through the whole school year again. I was not going to go through all that again.

Angela

Angela is a thirty year old Hispanic female. She attended schools in Texas and dropped out of school in ninth grade. She was pursuing a GED and working at the time of this study. Angela participated in the interview and the generation session of the research study.

In elementary, elementary was okay...I didn't have very many friends, not many friends that were girls. I had a lot of boyfriends, just friends. I was in special ed classes...elementary was, I guess when I got to fifth or sixth grade, the school class work and all that was okay, but they would never tell my mom and they wouldn't tell her how I was doing and she wouldn't go to the conferences. Then, but, I was still passing and I still had passing grades. Then I went, from there I would get into fights in elementary. They would always pick on me, the girls would say that I would talk about them, this and that. After that everybody wanted to beat me up, tried to beat me up. After that passed by, I don't know, I guess, little by little school work wasn't, I wasn't paying attention too much at school. I guess that's where it started, fighting...and then plus the teachers never would really call my mom. I liked to work and all that, but I guess I didn't really have anybody there to keep there,

to keep pushing me or tell me to stay in school. I guess I never had that. Then I went to junior high, seventh grade, and there, I guess I was more scared than, they were just like, here, you do this, here's your classes, you go there. I guess I was used to them always explaining in elementary and then when we got to a higher class, higher grade, it was like, here, you're on your own, do whatever. It was more easier for them not to pay attention to you because I guess there were more kids. So I didn't, I did whatever I wanted to do, I guess. Then I was skipping school and started drinking, not drinking really. I started getting high more. What happened there was I just started skipping school. I had too many absences. My grades were going down because of my absences, I didn't have no credits so they told me, well, next year you are going to have to go, for my high school I was going to have to go to a secondary school. Over there was even worse. I mean it was there for them to help you, right, but they didn't really help anybody either. I guess I would have to help myself too, but I didn't have...I don't know.

Pete

Pete is a twenty one year old Hispanic male who attended schools in Texas and dropped out in ninth grade. Pete was not pursuing a GED during the time of the study.

He participated throughout the entire research project. He was interviewed and he participated as a cohort member in the generation, structuring and interpretation stage of the concept mapping methodology.

In elementary everybody just pick on you because you are brown, basically. I was, yeah, I had ...a lot of people didn't like me just because of my skin color. Some of the teachers sometimes you would have a problem with me. I had a problem with it when I was little...the teacher didn't want to teach me because I was brown. I don't even remember her name no more. It was just because of my skin color. I mean I paid attention in class but sometimes they wouldn't want to help you at all. Middle school, what can I say, there was a lot of problems there. There was only like one teacher that didn't really support us and we'd ask her for help and she would be like, uh, I'm busy teaching this other student. I'm helping these other students. I would even wait after class, you know, until everybody left so she could help me and she would, I have to go and ...skip to the next...that's not right. High school...Jordan...the counselor spent a lot of time there. The teachers were pretty good...it's just like one or two teachers in the whole school that didn't really support us...well, we ain't got time, or the period is over and it's time for

your next class. I wouldn't really fully understand what he was talking about...I don't know a lot of teachers...some are nice and some of them just want, they want to help you but they want you to get to the next level and just some of the teachers don't care if you make it or not. That's when I dropped out...9th grade. Jordan High school, that's the whole reason I moved from Jordan because they weren't helping me. So I moved to De la Rosa and it's the same thing. Most of the teachers didn't want to help me. I don't know if it's my skin color, I don't know what it is. I can do a lot of stuff.

Maria

Maria is an eighteen year old Hispanic female who attended school in Texas. She dropped out of school in the ninth grade. During the time of the research, she was pursuing a GED and participated throughout the entire research project. She was interviewed and she participated as a cohort member in the generation, structuring and interpretation stage of the concept mapping methodology.

In elementary and middle school everything was pretty much good because like I was the kind of person that I wanted to be at school. I would go every day and do my work and my teachers were good. I moved around a lot in elementary, but like when I did my teachers were good. I didn't

really have any problems. When I got to high school, like everybody is like we can go out for lunch and do this and you aren't supposed to leave until you are in 12th grade. So we would leave and not want to come back. When I started in 9th grade everything, the teachers and everything were good but whenever I would start messing up like missing school, like I would go with my boyfriend and I would miss school, uh, and I would come back and my teachers would just give me a bunch of makeup work and like I wouldn't have to, they wouldn't have to explain what happened I would just do my work. So they would pass me because I could finish it but I wasn't there in class learning how to do it. I went to 9th grade twice actually. The first year I went they didn't pass me because of my absences. But like I went back to school and then that's when I got pregnant and like I went to my counselor and I asked her if there was any kind of like way that I could come half day to school and go work half day because my mom kicked me out and my dad didn't want to deal with me because I was pregnant. So when I tried to go back again after I had my baby, uh, I had got a breast pump and I was supposed to, because I was breastfeeding, and I was supposed to pump and my sister who was watching the baby was going to come and pick it up. The only time that I could

pump was at lunch time and they wouldn't let me leave. So I would have to go to the bathroom and my boobs were real sore and I would have to go pump into a napkin or something because they wouldn't let me go pump with my electric pump. My boobs got really hard, like, it was painful. I would leak all over my shirt. No exaggeration, my whole in front of my shirt would be soaked. I would have to go home. I couldn't stay there with a soaking wet shirt They wouldn't let me go and pump and so I had to stay at home. I couldn't go to school because my boobs hurt too much. They were cracking and bleeding because they were getting so big and I couldn't, I had to stay at home so I could feed the baby because otherwise I couldn't even walk. It hurt bad.

Juanita

Juanita is a twenty one year old Hispanic female who attended schools in Texas and dropped out of school in the eighth grade. At the time of the study, she was pursuing a GED and she participated throughout the entire research project. She was interviewed and she participated as a cohort member in the generation, structuring and interpretation stage of the concept mapping methodology.

