

**DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL: ISSUES AFFECTING  
CULTURALLY, ETHNICALLY, AND LINGUISTICALLY DISTINCT  
STUDENT GROUPS**

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## **Abstract**

This paper reviews the research pertaining to school termination or “dropping out” of school. Specifically, the degree that language, socio-cultural, socio-economic/political issues impact upon students to drop out of school. Research studies of the following types: descriptive, correlational, developmental, action and historical studies on drop outs are discussed. The findings indicate that culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct students drop out at a higher percentage rate than non-minority, Euro-American students and for different reasons. Finally, this paper addresses the need for school personnel that are culture and language sensitive, embraces culturally relevant language education for students and teachers, and argues for the importance of examining institutional issues of domination and submission rather than focusing the “problem” on students.

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## **Introduction**

The evidence is overwhelming. Students dropping out of secondary schools is an amplified controversy in this country. Since the beginning of this century, participation in schools has continued to increase; however, evidence of the last few years clearly indicates that this trend is reversing. Nationally and in the following order, Native Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, some Asian American groups, and poor Euro-Americans do not graduate from high school (Astin, 1982). Using estimated data from a national study, Arciniega and Morey (1985) illustrate that by age 20, “43 percent of Mexican Americans had not graduated from high school in contrast to 20 percent of [African Americans] and 18 percent of [Euro Americans] (p.4). Conservatively estimated, 300,000 school age children are not enrolled in school. This paper will address specific concerns within the larger “drop out” issue. Part One of this paper will center on the issues involved and provide examples of “drop out” definitions as well as how quantitative calculations for the dropout are made. Part Two will describe and discuss the impact “dropping out” has had on culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct student groups. The conclusion will summarize the findings plus argue that the act of “dropping out” should be explicitly recognized as an act of resistance (Giroux, 1986; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985).

## **Issues**

When students drop out it is a clear declaration that society as a whole and the educational institutions in particular are not providing for the welfare of all its student citizenry. Pivotal to this is the realization that school curriculums are hierarchically organized bodies of knowledge, particularly to the way in which these curriculums marginalize or disqualify working class knowledge as well as knowledge about women and culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct groups (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). Specifically, educators’ low expectations, tracking of students, inadequate school financing, too few minority teachers, over reliance on testing, poorly prepared teachers,

disregard of language and cultural diversity, poverty and hopelessness, the absence of an educational legacy among low-income parents, and negative peer pressure (Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Project, 1990) are categorical examples of marginalization and clarifies how students knowledge bases are disqualified. In turn, this translates for culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct students into low academic achievement which further translates into the inevitable—dropping out. Those populations most affected by the leaving of school before graduating are Native Americans (all Tribes), Hispanics (specifically Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos), African Americans, and Asian Americans (specifically Pilipino and Tagalog language groups, Vietnamese, and Pacific Islanders).

A state that represents the demographic changes occurring nationally is California. In California, it is estimated that by the year 2000, Hispanics will make up over 25 percent of the population (Brown & Haycock, 1984). In New Mexico, a state where a large portion of the kindergarten population has a primary language other than English, the projected “numbers” are most revealing. The Commission on Higher Education Report (1988) forecasts that for 100 kindergarteners that will begin kindergarten in the 1988, 4 will drop out at 9th grade, 28 will not finish school, 2 percent will continue on to college, and of that 2 percent, approximately 1.5 percent will earn a B.A.

To heighten the issues, there has been a shift in economic structure towards a more technologically- and information-based society which requires high levels of formal education. In the past, there was need for a large blue collar work force which could meet the needs of a labor-intensive industrial and agricultural economy and employ those with low levels of formal education. Consequently, the justification of “past reasons” for allowing students to drop out can not be rationalized nor tolerated. The economic shift towards technology and information has had a differential effect on Hispanics, Native Americans African Americans, and poor Euro-Americans, those least to complete high school and college. “The Bureau of the Census predicts that by the year 2000, minorities, who today are one fifth of the national population, will have accounted for 60 percent of the total population growth” (QEM Project, 1990, p. 15). This tends to consolidate them into a racial/ethnic underclass. That is “by leaving school students place themselves in a structural position that cuts them off from political and social avenues conducive to the task of radical reconstruction” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 98). Reconstruction of their circumstances on several dimensions. On solely an economic dimension, Rumberger (1983) reported a \$4,000.00 a year earnings differential between a high school graduate and a dropout. Implicit in this differential for the future may include continued poverty, inadequate housing, lack of proper medical and dental care as well as being underserved within other services including continued lack of schooling (QEM Project, 1990).

