

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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The majority of today's youth succeed in the traditional educational classroom. However, greater numbers of our children are not experiencing success in the traditional classroom and are at-risk of dropping out of school before completing graduation requirements. The magnitude and urgency of this problem was addressed in 1990 by the National Goals 2000 report. Even with this increase in awareness, the dropout rates have not decreased.

This qualitative study addressed two questions:

1. Do childhood developmental deficiencies create factors which place a child at-risk of dropping out of school before completing graduation requirements?
2. Can the practice of education intervene and reduce dropout potential?

The research was framed by an examination of theories of child development by Bowlby (Attachment Theory), Erikson (Psychosocial Development), and Bandura (Social Learning Theory). Factors that place a student at risk of dropping out of school were also examined.

The at-risk students in an Alternative Education Classroom from a high school in a rural community were asked to write a history of their school lives. The

histories of nine of these students were used to provide insight into the developmental milestones of these students. Follow-up interviews were conducted with all students and their parents. All interviews were separate and confidential. School records of the nine students were reviewed to provide additional validation to the memories of the students and their parents. The results were triangulated back to the theoretical perspectives of Bowlby, Erickson, and Bandura.

The data reflected a strong correlation between negative development and factors that were noted in the school histories. The data also, reinforced the importance of the classroom teacher/student relationship. This data infers that school dropout rates can decrease with insightful programming that involves the community working together to impact in a positive manner the developmental factors that place students at-risk.

Addressing Factors That Place Students  
At-Risk of Dropping Out of School:  
A Developmental Perspective

by

Carolyn J. Myers

A DISSERTATION

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degree of

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Doctor of Education Dissertation of Carolyn J. Myers presented on August 9, 1996.

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*Carolyn J. Myers* Carolyn J. Myers, Author *Myers*

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I am ever grateful to a Heavenly Father who provides perfect peace in the mist of confusion, self doubt, and frustration. He is always faithful to remind me that all is well, and He is in control of all things.

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## **DEDICATION**

*THIS WRITING DOES NOT BELONG TO ME. IT BELONGS TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR PARENTS WHO HAVE TAUGHT ME SO MUCH ABOUT WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT IN LIFE. YOU HAVE LOVED ME AND ALLOWED ME TO LOVE YOU AND BE A PART OF YOUR LIVES. MAY GOD RICHLY BLESS AND LOVE YOU AS YOU GROW AND MATURE INTO YOUR POTENTIAL.*

## PREFACE

*My desire in writing on this topic is based on my belief that we all have a responsibility to the children we come into contact with in our daily lives.*

*We say that we are a society that honors its children. Yet, we have growing rates of child abuse, large numbers of missing children, growing numbers of children being murdered - the list could go on and on. It is scary to focus on the levels of violence among our children. Many of them are angry and in emotional pain that shows in their faces.*

*As adults we can make a difference if we take the time to become aware of what it is these children need. It is easy to look at their behaviors, attitudes, dress, and turn away because they are unpleasant to encounter. Hopefully, this writing will be the beginning of awareness that it is not what is on the outside of these children that we need to change*

*My desire is that we all learn to listen to what these kids have to say with an informed ear.*

ADDRESSING FACTORS THAT PLACE STUDENTS AT-RISK OF DROPPING  
OUT OF SCHOOL: A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

**CHAPTER 1**

**PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Educators, community leaders, and parents are becoming increasingly aware of the school dropout problem faced by American educators. The magnitude and urgency of this problem was recognized by both the President of the United States and its' Governors in 1990 when they adopted as one of the six National Goals of Education, the goal of increasing the high school graduation rate to 90% by the year 2000 (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). Even though the majority of our youth succeed in a traditional educational classroom, a growing number of our children are not experiencing success in the traditional classroom and are at risk of failing, dropping out, and never realizing their potential or their dreams. (Stallings,1995).

However, this increased awareness has not brought a successful result. We do not see a decrease in dropout rates. In 1990, eighty six percent of 18-24 year olds had completed high school. By 1994, the national completion rate had not increased. (See Figure 1)

The State of Oregon dropout rate for 1994-95 is 7.37 percent, compared with dropout rates for the preceding periods of 5.75 percent (1991-92), 5.69 percent (1992-93), and 6.63 percent (1993-94). (See Figure 2)