I will start probably around second grade...uh, I was in a school, there were not enough teachers so they had me and about six

other kids, we were in second grade but they had us in a third grade class like on the side and the teacher would come and work with us just every once in a while, like give us, she didn't explain stuff as well and I didn't like her. I just didn't like her. She never worked good enough with us and we didn't learn enough. I know for sure we didn't...she would be working with her class and then just come and give us some stuff. We wouldn't even be facing the class...that was one thing. I think we just didn't have enough time to get to know each other...for me to like her. How can you like someone that's not paying attention to you and...I felt, and I know the other kids probably felt the same way, we didn't get enough attention and we felt pushed away because we were. Then mainly my most ...the reason I dropped out was because in middle school, when I was in, okay, when I was in 6th grade, well, even in elementary...I didn't learn like hardly any of my math then. So then when I was in 6th grade, I learned stuff in 6th grade. Then seventh grade came and I didn't go to school as much and they, I went to summer school for two classes and those were good. Then 8th grade came and I didn't go hardly at all because I had this one teacher, the assistant principal...if I wore a shirt that she thought was wrong, I wore a shirt that had a sling-shot on it and she told me to go

home and suspended me for that. When she could have told me to turn it inside out. I had been wearing that shirt for like three years. Just anything, every time I would go to class, I would turn around to ask a little question and my teacher would go, no, no, you're talking, you need to get a referral and send me to the office. When I would get to the office and the principal all she would do she would suspend me. I was never at school. I went to summer school for that and I didn't even go to like half the classes in summer school and they passed me to 9th grade. So basically they just pushed me up to grades and I never even learned anything. There was no point of pushing anywhere if I'm not going to understand anything once I get to a higher level. It was ridiculous. In high school I was going to school and doing good and everything but then I was in the biology class and these two girls, these two Anglo-Americans girls, and the teacher was Anglo-Americans too, I was sitting there, those girls, I didn't even know them, they were from a totally different school and everything, they would just talk all this stuff about me, and make fun of me. I told the teacher and the teacher was like, oh, it's okay. She still sat me by those girls and let them say, she never told them nothing. Finally

one day they said something that made me cry...they made me cry so I never went back to that class.

Nelson

Nelson is a twenty year old Hispanic male who attended schools in Texas and dropped out in the tenth grade. He was not pursuing a GED. Nelson anticipated participating throughout the entire research project. He was interviewed and he participated as a cohort member in the generation and structuring stage; however, he was unavailable to participate in the interpretation stage of the concept mapping methodology.

Okay, well, elementary and middle school was no problem. I was always an outstanding student, played sports and on honor roll and all the good stuff. My main distraction was when I got to high school, it was, the supervision wasn't always there. There was just too much freedom and lack of teachers not really showing as much interest in students as they should. Well, the, like when, the freedom, you definitely get a lot of freedom. The teachers will tell you, you know, this is ...I have nothing...I've had just about every teacher in high school tell me that it's not my responsibility. They will say, it's not my responsibility for you to do this. It's not like, you know, they give you the work but

you should at least get some kind of time to work with them and interact with them and talk to them. Yeah, there's no kind of time like where they would, some teachers would but it's not like steady...that would, hands-on, that would talk to you and physically show you, teach.

Carlos

Carlos is a twenty five year old Hispanic male who attended schools in Texas but dropped out of school when he was in the ninth grade. Carlos was not pursuing a GED. Carlos participated in the interview and the generation session of the research study.

High school was more, I was more affected by high school because of smoking marijuana and hanging around with the wrong crew andI got of age to be able to drop out, which was 16 so that I was able to make my own decisions at that point, if I wanted to go or if I didn't want to go. I pretty much made the decision that I didn't want to go any more because I was being treated in such a way because I was incarcerated from time to time as a 14 and 15 year old. My probation officer actually enrolled me in school, in high school. The principal gave me a, what is it, a, I was put on probation in 9th grade. I was always being looked at. I just felt like they were hawking me. It was more trouble to be in school than it

was not to be in school. That's the decision I made to just get away from all the troubles that I was dealing with.

The participant's stories were compelling. His/her story was a form of discourse that is known to the participant to retell key experiences and events (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). This section focused on the description of the study participants and gave a brief collection of their stories and their experiences in the public schools. In the next section, the researcher described the results of the concept mapping methodology.

Interpretation

As indicated in chapter three, eleven participants were interviewed and eleven attended the generation session. From the eleven participants that were in the generation session, five were chosen to be a part of the cohort group to participate in the structuring and interpretation sessions of the research. From the five that attended the structuring session, one was unable to attend the interpretation session because he moved to another city (see table 3).

Table 4.1

Total participants during the concept mapping stage

	Interview	Generation	Structuring	Interpretation
Mail distribution	2	0	0	0
Home visits	5	6	2	2
Snowball	4	5	3	2

As stated in chapter three, the participants decided that a six cluster map made the most sense to them. The researcher led the participants through a review of the statements in each of the clusters and they identified a word or a phrase to describe a particular cluster. After discussion they reached a consensus for naming that particular cluster. The group worked cluster to cluster to achieve consensus on cluster names (Onken, 2001). The final cluster names were:

- Lack of school support for students
- Lack of positive support from peers
- Lack of administrative support for students
- Home and family problems

- Personal reasons
- Programs for teens

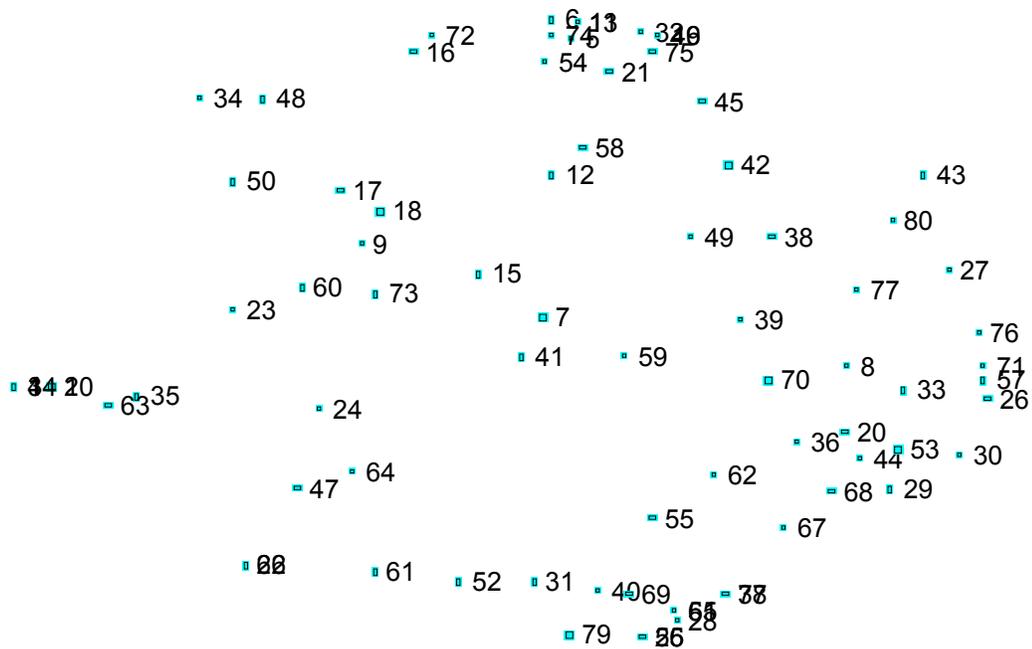
CONCEPT MAPPING RESULTS

Five participants had sorted and rated the statements that were used in the analysis. As stated in chapter three, a focus statement for the generation session was intended to elicit participants' thoughts on what happened in the public schools that caused them to drop out. Eighty statements were generated (Appendix D). Participants were asked to sort cards, each containing one of the eighty generated statements into piles so that the statements in each pile were similar to each other. Participants made as many piles as they wished. The key analysis in concept mapping is to take the aggregated sort data as input and create the point map. Figure 1 displays the eighty statements in a point map. This initial map shows all the elements of the statements in relation to each other. Each of the statements is specifically located on the plot. Statements that were sorted together more frequently were closer together on the map. The more people who sort items together, the closer the items will be on the map. The

result describes less distance equals more similar in meaning. The software analysis quantifies the qualitative data (Trochim, 2001, Grayson, 1992).