Dropouts, as Fine (1982) discovered in her study, were critical and politically astute students. Notwithstanding, because of the self-imposed or inflicted marginalization brought about by leaving school, the social consequences are an increased need for public assistance by those who drop out and, to some degree, disenfranchisement from society and its institutions (Peng & Takai, 1983). The implications for the educational establishment many times include frustration and feelings of failure, loss of ADA monies and pressure from the community to rectify the dropout problem while increasing so-called “academic standards.” The issues discussed demonstrate a need for our schools and for our society to critically reflect and determine not whether major operational changes are warranted but when and how those changes will be operationalized. Figure 1 provides some surface factors that correlated with dropping out.

## Definitions

One of the problems encountered in the studies of dropouts is the lack of a uniform definition. Many terms are used synonymously with the term “dropout” i.e., educational mortality, disaffiliated student (i.e., one no longer wishing to be associated with the school), capable dropout (i.e., family or cultural situation did not agree with school demands), stop outs (i.e., dropouts who return to school usually within the same academic year) (Morrow, 1987), pushouts (i.e., individuals who feel, sometimes quite accurately, that people in the school want them to leave (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen 1971.)) Another hindrance is that these studies do not use the same time frames in their dropout definitions. Some sources included only students who were enrolled in grades 10 through 12. Other studies examined data as far back as grade school and junior high. Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan (1984, for example, noted that official statistics do not include youngsters who drop out during the elementary and junior high school years, and most certainly they do not include the substantial number of youngsters who have not officially dropped out, but whose attendance is so sporadic that they may as well have left school (p. 115). As reader, one should arrive

at the conclusion that they do overlap, are not always consistent, and always focus on the students. The following are a few examples:

“Any student who has been enrolled in grades 10, 11, 12 but who left school prior to graduation or the completion of formal education, or legal equivalent, and who did not, within 1 school days enter another public or private educational institution or school program, as documented by a written request for a transcript from that institution” (California State Department of Education, 1986).

“Any student previously enrolled in a school, who is no longer actively enrolled as indicated by fifteen days of consecutive unexcused absence, ... not satisfied local standards for graduation, and for whom no formal request has been received signifying enrollment in another state-licensed educational institution. A student death is not tallied as a dropout. The designation of dropout can be removed by proof of enrollment in a state-licensed educational institution or by presentation of an approved high school graduation certificate” (Morrow 1987, p. 353).

“Those individuals who interrupt their full-time attendance in high school for more than a few weeks and for reasons other than illness” (Bachman, Green & Wirtanen, 1971, p.5).

“Dropout designates an elementary or secondary school pupil who has been in membership during the regular school term and who withdraws or is dropped from membership for any reason except death or transfer to another school before graduating from secondary school (grade 12) or before completing an equivalent program of studies; such an individual is considered a dropout whether his dropping out occurs before or between regular school terms, whether it occurs before or after he has passed the compulsory school attendance age, and where applicable, whether or not he has completed a minimum requirement amount of school work” (Morrow, 1987, p. 343)

Dropout is “a pupil who leaves school, for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another school” (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen, 1971, p. 5).

“Dropout is a colloquial term. It is understood that many of these youth have been thrown out, pushed out, or never allowed into the mainstreams of secondary education” (Fine & Rosenberg, 1983, p. 451).

### **Dropout Rate Calculations and Source of Data**

The basic formula uses the number of dropouts in the numerator and a measure of the population of which the dropout is a member in the denominator. Two types of studies use this basic formula: cross-sectional studies and cohort studies. The measures used for calculation have a profound influence on the outcome. Annual cross-sectional rates are often computed using total enrollment for the grade or grades in question for a particular year. This yields the largest denominator and the smallest dropout rate. When the year is September to June, those students who decided not to continue with school during the summer were lost to the count. Morrow (1986) advocates the use of average daily attendance for grades 7-12 for computing the annual dropout rate. This method minimizes the variability introduced by district practices concerning truants, i.e., length of time a student is continued on the rolls before being dropped. A cohort longitudinal study follows a well defined group over a specified period of time. In this type of study the denominator is fixed by the number in the cohort at the beginning of the study. The numerator would be all those students not graduating and otherwise fitting the traditional definition of dropout.

