

DROPOUTS WHO RETURN FOR THEIR GED: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE
SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES RELATED TO LEAVING SCHOOL

A Dissertation
by
DAVID C. BURLESON

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APPROVED BY:

Ken D. Jenkins, Ed.D.
Chair, Dissertation Committee

Roma B. Angel, Ed.D.
Member, Dissertation Committee

Monica A. Lambert, Ed.D.
Member, Dissertation Committee

Vachel W. Miller, Ed.D.
Director, Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

Max C. Poole, Ph.D.
Dean, Cratis Williams Graduate School

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Abstract

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David C. Burleson
B.A. Appalachian State University
M.A. Appalachian State University
Ed. S. Appalachian State University

Dissertation Committee Chairperson: Ken D. Jenkins, Ed.D

Since compulsory attendance laws began to dictate when students were able to leave school nearly a century ago, school systems throughout the country have struggled with the lamentable fact that some students leave school and do not complete their education. Research and state dropout records have primarily been filled with statements made by students at the time of their dropping out indicating feelings of anger, alienation, or instability. These data were collected at a time when these students were reacting to current situations or circumstances that caused them to finally leave school. Their voices have been unduly influenced by being interviewed at the time of dropping out when emotions were at a peak. The more valid reasons or influences for a student's dropping out most likely occurred years earlier and then escalated over time (Finn, 1989; Janosz, Archambault, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008; Joselowsky, 2007; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998). By exploring

the early and subsequent influences on students, educators can design interventions that will help prevent future dropouts.

The purpose of the study was to identify the influences that provided the initial catalyst for students who decided to drop out of school although they then returned to get their General Education Development (GED) certificate. Data for the study were gathered through interviewing a sample of such students to determine the influences that impacted their decision for leaving school.

An analysis of the responses to structured interview questions along with the review of relevant information provided a better understanding of the factors that lead to students leaving school. This analysis allowed data to emerge that addressed the gap in the literature suggesting a continued need for qualitative research examining a student's experiences at home, in school, and with peers. Few studies (see e.g., Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006; Kortering & Braziel, 2008) have examined the perspectives of the students themselves regarding their school experiences. Most research regarding dropouts has examined the specific reason for dropping out at the time the student left school, while often relying heavily on the reasons as reported by school officials.