Figure 4.1

Point map

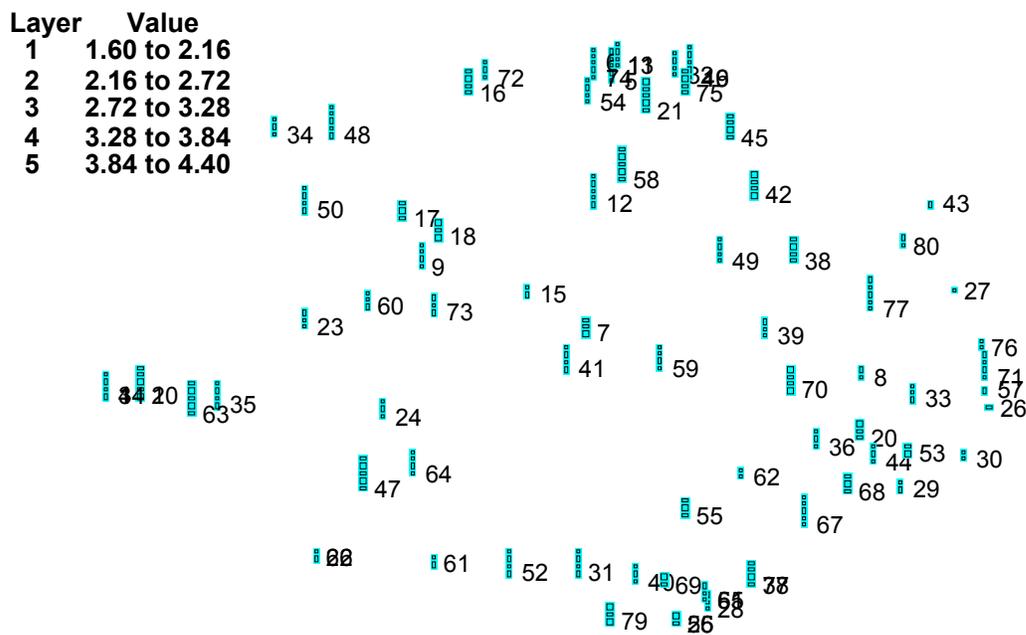


Participants rated each of the generated statements on a Likert-type scale where 1=relatively unimportant, 2=somewhat important, 3=important, 4=very important, 5=extremely important. The 1 to 5 rating data was averaged across persons for each item. The averages ran from 1.60 to

4.40. Figure 2 illustrates the rating information. It shows the original point map with the average rating per item displayed as vertical columns.

Figure 4.2

Point map with ratings

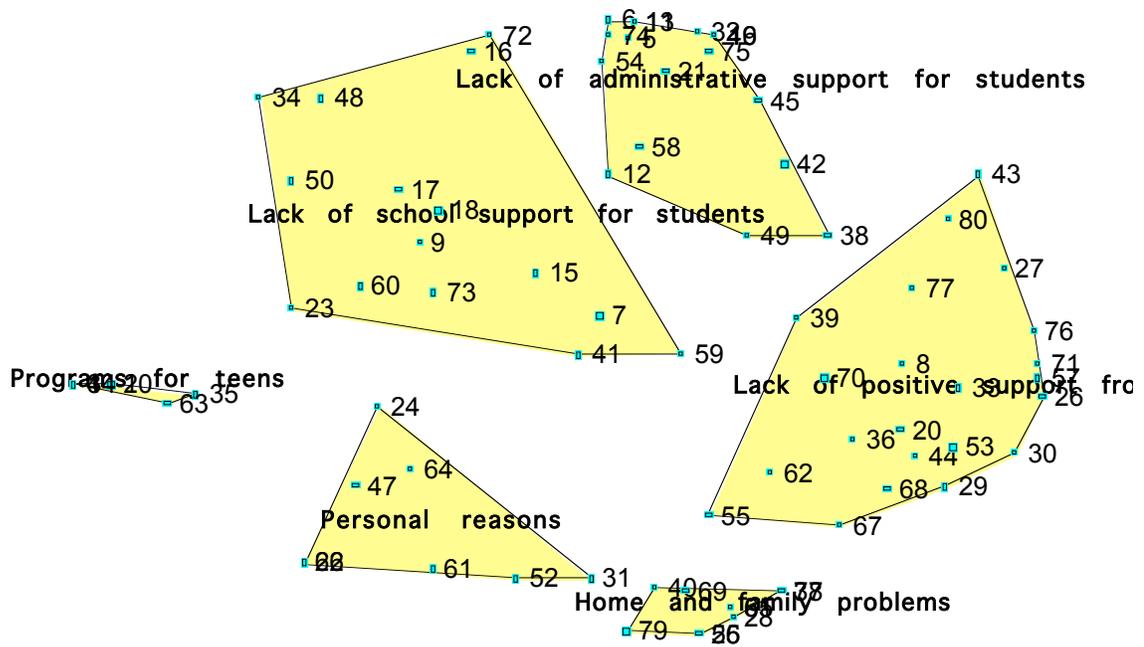


A concept map contains much information. It shows all the statements that pertain to the interest of the participants. It shows which statements are more related to the others. It shows clusters of ideas into which they are organized, see figure 3 below (Trochim, 2001). As

previously stated, the participants reached a consensus and labeled each of the clusters.

Figures 4.3

Concept Map shows how the statements were grouped into clusters.