Both types of data are valuable. Cross-sectional studies are responsive to annual variations, while cohort studies are not. Cohort studies give better information concerning the total school program, but that information is available only at the end of a study. The formula used is determined by the question that is asked. It is necessary to know which type of data is presented in order to compare dropout rates from different districts. Pallas (1987) states categorically, that national data, over time do not exist. However, data from the Bureau of Census indicate that

Factors Correlated to Dropping Out

<u>School Related Factors:</u>	<u>Family Related:</u>	<u>Personal:</u>	<u>Peer related:</u>
<p>1. Curriculum the student perceives as irrelevant (Bluhm 1966).</p> <p>2. Poor grades, expelled or suspended. Did not get along with teachers and school irrelevant (Peng and Takal 1983)</p> <p>3. Retained one or more times (Stephenson 1985).</p> <p>4. Cultural differences between student and school staff (Bluhm, 1966 and B.I.A. 1988).</p> <p>5. Lack of participation in extra curricular activities (Springstead 1981).</p> <p>6. Rebellious, delinquent or truant behavior (Pallas 1987).</p>	<p>1. Number of children in the family (B.I.A. 1988).</p> <p>2. Absence of a parent.</p> <p>3. Lack of reading material in the home (Steinberg, 81 Blinde, and Chan 1984).</p> <p>4. Fathers' education level (Rumberger 1983).</p> <p>5. Family socioeconomic system (B.I.A. 1988). If finances are already a problem at home, then money for dances, class rings, yearbooks, "name brand" clothes, pictures, gym suits, student body cards and uniforms all make school impossible for some, High school can be a social club which many minority students cannot get into. The problems of identification seems most acute in the pre—college years.</p>	<p>1. Married, or plan to be married.</p> <p>2. Pregnant,</p> <p>3. Military service,</p> <p>4. Offered a job and took It (Peng (1983).</p> <p>5. Lower levels of ability.</p> <p>6. Measures low on self confidence and sociability.</p> <p>7. Lack of educational arid occupational aspirations (Rumberger 1983).</p> <p>8. limited—English proficiency which affects academic achievement (Steinberg, Blinde, &amp; Chan 1984).</p>	<p>1, Friends dropping out—student craves as socialization.</p> <p>Could not get along with other students. (Peng Takai, 1983)</p>

nationwide high school completion rates for eighteen to nineteen year olds fluctuated within the low 70 percents between 1974 and 1985. The range varied from a low of 72 percent in 1982 to a high of 74.6 percent in 1985. This would indicate a national dropout rate within the mid- to high- twentieth percentile range. However, this masks the fact that some groups drop out more than others.

**Variability characterizes dropout rates**

California estimates a 20 percent dropout rate for its 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. African American and Hispanic students dropped out at a higher than average rate. A California State University study on educational attainment of Hispanics showed a 43 percent failure in their attempts to graduate from high school by age 20 (Arciniega & Bess, 1984) . There are several sources of national data. Among these are the current Population Survey of the Bureau of Census, the Center for Statistics (Common Core of Data (CCD)), and a longitudinal research study conducted by the Center for Statistics entitled High School and Beyond. The Current Population Survey samples approximately 60,000 households per month. The October survey is concerned with educational attainment of members of households who are 1 years of age. Each year the CD gathers information from public school districts concerning enrollment by grade levels and the number of individuals who graduate from the regular day programs. High School and Beyond, surveyed 30,000 high school sophomores. The survey was conducted in the spring of 1980 to establish the cohort. This particular study included both public and private schools. Properly weighted, this study projects to a population of 3,800,000. The sample was resurveyed in the spring of 1982 and again in 1981 One disadvantage to this particular study was that it began with a class which was already late in the sophomore year. Some individuals had dropped out of school before the cohort was defined.