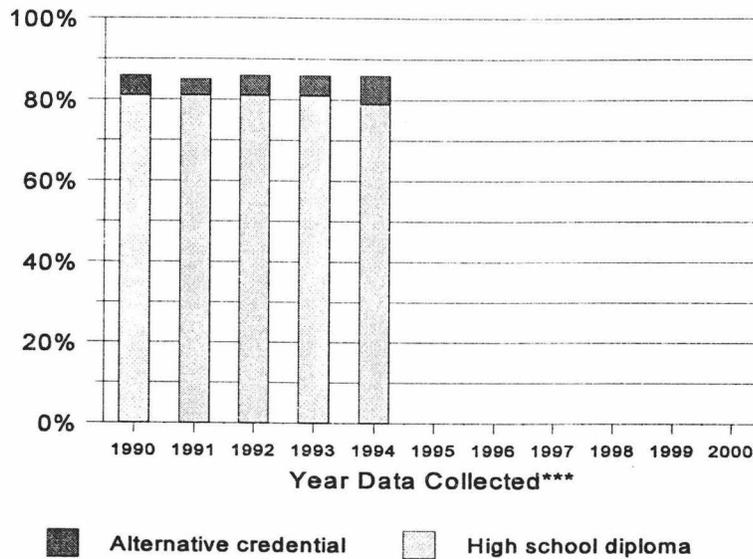
There is not a statistically significant change in dropout rates between white and minority students reported in The National Educational Goals Report (1995). The Oregon Department of Education classifies dropouts according to five racial/ethnic categories. Increases in Oregon dropout rates were found in all racial/ethnic categories in 1994-95. Hispanic students continued to have the highest dropout rate, increasing 43 percent since 1991-92. (See Figure 3)

Students who dropout of high school tend to be a mobile group either by choice or situation. Of those who dropped out, thirty-four percent were enrolled in the school district for a year or less. Approximately seventeen percent of the dropouts had been in the same district for more than five years, and forty percent had been in the same district one to five years. (See Figure 4)

The reasons which lead a student to make the decision to leave school before graduation are varied. However, high mobility may contribute to the lower accumulation of credits needed for graduation by reducing the opportunity to complete classes on a regular schedule. Participation in social interactions and extracurricular activities may also be more difficult for the student who moves from school to school.

The problem of school dropouts is not only a problem for parents and educators, but for the whole of society. The research indicates that the factors that place a child at-risk for dropping out of school are the same as the factors that place a child at risk of entering into criminal and substance abuse lifestyles (Adam-Price & Green, 1990). High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested

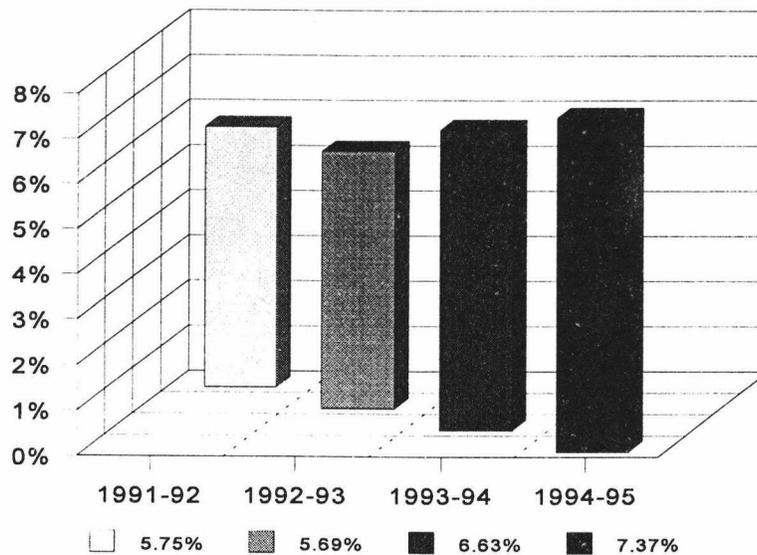
Figure 1: High School Completion Percentage of 18 - to - 24-year-olds\* With A High School Credential\*\* in the U.S.A.



- \* Does not include those still enrolled in high school
- \*\* Includes traditional high school diploma and alternative credential.
- \*\*\* These data will be collected annually through the year 2000