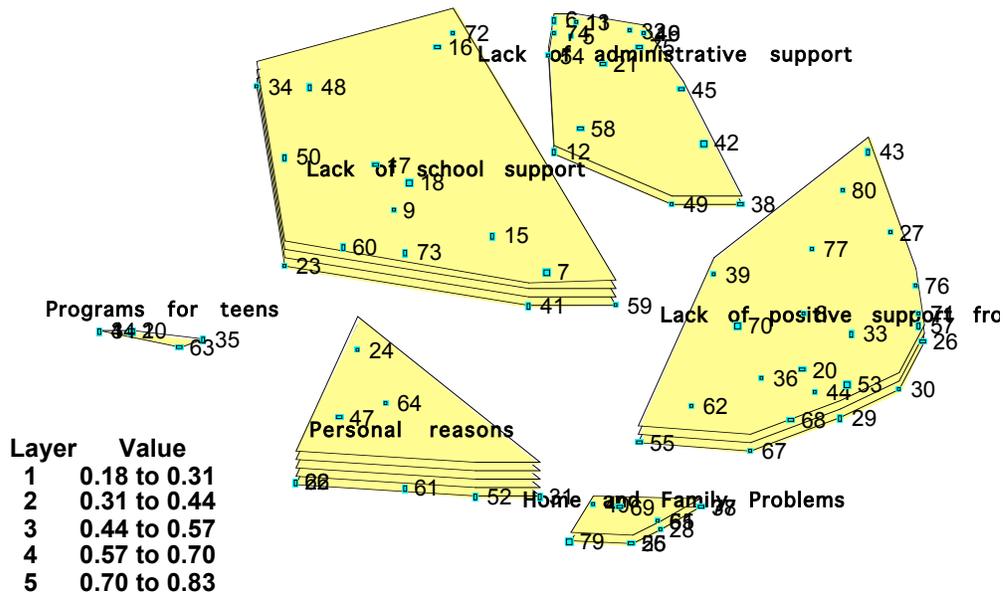


The concept systems software computes the cluster bridging value for a given cluster map. Figure 4 below displays the cluster map with different layers of the clusters reflecting the bridging values. A lower value means that a statement was frequently sorted with

statements which are closer to it on the map and a higher value means that the statement was frequently sorted with statements further away (as cited in Onken, 2001).

Figure 4.4

Cluster Bridging Value

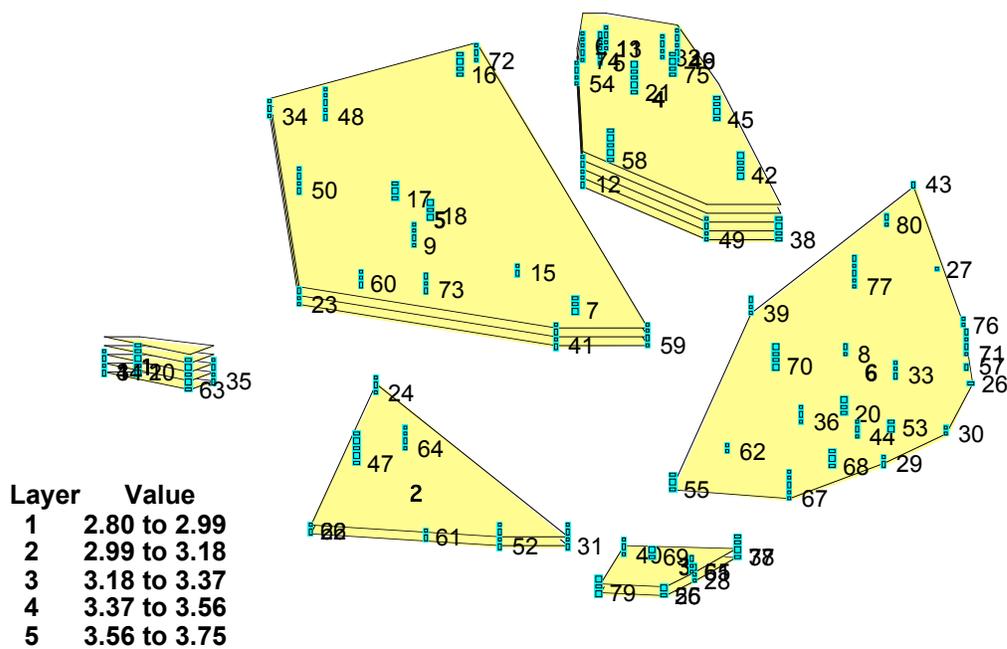


A bridging value, ranging from 0 to 1, is computed for each statement. A lower value means that a statement was frequently sorted with statements which are closer to it on the map and a higher value means that the statement was frequently sorted with statements further away. The cluster bridging value is the average value across all statements in a given cluster. Cluster with lower bridging values are

usually more cohesive, easier to interpret and reflect the content well in that part of the map (as cited in Onken, 2001). The most cohesive cluster was the *Programs for teens* cluster. *Home and family problems* and the *lack of administrative support* cluster were the next most cohesive clusters. The *personal reasons* cluster was the least cohesive, with the *lack of school support* and *lack of positive support from peers* falling between the next least cohesive and mid range, respectively.

Figure 4.5

Cluster Rating Map shows the relative importance or emphasis of clusters.



The cluster with the higher cluster rating is identified as the cluster that is named *lack of administrative support* for students. When the researcher asked the participants, what this cluster meant to them, they stated "that it represents the lack of support from the teacher, the principal, the district, the whole system". The next cluster in relative importance is the cluster that is labeled *programs for teens*. In this section, the participants stated that the cluster can be further explained as "schools that needed to have better programs for students that are pregnant and students that want to work". The next cluster, *lack of school support for students*, the participants explained "in this cluster they would like to see more support from the teachers, hall monitors and counselors". Two clusters, *personal reasons* and home and family problems were the same in relative importance. The participants stated that assistance with drugs and motivation will be beneficial in the personal reasons cluster. In the home and family cluster, they would like to see more assistance with problems at home, parent support, and mobility. The next cluster, *lack of positive*

support from peers is the section that explained students and friends.

With the concept mapping results and interview transcripts, the researcher examined the participants' perspectives about their experiences in the public school. The consensus reached by the participants during the concept mapping interpretation session illustrated that the concept maps represented findings of what happened to them in the public schools that caused them to drop out. Furthermore, it is apparent that the interview transcripts represented such findings as presented by Tinto's theory of student departure. The findings answered the essential research questions: 1) What are Hispanic dropouts' perceptions of the internal and/or external factors contributing to their decision to leave school? 2) What are Hispanic dropouts' perceptions of the institutional factors contributing to their decision to leave school? 3) How useful and applicable is Tinto's theory on student departure to the interactions and experiences Hispanic dropouts have within the public school? In the following section, the researcher will share the voice of the

participants as it relates to Tinto's theory of student departure utilizing the concept mapping results as well.

DISCUSSION

In the review of the literature, researchers were able to identify dropout rates and their patterns among student populations. Even when the dropout rates are available, the reader is still left with the problem of determining if and when the departure had occurred. Researchers only scratched the surface of the complex processes of interaction among the students and the schools in which they attend. Most research failed to distinguish adequately between different forms of leaving. Tinto's theory of student departure seeks to explain how and particular individual and institutional attributes come to be associated with student departure (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) explains:

departure is a highly idiosyncratic event, one that can be fully understood only by referring to the understandings and experiences of each and every person that departs. Nevertheless, there does emerge among the diversity of behaviors reported in research on this question a number of pertinent themes. These pertain to the dispositions of individuals who enter school, to the character of their interactional experiences with the institution following entry and to the external forces which sometimes influences their behavior within the institution (p. 37).