Peng and Takai (1983) reported high school sophomore dropouts only by sex, ethnicity, socio—economic status, geographical region of the country and community (whether rural, suburban, urban, public or private). Peng and Takai (1983) data support other findings. Native American sophomores have the highest attrition with a 29 percent drop out rate, followed by Hispanics with 18 percent, African Americans 17 percent, Euro Americans 12 percent, and Asian Americans at 3 percent. Again these data revealed that the lower the socio-economic level, the more likely these sophomore students would drop out. The Southern and Western parts of our country hold the highest percentages, 17 and 15 percent, respectively. Interestingly, the type of high school program (academic, general, or vocational/technical tracks with dropout rates of 4, 13, and 15 percent, respectively) also affected whether these students stayed or dropped out. Said another way, the vocational/technical track students were almost four times more likely to dropout than those in the academic track. It seems that we wish to have students leave school; we simply must track them into vocational/technical classes (Oakes, 1985).

A study conducted for the New York City Board of Education by the New York Alliance for Public Schools (1985) gathered data from five cities concerning dropout rates for the diverse ethnic groups. New York was not included in the study since the schools do not list ethnicity for its graduates or dropouts. The results speak for themselves. See Table 1.

Table 1

Dropout Rates by Ethnic Groups within Four U.S. Cities

	Boston	Los Angeles	Miami	San Diego
Asian American	19.0%	4.0%	19.0%	6.8%
African American	28.4%	26.0%	33.9%	5.1%
Hispanic	34.6%	43.0%	29.3%	7.4%
Euro-American	28.4%	26.0%	26.4%	3.8%

Source: Census Bureau, the Department of Labor, and the National Center for Educational Statistics

Correspondingly, during the year 1980-81 Aspira, Inc. (1983) computed its own dropout rates for New York City. Those figures indicated that from 9th to 12th grade 80 percent of Hispanics, 72 percent of African Americans, and 50 percent of Euro-Americans dropped out of school. Another study, of migrant students in Texas, stated that approximately 10 percent of the migrant students grades 7-12 drop out in any given year (Springstead, 1987).

Although dated, a 1970-71 study from Waco, Texas showed the following dropout rates for students from grades 9-12: Mexican Americans 12.6 percent, African Americans 6.1k percent, and Euro-Americans 1 percent (Richardson & Gerlach, 1980). While only about three quarters of the above 18-19 year olds completed high school on time, a longer view yielded 'a more optimistic picture. It is estimated that about forty percent of the dropouts return to the educational system and of these thirty percent eventually earn a diploma. The same study quotes the Bureau of Census data when reporting a small but steady increase in high school completion with increasing age. The range was 67 percent for 18 year olds to 87./ percent for those individuals in the 31-3' year range. In contrast, in 191 only 1 percent of the 18-19 year old population had completed high school (Pallas, 1987).

### **Dropout Impact**

Dropout rates vary widely between cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Historically speaking, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct groups have always had higher dropout rates than Euro-Americans; these groups, however, have made greater relative improvements in the last two decades (Rumberger, 1981). African Americans and some Hispanic groups, still are much more likely to drop out of high school than Euro American or Asian American students. This section will discuss dropping out as it relates to specific ethnic groups. Some researchers have found certain factors are applicable for all groups while other factors are group specific (refer to Figure1). The studies to follow represent five categories of research. Most of the studies fall into the descriptive research category, followed by correlational, developmental, action, and historical research, in that order.

### **Native American**

Most authorities agree that Native Americans have the highest dropout rate. In California it is recorded as high as 70 percent. In Alaska it is as high as 90 percent (Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984; NPR Broadcast, 1990). The BI Report, (1988) states that the reasons for dropping out are: culturally irrelevant curriculum (not part of their contextual society), dissatisfaction with teachers, multiple family problems, and cultural conflict between home and school. The cultural conflicts can be described primarily as pedagogical where "outside" beliefs impinge on the support family and causes "culture shock." Poverty, lack of parents with a formal education, lack of educational encouragement from the home<sup>4</sup> alcoholism, divorce, and language differences are factors that may contribute to Native American students' academic achievement BIA Report, (1988).

