

'Dropping Out' An Over-Rated Problem

Current anti-dropout campaigns insist that students who stay in school long enough to get their high school diplomas have a better chance of "making it" economically — an argument termed "highly deceptive" by University of Michigan researchers.

Gerald G. Bachman, Swaynes Green and Iona Wirman of the university's Institute for Social Research (ISR) in their new monograph "Dropping Out — Problem or Symptom?" suggest that it is

really the young people who go to college that have a markedly better chance. Anti-dropout campaigns seldom mention this fact, the U-M researchers note.

Furthermore, they say, "even if potential dropouts were clearly shown that college is the real issue, their limitations in ability, past school performance, and attitudes toward school make them very poor prospects for a successful college experience."

Dropping out of high school is overrated as a problem in its own right, the U-M researchers say. They conclude that dropping out is more accurately viewed as the end result or symptom of other problems which have their origin much earlier in life. The study, conducted by the ISR's "youth in transition" project, reflects measures of a representative group of more than 2,000 young men over four years of high school and post-graduation experience.

Earlier reports have utilized the resulting information to confront such critical youth problems as drugs, the Vietnam war, race, social class, an all-volunteer army, effective learning environments, population control and others.

"The difficulties experienced by the dropouts we studied — the low aspiration and accomplishment, and even the limitations in self-esteem and self-concept — were already present or predictable by the start of 10th grade, and there is little evidence that dropping out made matters worse," the U-M report explains.

THE NATIONAL concern over the "dropout problem," and resulting campaigns to get dropouts back in school, the authors add, are often based on the wrong kind of information — measurements taken only after youngsters have dropped out.

What such studies usually show is that there is a substantial difference between those who dropped out and those who stayed in school, particularly those who enter college.

This difference, the report insists, existed well before the actual act of dropping out. The long-range ISR study, "before and after" design, was able to demonstrate that in nearly every case a difference which turned up at the end of the study was present and equally strong at the start — before dropping out occurred.

The U-M researchers conclude that dropping out is only a symptom, and that the real problem is a "serious mismatch between some individuals and the typical high school environment."

They cite some problem areas involved in school dropouts:

1. **FAMILY BACKGROUND:** The lower a family's socio-economic level, the more likely a boy is to become a dropout.

He is also more likely to drop out if he comes from a large family or a broken home.

The study found that reports of parental punishments occur more frequently among dropouts. It is not clear, the authors say, whether this is a cause of dropping out or merely a reaction by the parents to the kinds of behavior which eventually

lead to dropping out.

2. **ABILITY LIMITATIONS:** The study found some difference in tests of intelligence and academic ability between dropouts and those who stayed in school.

Surprisingly, the differences were small — the equivalent of five IQ points on the average. Larger differences appeared between those boys who later went to college and all those who did not.

3. **PAST SCHOOL FAILURE:** Two of the most important predictors of dropping out are poor classroom grades and being held back, the U-M study indicates.

It estimates the dropout rate at about 40 per cent among boys who have failed a grade in school, compared to 10 per cent among those never held back.

The authors say further studies will be needed in order to determine whether the experience of failure itself causes still more failures and possibly dropping out, or whether poor grades and school failures are simply indicators of a more fundamental inability to do well in an academic setting.

4. **REBELLIOUS AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR:** Boys who drop out of high school are more likely to have a background of delinquency.

Other personality characteristics also tend to mark the potential dropout to some degree.

The report cites (a) lower than average self-esteem and need for self-development, commitment to social values and personal efficiency, and (b) higher than average in physical and emotional complaints.

In measuring more than scores of personality and behavior dimensions over the four-year study period, the authors say, they found that "there are very few changes of any consequence and virtually none that would support the argument that dropping out damages a young man's mental health and his commitment to society's values."

The report also examines the frequently used argument that dropping out leads to a higher rate of unemployment — often double that of those who stayed in school.

The authors suggest such figures are misleading because they do not indicate whether it is the actual dropping out that causes the higher rates of unemployment or other factors such as the dropouts' lower intelligence scores and lower socio-economic level.

The study indicates that unemployment can be predicted more accurately by using background and ability measures than by using dropout data, and that the best prediction is made when the

two types of data are combined.

"We conclude that dropping out probably makes it more difficult to obtain employment," the U-M researchers write. "However, the more important causes of unemployment are those in pervasive differences in background and ability which precede and help determine the act of dropping out."

"The overall impression to be gained from the data is that dropping out does not change things a great deal — at least not in ways that are apparent by the time a young man reaches the age of 19 or 20."

Guard Seeks Enlistees

The Michigan Air National Guard, located at Selfridge Air National Guard Base near Mt. Clemens, is seeking new enlistees.

There are openings in every branch and section of the 127th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, according to the wing's director of personnel, Lt. Col. Melvin A. Weber.

Weber is interested in interviewing men and women 17 years or older who are interested in fulfilling their military obligation by serving six years in the Air Guard.

Col. Weber's office is in Building 304 at Selfridge ANG Base.

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