Internal Factors - Goal and Commitment

Students are understood to arrive at school with various levels of goal commitment (for example, to graduate with a certain degree) and institutional commitment (for example, to remain in school), which are then increased or decreased in accordance with their level of academic or social integration. Over time the individual's goals and commitment interact with institutional experiences, such as the formal and informal academic and social systems of the school (Seidman, 1996).

The participants interviewed had intentions to attend school and finish. Nelson and Miriam describe their experiences:

Nelson

I was always an outstanding student, played sports and on honor roll and all the good stuff. As far as elementary and middle school goes, I was a real good student. I never had no problems in school and even in high school I played sports and stuff.

Miriam

When I did go to school, I always went to school. When I did go to school I always made straight A's. I would always participate because I'm a very open person but I'm not one to talk mess to people just to talk mess to them. I'm a real quiet person, but when it comes to participating, I did that a lot because I was just a very outspoken person.

External Factors

The two external factors that may contribute to the student's decision to dropout are "obligations" and "finances" (Tinto, 1993, p.37-38). Some studies have determined that students who have dropped out of school have cited financial reasons, family or job responsibilities, and/or personal problems for leaving (Horn & Carroll, 1998).

Two of the clusters from the concept mapping methodology, *personal reasons* and *home and family problems* were identified by the participants as causes for dropping out of school. Statement #24 in the personal reasons cluster states: "I thought that maybe if I had a job I

would not have to go to school. I could do whatever I want to do." Statement # 28 in the home and family problems cluster states: "I would isolate myself cause of problems at home."

During the interviews, Miriam described her experiences as follows:

When I got into high school I was doing good but I was having a lot of knee pains and stuff so I went in to go see a doctor and the doctors ran a lot of tests and stuff. I started going to Taft High School and I gave up all my medicines that I needed to take and stuff like that. Then I was doing pretty good at Taft High School. There were times that I would pass out and stuff and ..would have to go and get me and then they finally told me that I should just stay home and shouldn't go back to school anymore. I didn't go back to school after that. Then I had tried to get homebound for three years. Every year that school would start, I would try to get homebound and they would always put it off. They would never call me back. Finally, I moved in with my cousin James and his wife when I was seventeen and they were all like, you need to go, you need to go back to school and stuff like that. At that time I had started Cytoxin. I was doing chemotherapy so I needed to do homebound. I finally got it through and I did homebound and my homebound teacher told me that I should basically not go back to a regular school that I needed to just go ahead and go for my GED because I was already too old to enter school and stuff like that. I gave up on the last....I didn't understand it, but when my mom went to the school one time that I had passed out in the hallway...the teacher finally told me, stay home, don't go to school no more. I was like, okay, I guess. So that's basically my school years.

Miriam dropped out because of her medical illness. Maria dropped out because she had a baby and was breast feeding. She states: "They wouldn't let me go and pump and so I had to stay at home. I couldn't go to school because my boobs hurt too much." Barbie explains that she dropped out because her father passed away "my dad passed away...it was my last final and I had to leave."

The participants' personal interpretations of their schools' opportunities and challenges shaped their decisions and behaviors. Such factors as encouragement and support from significant others and the positive interactions with faculty and peers may keep the students committed to the school (Braxton, 2000.) For the participants in the study, their decision was to leave.

According to Tinto (1993), there are four terms of individual experience which affect departure. The terms are: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence and isolation. Each describes an important interactional outcome arising from individual experiences within the school (Tinto, 1993.)

"Adjustment" is a requirement for students to develop school membership. This attribute is apparent as students

transfer from middle school to high school. This transition appears to be a major source of academic failure and "alienation from the institution" (Wehlage, 1989, p. 12). With this transition, students are asked to meet new standards and expectations. High school teachers tend to distance themselves from students in an effort to encourage them to become more responsible and grown up.

The participants in the study did have to adjust to the school they attended. They experienced the distancing from the teachers. Below are their stories:

Nelson

I've had just about every teacher in high school tell me that it's not my responsibility. They will say, it's not my responsibility for you to do this.

Barbie

High school was where it started getting kind of, freshman year was kind of hard, you know, everybody was like, you've got to do this, you've got to do that.

Pete

Mostly high school...I got in a lot of trouble in high school because....people were messing with me...because I'm Mexican or whatever....just make up excuses...just pass you up like you were nothing. I think that's the whole reason that I dropped out because I knew that I wasn't going to get nowhere in that school. I didn't know where else to go.

In the concept mapping results, the programs for teens cluster statement #10 states: "High school is a big step from middle school. There is no one to keep you in line in high school". In the lack of school support for students cluster statement # 7 states: "Staying focused is hard at school because of all the distraction things like misbehaving or it can be anything like a negative teacher" and statement # 7 states: "In one of my classes, this girl and her friend would talk bad about me and they would say it loud and the teacher never told them anything. One day, they made me cry and I left class and never went back because the teacher never told them anything. Those two girls were Anglo-Americans, so was the teacher".

Direct examination of the constructs in the Tinto Model was conducted by Nora and Cabrera (1996). They found among minority students perceptions of prejudice had significant negative indirect effects on persistence in school (Braxton, 2000).

"Difficulty" refers to academic difficulty as a means of explaining academic failure, or the "difficulty in sustaining interest and effort" in learning (Wehlage, 1989, p.13). The participants' responses in the generating session and in the interviews are important because it describes what he or she believes to be true about the events that happened throughout their experiences in school. The participants experienced academic difficulty.

Nelson

I failed several classes. Those were really the classes that the teacher would just give us the work and say it's up to you. I would do the work and stuff but sometimes I didn't. Like the teachers, the teacher's skill level, their communication, the way they didn't reach students on the level to where it's easier to learn and cooperate with them. It's just easier to learn

when you're in an environment where you know that this person is going to help you when you need it and if you're wrong they're going to go back and backtrack and help you with it and not say, oh, well you turned it in and it's wrong. You failed it after not even helping you.

Barbie

It was kind of hard though, teachers were not very good with me. I had a hard time in science and math. They're not that good with helping you at all. I don't like people telling me I'm wrong when I know I'm right. Then I used to go to ISS because I wouldn't do my work. You've got to help me, but they wouldn't though. It only happened in my freshman and sophomore years.

Angela

I always had problems in math. That class was really hard. I asked the teacher if they could help me out with the assignments. She said, yeah, I'll be with you in a second, or they didn't really say anything. I guess they thought, well, you already know, you should know

this already. was like, man...I guess I didn't care after that my credits were already behind, I didn't have no such credits, whatever. That was when I started skipping...I started skipping at Cleveland Junior High. There I started skipping school and then little by little I just dropped out.

"Incongruence" is concerned with the cultural match between the student and the institution, in essence, "how well they fit into the school" (Wehlage, 1989, p. 13).

"Incongruence" describes all students who identify themselves as existing outside of the mainstream in some way.