One unique factor about Native Americans is that many do not plan on joining mainstream America—the reservation is home. The American school, per se, is a mainstream institution not sensitive to the contextual, cultural, and linguistic experiences the Native American student already possesses. When a child contemplates a future of livestock raising, that kind of future may not demand twelve years of formal education. Another unique factor about Native Americans is that some children, born and raised deep in the center of a large reservation, will grow up speaking the language of the home. The language factor, of and by itself, is only a unique factor when it is not nourished and nurtured as the medium for instruction within the school setting, thus causing alienation, sometimes confusion and always frustration among those students whose language is not celebrated (QEM Project, 1990).

### **Hispanics**

The general term "Hispanics" includes many Spanish speaking groups: Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central and South Americans, Mexicans, Chicanos, and Mexican-Americans. While these groups share a common language and some cultural commonalties, they are by no means homogeneous. This is seldom made clear in studies which use the term Hispanic. However, the Dade County report did distinguish Cubans amongst Hispanics and further commented

on differences between pre- and post-Marial Cubans (Stephenson, 1984). Following Native Americans, Hispanics have the next highest dropout rate. Aspira (1983) reported that, in New York City, the dropout rate for grades 9-12 was near 80 percent for Hispanics with the large proportion coming from the Puerto Rican community. The overall dropout rate for New York City was 68 percent. This is compared to a seventeen percent overall dropout rate for up-state New York. In contrast, Hispanics in up-state New York have a dropout rate of twenty-nine percent. A survey study for the New York City School Board of six city districts concluded that regardless of other characteristics, being overage within a grade placement was a major causal factor (New York Alliance for Public Schools, 1985). This study reported 75 percent of overage students did not complete school. Being overage is related to having been retained in an earlier grade or not earning enough credits to progress normally in high school. Retention is related to poor academic performance, which in this population resulted from cultural and language differences (New York Alliance for Public Schools, 1985).

A study of migrant Hispanic dropouts in Texas cited the following factors as contributing to their decision to drop out: courses flunked, low grades, too many absences, and months behind grade level in math and English standardized test scores (Springstead, 1981). No reference was made in this study of those schools providing support services such as flexible schedules and additional time in certain subjects to 'catch up, collaborating with peer tutors, etc. While many of the reasons for dropping out in this group are the same as other groups (i.e., poverty, parents' lack of formal education, language difference) other compelling reasons are characteristic of Hispanics. Like the Native American population, home-culture and school-culture mismatch have been cited as a cause of dropping out; in general, this dimension has been better studied with regard to Hispanics. An excellent discussion by Chan and Rueda (1979) describe a "hidden curriculum" known to mainstream children but not to incoming culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct student groups. Some factors included within the hidden curriculum are development of rudimentary cognitive skills (such as knowing colors, certain vocabulary and how to retell stories), use of standard English, a value for education, and knowledge of appropriate "school" behavior. One example of home/school culture mismatch is a preferred interpersonal style. Another example, some large segments of traditional Mexican culture value a collaborative effort while mainstream school culture values competition amongst individuals.

Being poor is a critical contributing factor to students dropping out. The socioeconomic composition of the school is reflected in its dropout rate (Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1987). Students reported they drop out because of job offers or because of financial difficulties (Rumberger, 1983). For women, pregnancy is a contributing factor (Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1987). Teacher disapproval of students is a contributing factor to Hispanic students dropping out. Grade retention, which results in overage students, is highly correlated to the likelihood of a student not finishing school (Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1981k; QEM Project, 1990). A cohort study of dropouts in Dade County, Florida revealed that one third of the cohort was out-of-phase. That is, of this out-of-phase cohort 46 percent were Hispanics, 42.3 percent were African Americans, and 25.5 percent were Euro-Americans. One possible reason for so many out-of-phase Hispanics is that they probably entered school as non-English speakers. For those students in-phase, the dropout rate is almost identical for the three ethnic groups. Again, overage is an important factor in the dropout rate. The overall cohort dropout was 29.3 percent for Hispanics, 33.9 percent for African Americans, and 26.6 percent for Euro-Americans. By this discussion, it would seem that "overageness" is more a causal factor than ethnicity. However, retaining ethnically, culturally, and linguistically distinct students at the same grade level for more than one year and creating "tracks" for them because of not having standard English and/or English as a second language skills and/or "middle-class" social skills will eventually keep students from proceeding through the grades and, in turn, automatically creates overageness (Oakes, 1985).