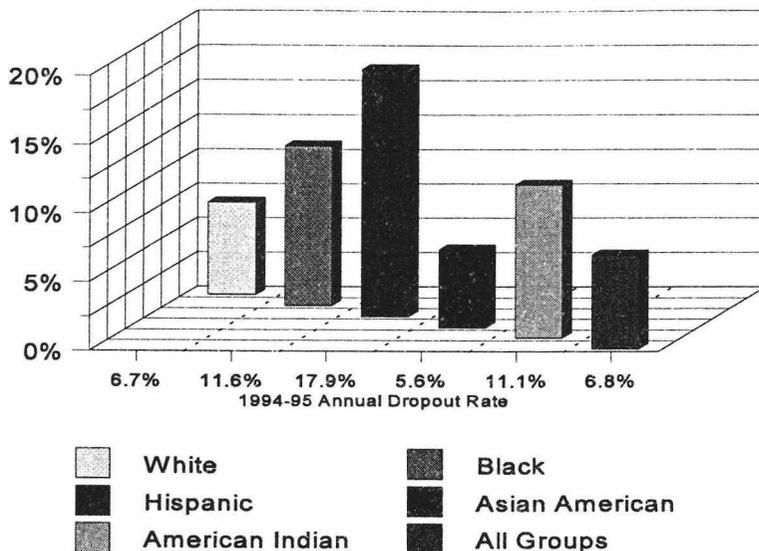
Source: National Center for Education Statistics and Management Planning Research Associates, Inc.

Figure 2: Annual High School Dropout Rate in Oregon



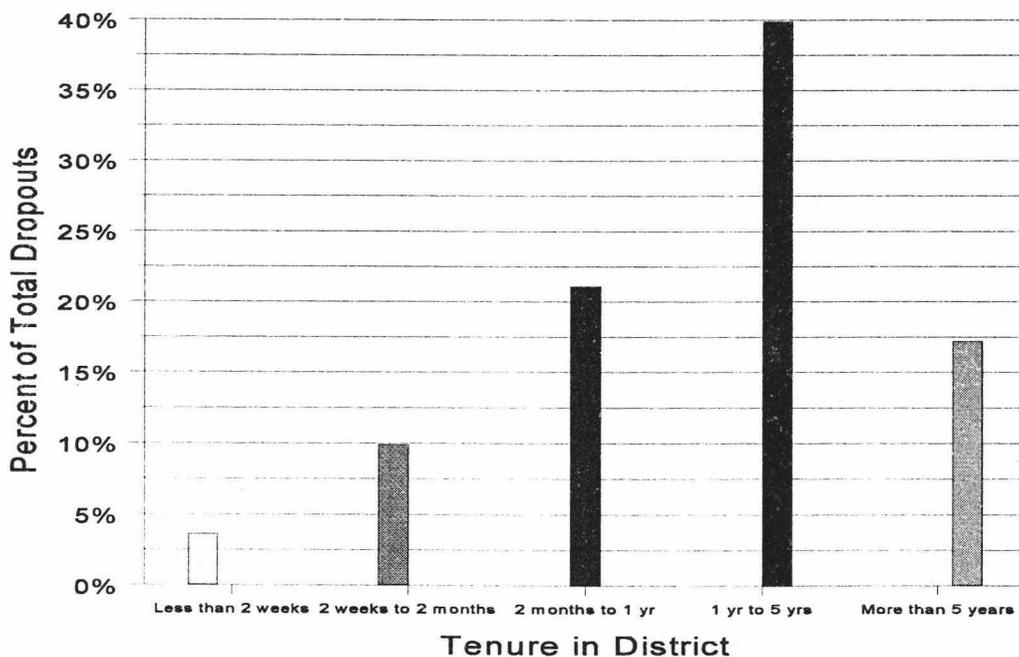
Source: Dropout Rates in Oregon High Schools, 1994-1995, State Summary Report, March 1996

Figure 3: 1994-95 Annual Dropout Rate by Racial/Ethnic Group in Oregon



Source: Dropout Rates in Oregon High Schools, 1994-1995, State Summary Report, March 1996

Figure 4: Percentage of High School Dropouts by Tenure in District in Oregon



Source: Dropout Rates in Oregon High Schools, 1994-1995, State Summary Report, March 1996

than high school graduates and eighty two percent of all people incarcerated are school dropouts (Stallings, 1995).

Several decades of research document a clear behavioral profile for students at risk of dropping out of school. According to this profile, at-risk students have low educational aspirations (Frymier, 1989), low self-efficacy (Midgley, Anderman, & Hicks, 1995), and negative attitudes toward school (Dubow, Fisak, Causey, Hryshko, & Reid, 1991). According to Lehr and Harris (1993) these factors result in students having academic difficulties, lack of structure, inattentiveness, distractibility, short attention span, low-self esteem, excessive absenteeism, dependence, discipline problems, narrow range of interest, lack of social skills, inability to face pressure, fear of failure, and lack of motivation. One of these factors alone will probably not create a school dropout, but rather the greater number of these factors present, the greater the probability of the youth dropping out of school.