Barbie

People always come down... I don't know why...even the Mexican teachers too, they would treat us like that. We have it hard. don't know...we're the middle people. We have to work. We work harder than anybody. I was like, I told them...you're Hispanic or Mexican or however you

want to say it, but, I just don't like it. I don't like being ... I'm Hispanic...

Pete

...a lot of people didn't like me just because of my skin color. Some of the teachers sometimes you would have a problem with me. I had a problem with it when I was little...the teacher didn't want to teach me because I was brown. I don't even remember her name no more. It was just because of my skin color. She had mostly Anglo-Americanss, probably about two African American students and me. I was the only brown student there. They wouldn't, over the years...I mean I paid attention in class but sometimes they wouldn't want to help you at all. I see these Anglo-Americans kids go up to him and ask him and he will sit there and tell them...answers and stuff to try and help them. I go up there and...go back to your seat and I'll help you when I'm done.

"Isolation" refers to both academic and social experiences at the school. Social isolation can refer to a

lack of interactions with other students as well as with adults. The central tenet of school membership involves the need to have quality interactions between adults and students.

Nelson

There was just too much freedom and lack of teachers not really showing as much interest in students as they should. A couple of years in high school and the distractions. It's not like, you know, they give you the work but you should at least get some kind of time to work with them and interact with them and talk to them. I know they are busy too. Yeah, there's no kind of time like where they would, some teachers would but it's not like steady...that would, hands-on, that would talk to you and physically show you, teach. It wasn't me copping out on the work, it's, it was somewhat, but it wasn't, the teaching wasn't always there.

Pete

There was only like one teacher that didn't really support us and we'd ask her for help and

she would be like, uh, I'm busy teaching this other student. I'm helping these other students. I would even wait after class, you know, until everybody left so she could help me and she would, I have to go and ...skip to the next...that's not right. I would sit there and actually listen to talk all this stuff about school and then I want to ask questions and they ain't got the time for it.

Juanita

I think we just didn't have enough time to get to know each other...for me to like her. How can you like someone that's not paying attention to you and...I felt, and I know the other kids probably felt the same way, we didn't get enough attention and we felt pushed away because we were.

SUMMARY

The concept mapping results and the themes that emerged from the interviews were compared to Tinto's theory of student departure. The participants' stories were compelling. This chapter described the study participants, a brief collection of their stories, and illustrated the

results of the concept mapping methodology. In the next section, the researcher will answer the research questions, share implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The data collected described the experiences of Hispanic dropouts and demonstrated that the student's level of goal and commitment (internal factors) are decreased due to the experiences the participants had in school (institutional attributes). According to the data, external factors were also related to Hispanics dropping out.

The researcher sought data which described the participant's experiences in the public schools. Furthermore, the researcher sought to fill the gap in research by giving voice to the Hispanic dropout by using a methodology that had not been used in dropout research. The methodology provided the tools to organize the ideas and thoughts of the participants regarding what happened in the public schools that caused them to drop out. Once the information was gathered, the thoughts of the participants were represented in the form of concept maps in order to communicate their thinking. Interviews were conducted and analyzed. The qualitative nature of the research provided insights into Tinto's Theory of Student Departure and

determined what factors within the theory impacted the decisions for Hispanics to drop out of school.

The study offers a unique perspective into the internal factors, institutional attributes, and external factors as they relate to student departure. It also provides compelling evidence with respect to the key questions that are associated with Hispanics dropping out. Since the study only had eleven participants in a single school district within an urban school district in Central Texas, there is no intent to generalize the findings to a larger population of students. The findings may give legislators, system school leaders, principals and teachers' new ways to understand the problem, give insight on how to not only better serve Hispanics but also students of other racial or ethnic backgrounds and provide insights and ideas that might form the basis for further study.

The eleven participants expressed their experiences in the public schools; their stories are compelling and offer insight into the lives of similar students. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are Hispanic dropouts' perceptions of the internal and/or external factors contributing to their decision to leave school?
2. What are Hispanic dropouts' perceptions of the institutional factors contributing to their decision to leave school?
3. How useful and applicable is Tinto's theory on student departure to the interactions and experiences Hispanic dropouts had within the public school?

Each of the questions was addressed independently, unexpected themes were discussed and interpretations and limitations of the study were noted. The last section of this chapter offers suggestions for future research.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

Research Question 1: What are Hispanic dropouts' perceptions of the internal and/or external factors contributing to their decision to leave school?

The internal factors were identified through the analysis of the interviews. The participants' perceptions indicated that they were committed to the institution and that their goal was to acquire a high school diploma. The participants described their experiences at school as

"good". Miriam explains: "I always made straight A's". However, his/her level of goal and commitment were affected by the institutional attributes or external factors.

Two external factors identified through the interviews are: 1) Personal illness, and 2) Family. One of the participants stressed that the family problems were "traumatic". Parents that were alcoholics and death in the family were two themes that emerged from the interviews. Incest was also mentioned by one of the participants who had her father's baby at the age of eleven.

The concept maps were based entirely on activity statements that the participants generated in their own words and which they structured into statement piles. The participants examined each statement within each cluster and then named the clusters. The clusters that reflected the external factors in Tinto's Theory of Student Departure through the concept mapping methodology were: 1) Home and Family problems and 2) Personal reasons. The programs for teens cluster cited a need for programs where teens could go to work and school.

Research Question 2: What are Hispanic dropouts' perceptions of the institutional factors contributing to their decision to leave school?

The data drawn from the concept mapping methodology identified four clusters that are closely related to the institutional attributes that are relative to Tinto's Theory of Student Departure. The clusters named by the participants were:

- Lack of school support for students
- Lack of positive support from peers
- Lack of administrative support for students
- Programs for teens

Three significant themes that emerged from the interviews go across the institutional attributes as they relate to Tinto's theory of student departure. Throughout the interviews, the participants expressed many of their negative experiences in the school to begin in the elementary and middle schools. The themes identified were:

- Negative experience with teachers - The participants expressed that the teachers did not assist them with the class work. In this area, some of the

participants expressed that they were discriminated against because of their skin color. They did not make connections with their teachers. As a result, the participants were unable to adjust to the school (adjustment) they were attending, they did not feel as though they were part of a group within the school (incongruence), they had difficulty earning credits (academic difficulty) and they felt isolated (isolation) within the school. Their social experiences were more negative than positive as only two participants played sports for a short while, another attempted to join the ROTC and still another choir, but they were both unsuccessful.

- Negative influence from peers - Three themes emerged from the negative influence from peers:
 - o Fighting - The participants expressed that other students would ostracize them. They explained that some students thought "they were better than you". The participants felt as though they had to defend themselves and began fighting back. " I went back to school in seventh grade and I was just like raging fury

because these girls used to like chase me home".