### **African Americans**

Forty-two percent of African American children live in poverty. "More than twice the poverty rate for all American children" (QEM Project, 1990, p. 29). The overall rates of poverty are felt more by this group with 31.6 percent living in poverty, two and a half times the national average of 13.1 percent (QEM Project, 1990). Severe poverty adds another dimension to why African American students stay or drop out of school. A correlational study in Texas, the chief, self-reported reason for dropping out was the perception that education was not economically beneficial. Curiously, this study found that African American dropouts had a higher mean I.Q. score than those African Americans who remained in school. Seventeen percent of the variance could be attributed to I.Q. score (Richardson & Gerlach, 1980). In an awkward sense, enhanced academic ability increases dropout probability (Rumberger, 1981; Fine & Rosenberg, 1983).

Another influential variable is the lack of educational motivation and aspiration brought on by the reality of continued poverty and increased alienation. Today, years after equal rights legislation, African Americans are still not

benefiting from our educational system. African American teenagers with a high school diploma suffer 54 percent unemployment and over one-quarter of the African American women with some college training live beneath the poverty line (Fine & Rosenberg, 1983). More recently, the data are about the same: African American high school graduates' income fell 40 percent and, for those who are college graduates, income rose by 3 percent while white-Euro-Americans' income rose 12 percent (Jaynes & Williams, 1989). Lastly, the family structure continues to be a strong indicator whether African American students stay or leave school. The mother's educational level influences both sons' and daughters' probability of finishing school which is not true of other ethnic males (Rumberger, 1983).

### **Asian Americans**

The general term "Asian American" includes many specific groups who for over 150 years or more migrated from the Pacific Rim countries, e.g., Korea, Japan, Mainland China (Cantonese, Mandarin dialects), Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines (Tagalog, Pilipino, Ilucano), Micronesia, etc.. In contrast to Native Americans, Hispanics, African American and Euro Americans, Asian American students achieved superior ratings as junior high and high school students in grades attained, formal classwork, and state mandated tests (Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi, 1986). A high proportion of Japanese and Chinese Americans go on to college and receive degrees. Although the over-all dropout rate of 3.1 percent seems comparatively small and could be assumed that it is "less of a problem," the myth that Asian Americans are successful within our schools and finish high school must be seriously questioned. The myth is shattered when dropout rates in major cities are reported as high as 19 percent in Boston and Miami, followed by San Diego at 7 percent, and lastly, Los Angeles at 4 percent (Peng & Takai, 1983).

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

Our society and, in turn, our schools have not been culturally and contextually sensitive to the diverse needs of the diverse populations it serves. Although schools will continue to experience increased enrollment of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct students, our educational institutions, per se, have changed very little (see for example, Okazawa-Rey, Anderson, and Traver, 1987; Mcbay, 1989; National Governors' Association, 1988; New Mexico Commission on Higher Education, 1988; QEM Project, 1990). Changes and flexibility in the school operations have been minimal and rhetorical in nature; the perpetuation of negative or debilitating myths (QEM Project, 1990) about culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct I groups only serve to promote an elitist Euro-American middle class curriculum which continues to be part-and-parcel for all students; factory-like organizational structures within high schools have continued to impede learning for many students; and top-down teacher preparation programs have continued to inculcate submission and acceptance of what a white-Euro-American education should be instead of providing contextual and cultural mechanisms with multicultural approaches that create educational—theory and practice, possibilities for enabling critical thinking, analytical discourse, and learning through collective practice to transpire within our teaching practice and profession (Apple, 1990; Apple & Weis, 1983; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Shor, 1987).

Cummins (1989) has argued that crucial messages are conveyed in subtle ways to culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct students about the validity of (or lack of) their language and cultural identity. Educators many times do provide but often fail to provide latitude and encouragement for students to express their cultural/ethnic and linguistic identity through their shared experiences with other students and adults. Additionally, educators have the choice to collaborate with culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct parents as partners in the shared enterprise of schooling whereby contributing to students' academic and personal empowerment. In essence, educators must see pedagogy as a relational act where the aggregates are "sensitive to the actual historical, social, and cultural conditions that contribute to the forms of knowledge and meaning that students bring to school" (Giroux, 1986, p. 15).

