

A Case Study Examination of a Dropout Prevention Program from the Perceptions of Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explored six teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy, instructional and motivational approaches, and bonding with students that precluded noncompletion at a high school dropout prevention program. Data were collected through interviews and classroom observations. The findings revealed that teachers' high self-efficacy regarding student retention, connectedness, and attachment were important factors in preventing dropout.

PROBLEM

In the United States, teachers have low self-efficacy regarding their ability to limit the likelihood of dropout among high school students. Dropout rates in the state averaged nearly 5% for the past 3 years. Previous research was limited concerning how teachers could help lower dropout rates. After 6 years in operation, state policymakers, high school leaders, teachers, and district officials need to gain a better understanding of how teachers who work at the dropout prevention program prevented early school leaving.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

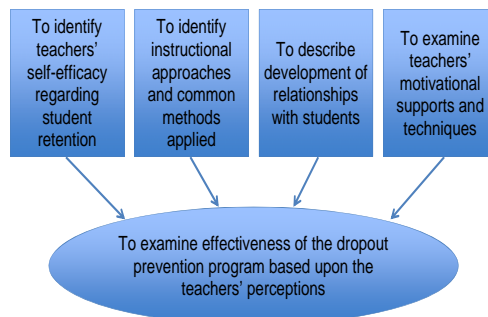
How did SPA program teachers:

1. Perceive their capacity to lower dropout rates among high school students?
2. Use instructional methods and approaches teach students at risk of dropping out?
3. Perceive the extent to which relationships with students play a role in preventing students from dropping out?
4. Motivate students to complete high school?

RELEVANT LITERATURE

- **Schools were a strong determinant of successful high school graduation** (Christle et al., 2007).
- **A school's culture contributed to teachers' expectations** of students' performance (Patterson et al., 2008).
- The development of **positive student-teacher relationships through close emotional bonding such as attachment were particularly helpful** among students at risk of dropping out (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).
- **A student's level of connectedness and engagement determined the extent of academic commitment**, which led to school completion (Libbey, 2004).
- **Teachers influenced factors that led to student success** both academically and socially, such as a students' level of motivation and engagement (Harris, 2011; Stewart, 2008; Whitlock, 2006).
- Framework for the study: **Hirschi's (1969) theory of social control**. Positive relationships were developed through bonds that occur through various factors, such as attachment, commitment and trust, which led to sustained school completion.

PURPOSE



PROCEDURES

Qualitative Descriptive Case Study

All 14 teachers who worked for the program were invited to participate in the study.

Six were selected for participation based upon the following criteria:

- Worked at the program for at least 2 years.
- Had prior experience with high school students at risk of dropping out.
- Were highly qualified according to NCLB.

Semi-structured Interviews were conducted, audio recorded, and transcribed by the researcher.

Follow up interviews were conducted with 4 participants for depth.

Teacher observations completed the triangulation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interview data were analyzed **using typological and thematic coding**.

Analogous topics were grouped together to determine succinct themes.

Color coding was applied during the analysis phase to organize and identify significant and common statements.

Specific participant quotes were used to support each theme.

FINDINGS

Triangulation of data validated the effectiveness of the dropout prevention program and methods used by teachers to limit the likelihood of students dropping out of high school. **Themes that emerged from the data were:**

1. Teachers self-efficacy, positive beliefs about preventing student dropout.
2. Teachers instructional strategies and student engagement, including online, distance, and self-paced instruction.
3. Teacher-student relationships and student persistence, close knit and supportive environment.
4. Teachers contribution to motivation and high school completion.

LIMITATIONS

The researcher has former experience as a high school teacher.

Limitations were minimized because the researcher was not an employee of the district where the research was performed. All participants worked at the research site, and triangulation of data collection included observations and interviews.

CONCLUSIONS

This study illuminated the extent to which teachers can limit dropout among high school students. All teachers had distinct experiences they shared, **expressing strong beliefs about:**

- ❖ **Preventing student dropout**
- ❖ **Personalized instructional strategies**
- ❖ Methods used to **keep students engaged in learning**
- ❖ **The importance of trusting and meaningful student-teacher relationships**
- ❖ **The role of small program size in contributing to student motivation** that lead to successful completion

SOCIAL CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study may contribute to social change for other high schools throughout the state because the research site is the only stand-alone dropout prevention program in the state. Other examples of **positive social change** include:

- ❖ Professional development for novice teachers emphasizing the significance of developing student-teacher relationships.
- ❖ Development of additional programs for high school students at risk of dropping out.
- ❖ Illuminate the voices of teachers regarding their contributions toward dropout prevention.