- o Truancy - The participants expressed that their peers would encourage them to skip school. "I ended up meeting a lot of people, a lot of students and skipping". Skipping school was the norm for most of the participants.
- o Drugs - The participants were encouraged to "get high" One participant clearly explained "This girl that I used to hangout with, she said come on let's go over there across the street to the apartments, everybody is over there. I said everybody is over there? What are they doing? She goes, come on, let's go. So I went with her and the apartments, and there was a parking lot and they have like a roof... there was like a big old circle, the whole parking lot was full of kids from school getting high. Everybody had a joint. Then I thought to myself, man, I guess everybody is doing it."

- Lack of administrative support - The participants overwhelmingly cited the principal and assistant principal as being non supportive. One participant explained: "I went to summer school and I had the same principal and he kept on saying, you aren't going to finish summer school, you are too bad, you are too into drugs and stuff". Another participant explained that he was put on probation in ninth grade. He stated "the principal was always looking at me and hawking me". Some policies that are put in place have caused students to drop out; for example, one of the participant's father passed away right before she was to take a final exam. When she returned to school, the principal explained to her that she had to repeat the eleventh grade. In short, the participants felt that they did not have the support they needed from the administrators.

The results from the interviews and concept mapping methodology confirmed that the participants' level of goal and commitment decreased due to the negative experiences they had in the institution. The institutional attributes

addressed were: adjustment, incongruence, academic difficulty and isolation.

Adjustment - Many of the participants expressed their concern when they arrive new at a school. "The principals are aware how they treat newcomers to the school. I told them to keep her away from me or talk to her or something. They didn't prevent that and it happened". Another participant expressed her concerns: "Then, I went to junior high, seventh grade, and there, I guess I was more scared than, they were just like, here, you do this, here's your classes, you go there". Another participant stated: High school was where it started getting kind of, freshman year was kind of hard, you know, everybody was like, you've got to do this, you've got to do that".

Incongruence - The participants expressed that they did not feel as though they were a part of the dominant culture of the school. "Mostly high school, I got into a lot of trouble because people were messing with me...because I'm Mexican". "When I came to Austin, I went to middle school, an Anglo school. There was nothing but Anglo-Americans. There was a lot of prejudice over there".

Academic Difficulty - The participants expressed that they had academic difficulty in their classes. The negative experiences with the teachers they expressed were due to the teachers not assisting them with the work they needed to learn. One participant stated: "It wasn't me copping out of the work, the teaching wasn't always there". In addition, many of the participants mentioned that they repeated a grade level in middle school or in high school. Three participants expressed their placement: "I went to ninth grade twice actually;" "I went to ninth grade three times" and "finally went back my second year for seventh grade".

Isolation (a feeling of not belonging) - As stated earlier, the negative interactions the participants experienced with their peers influenced their decision to drop out. As one participant explained: "I was just getting in trouble in the school and with the wrong kids and stuff so I just stayed away from it all together". Another participant expressed: "All through sixth grade my mother used to go to school all the time because not only were the girls harassing me but some guys too". The participant's experiences with their teachers were as follows: "When I

dropped out in ninth grade, they weren't helping me".

Another participant explained her experience: "She never worked good enough with us and we didn't learn enough".

In the concept mapping results, the clusters identified by the participants, lack of administrative support, lack of school support, and the lack of positive peers clusters, reflected the institutional attributes of incongruence and isolation. Based on the data collected, the findings suggested that school practices have a significant impact on student's decision to stay in school. Most importantly, the influence of teachers and peers had a significant impact.

Research Question 3: How useful and applicable is Tinto's theory on student departure to the interactions and experiences Hispanic students have within the public school?

The participants recognized the importance of sharing their stories. They felt that their interactions with peers, teachers and administrators were instrumental in their school experiences. External factors were also identified as reasons for leading them to drop out of school. The data collected was directly related to Tinto's theory of student departure. The clusters created by the

concept mapping methodology were the results of the participants' statements; they represent their ideas and experiences. The clusters are highly suggestive of what is true and actual and they have potential to provide significant direction for teachers, school administrators, and school system leaders.

IMPLICATIONS

The research presented can be used by school system leaders, principals, pre-service educational administration programs, pre-service education programs, counselors, and professional development programs in local school districts and from other institutions which provide services to Hispanic students. The findings should be interpreted as an attempt to voice the experiences Hispanic dropouts had in the public schools.

Implications for school system personnel

1. The need to reorganize schools, personnel and provide the adequate funding for the schools in their district is critical. The concept mapping results may be utilized and addressed in the district's strategic plan. Diversity and Conflict resolution training needs to be addressed district wide.

2. District personnel need to address how they can provide the support the campus level needs.
Collaboration with health and human services and other community organizations is critical. Collaboration with institutions of higher learning is important; most importantly with the department of social work and counseling. Social work and counseling interns may be placed in schools that have a critical need for these services.
3. Principals need to consider putting systems in place to address the themes that emerged. Teacher training is critical. Counselors and social workers need to be assigned to schools and provide the services they are trained to do. Diversity and conflict resolution training needs to be addressed campus wide.
4. Counselors should consider their role and how they can better serve students. The research presented here demonstrated that the role of peer influence is critical to school departure.
5. Teachers should consider their role in relation to the students in their classrooms. The research presented here shows that the teacher's influence is critical to

school departure. Positive student/teacher engagement is critical

6. Educational administration programs should include overviews of diversity and conflict resolution training. In addition, a need to review the roles of the personnel that are in the schools and how those roles are utilized to provide services to the students they serve.
7. Pre-service education programs should include overviews of diversity and conflict resolution training. Positive student/teacher engagement is critical.
8. Institutions of higher learning- department of social work and department of counseling- should consider their collaboration efforts and reach out to local school districts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study presented data which described the perceptions of Hispanic dropouts and what they consider to be the most important things in their experience that cause them to drop out. There is need for additional research.

1. Study the perceptions of teachers to explore what they believe are the reasons students drop out of school using concept mapping.
2. Explore and broaden the research of Hispanics
3. Explore intervention strategies that may keep students in school.
4. Replicate this study with other drop out populations.

SUMMARY

With the increase of the Hispanic student enrollment in the schools across the country and the state, there is an increasing need for district and school level personnel to identify how they can better serve Hispanic students and students of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. The research presented significant findings of what Hispanic dropouts believe causes them to dropout. The research demonstrated that lack of school support and lack of positive influence from peers is critical. Therefore

teacher and peer influences need to be addressed at all levels in a school district. Schools need to address the needs of all students in order for all to complete their secondary education.

Appendix A

November 2003

Name
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr. or Ms. Name:

My name is Danna Diaz Joseph and I am a graduate student at The University of Texas at Austin.

The purpose of my letter is to begin identifying participants to be part of a research study that will be conducted at the [REDACTED] facilities (please read enclosed consent form for more information.)

I would like to request your help by completing the enclosed resident survey and research consent form. Please return both forms in the enclosed stamped envelope by December 8, 2003.