Some recommendations that could be considered, yet in themselves have limitations, include transforming the physical operations of school plants such as length of school year and flexibility in school day and classroom function; attending quality time to subjects of interests that provide for intellectual growth<sup>5</sup> and long-term relevance; reducing class sizes in order to provide for dialog and reflection; flexible curriculum aimed at a closer cultural and contextual match between home and school; more counselors and teachers whose high expectations coincide with understanding and accepting culturally and linguistically diverse students' experiences and knowledge bases coupled with goals for finishing high-school and attending and finishing a university education rather than "tracked" solely into vocational careers (Oakes, 1985); peer- and adult-tutoring<sup>6</sup> involving individuals who are not only subject-matter

specialists and empathic but also can directly assist in moving forward the goals of the targeted students; financial aid to parents of students at upper elementary or junior high, or high school levels that would give those students an opportunity to study rather than hold an after-school job; and empowering methods that educate parents, teachers, and students (Ada, 1987) on causal issues mentioned throughout this paper and related to schools and schooling.

Our review indicated that the potential remedies for solving the dropout problem are not the same for all language and cultural groups. Examples of differences included African America having a lack of confidence in the economic benefits of continued education (Richardson & Gerlach, 1980; Fine & Rosenberg 1983); Native Americans, especially those on reservations, perceiving the educational system superfluous to them, culturally, economically or both (B.I.A. Report, 1988); and, for Hispanics, schools not accounting for language differences emerged as the most significant predisposing factor for dropping out. Among all groups, overage was a contributing factor.

In metaphoric terms, our educational institution is much like the mythological figure of Prokrustes, who tried to make all persons conform to his bed. Whether it meant stretching them or hacking off parts of their bodies, the results were always morbid. In the case of the “dropout” it may be time to consider modifying the “bed” or offering a choice of educational beds that will be comfortable and that will be slept on. On the surface, this could be characterized as an ‘enabling’ education in contrast to an ‘disabling’ education. More deeply, this educational bed requires a pedagogy where “dropping out” is recognized as act of resistance. Consequently, staying in school will require teachers to search for the emancipatory interests that underlie such resistance and to make those interests visible to students who have dropped out or who may be in-process of dropping out, and include parents and all concerned citizens so that the act of “dropping out” can become the object of debate, political analysis, and action (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). Enlightened self-interests<sup>7</sup> dictates that we address the drop out issue with all its manifestations and discover approaches, from the ground up (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)<sup>8</sup> to indeed prepare all our students and all our future generations for the world all will inherit.

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### Footnotes

1. The term drop out is the one with which the educational community is most familiar; however, the authors recognize that this term was also created by the educational community, and semantically places the blame on the victims. The term has been challenged on exactly this point and the term "squeezed out" (Bahruth, 1987) has been offered as more semantically appropriate, since it places the blame on systems which victimize whether intentionally or not.

Source:

Bahruth, Robert. "Dialogue Journals and the Acquisition of Spelling in a Bilingual Classroom" In *DIALOGUE*. Edited by Peyton, J. and J. Staton, Washington. DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Vol. IV, No. 1.4/1987.

2. This paper was originally drafted when Dr. Chavez was an Associate Professor of Education in the Department of Advanced Educational Studies and Coordinator of the Bilingual / Cross-Cultural Education Program at California State University, Bakersfield.

3. Educators include all school professionals—administrative, instructional, and support, as well as all college of education professionals, in particular, and all university professionals, in general, and the community, at large. We cannot believe that the drop out issue is solely the responsibility of school professionals because of their direct contact with students. It must be a responsibility that all S5embrace (see QEM Project, 1990).

4. This does not necessarily need to be viewed as negative, especially when viewed from the Native American parents themselves who have experienced a history of oppression from dominant groups both directly and indirectly.
5. This, of course, assumes that students' involvement in this endeavor is meaningful and conducive to critical dialogue, reflection, and collaboration.
6. preferably, but not limited to, senior citizens from the community at large who because of their professional and personal experiences, insights, and wisdom can provide an array of conceptually successful "webs" for culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct students' goal attainment.
7. 'See for example, the Nation at Risk Report (1983), America's Shame-America's Hope: Twelve Million Youth at Risk (1988).
8. 'Strauss and Corbin (1990) in their discussion of grounded theory stress the importance of "fit, understanding, generality, and control" (p. 23).