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MATURATION AGE: ANOTHER DROPOUT FACTOR?

ABSTRACT: Dropouts from school are a serious problem and many interrelated factors have been identified. Students who drop out often see the school as hostile and rejecting. In a longitudinal study carried out in an Edmonton high school data were gathered from 196 grade-ten students. Of these, 130 graduated, 55 dropped out, and 11 transferred out. One item of information for the 185 students studied was an estimate of maturation age as shown by growth spurts from height and weight charts.

The maturation age for dropouts was significantly earlier than the maturation age of those who graduated. This difference leads to speculation as to why this is so. Do those who mature early see the school as more hostile and rejecting?

The serious problem of young people dropping out of school before high-school graduation has been recognized in innumerable publications, and the interrelated factors associated with students dropping out of school are many. Penner (1970) stated: "In reviewing the literature on the causes and factors of dropouts it becomes apparent that this is a very complex matter. Often the multiplicity of factors which operate together present the individual student with seemingly insoluble problems which are most easily met by simply withdrawing from school (p. 16)." Dresher (1954) noted that "There are many factors that contribute to the cause of dropouts, and several factors may operate together to contribute to the cause (p. 287)."

Recent studies of Alberta dropouts by Penner (1970) Thomas (1969), and Scragg (1969) have summarized most of the important factors from available literature. A list follows:

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|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Feeling of alienation to school | 8. Absenteeism |
| 2. Low school achievement | 9. Low ability |
| 3. Occupation of parents | 10. Overageness |
| 4. Attitudes of parents | 11. Frequent transfers |
| 5. Education level of parents | 12. Economic difficulties |
| 6. Participation in school activities | 13. Sex |
| 7. Grade-nine achievement | 14. Personality problems |

Reasons given by the students themselves for dropping out of school appear in a number of studies. Virgil (1960) found that the major reason for girls dropping out of school was for marriage, and for boys, to obtain a job. Failing grades and a dislike for school were also given. Miller (1967) speaks of four kinds of school dropouts: school-inadequate, school-rejecting, school-perplexed, and school-irrelevant. Tannenbaum (1966) points out that dropouts, "Rather than withdrawing *from* school . . . see themselves as rejected *by* school (p. 15)." Penner (1970, p.iv) lists the following reasons given by his subjects for dropping out of school:

Alberta Natives (Indian and Métis)

1. not getting anything worth while from school
2. not liking their teachers
3. the school work was too hard

Alberta (non-Natives)

1. not getting anything worthwhile from school
2. preferring work to school
3. not liking their teachers

The school to many dropouts is unpleasant. It appears as a somewhat hostile place that is not meeting their needs.

The Study

The present study grew out of a longitudinal study into the self-concepts of high-school students. A number of different kinds of data were collected from a complete grade-ten class in an Edmonton high school. Complete sets of data were gathered from 196 students. Of these, 130 graduated, 55 dropped out, and 11 transferred to other schools. One of the pieces of information obtained was an indication of each student's age at maturation. This was taken as the age of the student when his growth spurt occurred. The growth spurt was the rather dramatic gain in height and weight in early adolescence as shown by yearly health charts. The age of the student when this occurred was noted and multiplied by twelve to convert the age into months.

Since no study was found that related maturation age to school retention it was decided to compare the maturation age of students who graduated with students who dropped out of school. Table 1 summarizes the findings.

TABLE 1

A Comparison of Graduate and Dropout Maturation Age Means in Months

Group	Maturation Ages	
	Mean	SD
Graduates (n = 130).....	167.2	17.5
Dropouts (n = 55).....	157.3	16.0

p < .01

Conclusion

Those students who drop out of school tend to mature at an earlier age than those who remain in school to graduate.

Comments

1. It is hoped that the present study will not add to the complexity that already exists in the field of factors related to dropouts. Perhaps the maturation age factor will help to tie other factors together, making the picture clearer.

2. The present study has a number of limitations, including the rather rough estimate of maturation age. It is felt that enough evidence has been presented to point the way towards a more sophisticated study.

3. As the literature suggests, many dropouts appear to view the school as a rather hostile place that does not meet their needs. Young people who grow up early with these feelings may be able to escape to marriage or a job while those less mature must remain in school because of physical limitations. These negative feelings may be more prevalent than we would like to admit. Are our high schools still so "child oriented" that many are willing to take the serious step of dropping out with all its consequences rather than remain to be "treated like children"?

RESUME: Le désistement (drop-out) de l'école constitue un problème sérieux et l'on a identifié plusieurs facteurs qui sont interreliés. Les étudiants qui abandonnent l'école la voient souvent comme hostile et les rejetant.

On a effectué une étude longitudinale auprès de 196 étudiants de dixième année fréquentant une école secondaire d'Edmonton. De ce nombre, 130 graduèrent et 55 abandonnèrent l'école. Un indice d'âge de maturation fut établi pour chaque étudiant, à partir des courbes de poussée de croissance de la taille et du poids.

L'âge de maturation fut atteint significativement plus tôt chez les étudiants qui abandonnèrent l'école que chez ceux qui graduèrent. Ce qui incite l'A. à formuler certaines spéculations en rapport à cet état de fait. Est-ce que les étudiants qui ont atteint leur maturité plus tôt voient l'école comme hostile et les rejetant?

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