If you have any questions, you can call me at [REDACTED]

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Danna Diaz Joseph

Appendix C

Research Consent Form

Hispanics Speak Out: A study of Hispanics and their experiences in the public school system.

You are invited to participate in a study seeking to understand why Hispanics drop out of school. My name is Danna Diaz Joseph and I am a graduate student in the Educational Administration department at the University of Texas at Austin. This study is being conducted to satisfy the requirements for a dissertation under the guidance of Professor William Moore and is not funded by any outside source. You have been invited to participate in this study because members of the [REDACTED] have determined that you are committed to promoting change in the public school system. Results from this study will inform administrators, policy makers, and community organizations on the possibilities of making change to improve school reform efforts. There will be up to thirty participants involved in this study.

If you decide to participate, I will be doing most of my research between October 2003 and January of 2004. There may be several times throughout the rest of the year during which I may need to talk with you as well. There are two ways in which I will be working with you: interviews and focus group sessions. All interviews will be tape-recorded. You will select the time and place to conduct the interviews. There is no right or wrong answers. I do not anticipate major risks. However, talking about your experiences in school may bring sad memories or uncomfortable feelings. If you feel in any way uncomfortable, please let me know. If you wish, I will turn off the tape recorder or stop the interview. However, most subjects enjoy talking about their experiences.

Initially, I would like to know your life history, your experiences, and your impressions about school. The interview will last approximately one hour. A follow up meeting will occur to review the notes from the interview to make sure I captured what you said correctly. Three focus group sessions will follow and each will be approximately two hours.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. Your responses will not be linked with your name in any written or verbal report of this research project. The audiocassettes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them. All audiotapes and information about you will be kept in a secured location in my home. The tapes will be retained for possible future analysis.

Your decision to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relationships with The University of Texas as Austin,

[REDACTED] Taking part in this study will not cost you anything and you will receive compensation of a twenty

dollar gift certificate to HEB or Wal-Mart every time I meet with you either in an interview, follow up meeting and the three focus group sessions.

If you have any questions about the study, please ask me. If you have any questions later, you may call me at [REDACTED], or my supervisor, Professor William Moore, at ([REDACTED]). In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Clarke A. Burnham, Ph.D., Chair, and The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, ([REDACTED]).

If you agree to participate, you may discontinue your participation at any time. Your signature below indicates that you have read the material above and have agreed to participate in this study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix D

Generated Statements from Hispanic dropouts

1. I dropped out when I got pregnant. There weren't any programs for me because I was 15.
2. I need a flexible schedule to go to work and school.
3. There should be more day care for high school mothers.
4. I was only allowed to pump my breast at lunch time. My breasts would leak and hurt at school.
5. My coach would talk to my teachers to have me do extra work and get my failing grades changed. I would play even if I had failing grades and absences.
6. I would miss biology class for two months and still pass. I was passed to the next level and I went to another class, I would be there a month before the school tells me I have to retake the biology class.
7. Staying focus is hard at school because of all the distraction things like misbehaving or it can be anything like a negative teacher.
8. When I was in school the biggest distraction was friends, so if one would act out you would.
9. When you play sports in high school you get a good look out on everything. Teachers would pass students that were on the football and baseball teams. If you were not part of the team, you would feel that you would be cheated. Teachers think they are helping you out but their just cheating you.
10. High school is a big step from middle school. There is no one to keep you in line in high school.
11. When I dropped out I did it because the school did not do part day and part time job will not be enough to support my family.

12. From elementary to high school they passed me up to all the grades without giving me the knowledge I needed.
13. Many times I would skip school and they never did anything to help me stay on track.
14. I never got one on one with a teacher to help me learn many things.
15. When I got pregnant, it was hard to get day care. I lived with my boyfriend and our son at his father's house and my mom lived at her house.
16. The school didn't let me use the address I lived at to go to the same school as my boyfriend so it took me a while to get to [REDACTED].
17. I only had two teachers who really cared if I skipped or not and one was a gymnastic teacher and the other was a delta teacher.
18. In one of my classes, this girl and her friend would talk bad about me and they would say it loud and the teacher never told them anything. One day, they made me cry and I left class and never went back because the teacher never told them anything. Those two girls were Anglo-Americans, so was the teacher.
19. In second grade my class was put with another class which was a third grade class. The teachers never helped us with anything. So I wasn't ready for third grade. After that, I never learned a lot of math.
20. I would hang out with the wrong crowd, peer pressure.
21. The teachers never really contact my parents to let them know how I was doing in school.
22. I started to get high in school before school, during lunch and after school.
23. One time, the whole school was getting high across the street at some apartments, the vice principal came out and caught everyone. He didn't do anything to anyone or even talked about what happened that day.
24. I thought that maybe if I had a job I would not have to go to school. I could do whatever I want to do.
25. My mom let me do what I wanted
26. I didn't like being around a lot of people.

27. I felt like I didn't fit in, wasn't smart enough.
28. I would isolate myself cause of problems at home.
29. I was in fear of failing.
30. I had a low self esteem
31. I didn't have anyone to encourage me.
32. After a while, I would show up to school and teachers wouldn't even bother to give me any work.
33. I wasn't able to pay attention at school.
34. I hung around the wrong people.
35. The teachers would help sometimes.
36. I started working. Not enough time.
37. I got into a lot of trouble.
38. I had a lot of trouble at home.
39. Some teachers would make fun of me.
40. I spent a lot of time in ISS or Saturday school.
41. I went to a lot of different schools.
42. I hung around with the wrong friends.
43. I was getting high.
44. Students would pick on me and I would get into fights.
45. Not getting the attention that I needed.
46. I was in special education classes.
47. I had peer pressure.
48. The teachers didn't pay attention.
49. The teachers didn't care about some of my work, they just moved my up.
50. My father passes away.
51. The principal was not talking tome right.
52. The principal had a negative attitude.
53. The system wanted me to repeat the grade level again
54. They wouldn't let me take my exams.
55. My mom needed me.
56. My family fell apart.
57. Peer pressure to succeed.
58. Appearance level, one had to look a certain way.
59. Lack of education, wasn't learning anything.
60. Conflict with other students
61. Bad parenting
62. Antisocial
63. Bad communication with teachers and students
64. Prejudice - judged on prior history
65. Involved in marijuana use

66. Lack of waking up - hanging around with friends all night.
67. Found a job.
68. Independent freedom - money
69. No father
70. Drug dealing
71. Lack of a good role model
72. Juvenile delinquent - criminal mischief
73. Initial environment was corrupt
74. At times I felt more older than some of students in class that would act childish.
75. I felt out of place.
76. The system failed me
77. I was frequently expelled and kicked out of several schools.
78. I would not be able to keep up with the work.
79. Schools were prepared to present what I had already accomplished
80. The school district was unable to teach me what it was I needed to know to pass to the next grade.

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