Traditionally, both educational research and practice have focused on individual, intra child factors of the at-risk youth, rather than on an ecosystem approach that includes the family, school and social environment factors (Vickers, 1994). Current research suggests that dropping out of school is the final stage in a cumulative process of disengagement and withdrawal (Rumberger, 1995). This would indicate that intervention into this disengagement process makes dropout prevention possible. The documented results of the ecosystem approach reflect higher academic achievement, improved attendance, increased positive behaviors, and more effective teacher - parent or school - parent relationships (Vachan & Mclaughlin, 1992).

Successful intervention into the student's disengagement process requires taking into consideration the factors that have placed the student at-risk of dropping out of school. In my experiences with an Alternative mid-level classroom, I have observed that students who have increased their educational aspirations after a rise in their self-efficacy levels. This has resulted in an increase in attendance and academic success.

This study explores which childhood development deficiencies produce many of the factors that place a child at risk of dropping out of school. This study is limited to one group of at-risk students from a small rural community. Many of these students have known each other for several years and have a two to three year relationship with the researcher. Additionally, this study recommends what educators can do to intervene effectively in order to decrease the dropout rate.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Adolescence; the developmental time between childhood and adult.

Alternative Learning Environment; an educational setting outside of the traditional school setting which provides a learning environment.

Early Adolescence; this period corresponds to the middle school or junior high school years.

Ecological Theories; these emphasize the role of the community or social environment and how it impacts one's growth and development.

Extrinsic motivation; behavior influenced by external rewards and punishments.

School Dropout; an individual who has left school before completing the requirements for high school graduation.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is aimed toward exploring the child development theories embedded in Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980), Psychosocial Development (Erikson, 1963, 1968) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986). This inquiry will attempt to answer the following two questions:

- (1) Do childhood developmental deficiencies create factors which place a child at-risk of dropping out of school before completing graduation requirements?
- (2) Can the practice of education intervene in the child's decision to drop out of school by attempting to reduce some of the factors that place a child at-risk of making the decision to drop out of school?

A majority of the research on school dropouts is focused on the individual and the reason that child made the decision to leave school before graduation (Rumberger, 1995). The decision to drop out of school is a process that may begin as early as the third grade and is positively related to penetration into the criminal and substance abuse lifestyle. Theory and research indicate a positive correlation between the style of attachment formed in infancy (Ainsworth, 1978; 1989), the child's self-efficacy (Midgley, Anderman, & Hicks, 1995; Bandura, 1986, 1989), and the ability of a mid-level adolescent to be successful and remain in school (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Goodenow, 1993). Research to date has identified a

wide array of factors that must be considered in analyzing the student's decision making process. These factors can be grouped into four major categories:

1. demographics;
2. family issues;
- 3 peer relationships;
4. school experiences.

## **2.1 DEMOGRAPHICS**

Although the definition and measurement of school dropouts is problematic, the United States Census Bureau estimated that 11% of all youth 16 to 24 years old in 1992 were dropouts, meaning they were not enrolled in school and had not been graduated (McMillen, Kaufman, Hausken, & Bradby, 1993). Although there exists a concerned growing awareness and a wide variety of programs aimed toward impacting school dropouts, demographers predict continued growth in the population of youth that fit the at-risk profile (National Research Council, 1993).

Essentially all studies of dropouts reflect demographic factors highly correlated with the propensity to drop out of school. The single most consistent factor characterizing at-risk students is social class (Rumberger, 1995; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992). Social class or socioeconomic level is a powerful determinant of school success, making the 13 million children living in poverty (Stallings, 1995) a concern. The second factor that is consistent in youth at-risk of leaving school is race (McMillen et al, 1993) with dropout rates for Black, Hispanics, and Native Americans, significantly higher than dropout rates for Anglo-Americans and Asian

Students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1992). While such differences are well documented in the research, the reason for the consistency of these two factors is not clear.

## **2.2 FAMILY ISSUES**

Mid-level adolescents whose parents or siblings have dropped out of school, engaged in criminal activities or engaged in substance abuse, are themselves at risk for these behaviors (Vickers, 1994; Rumberger, 1990; Frank, 1990). Parents convicted of a crime and chronically delinquent siblings increase the risk of delinquency, whether measured by official records or self-reports (Hawkins, Lishner, Catalano, & Howard, 1986). A consistent positive correlation has been widely documented and accepted between parental drug usage and adolescent drug usage.

In addition to criminal behavior and/or substance abuse within the home, is the issue of parenting style. Mid-level adolescents develop more psychosocial maturity and do better in school when they come from families in which the parents monitor and regulate their adolescent's activities at the same time that they provide emotional support and encourage independent decision making (Rumberger, 1995). However, mid-level adolescents raised in families with excessively severe disciplinary practices (Steinberg, Lambron, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992), incestuous activity (Paulson, 1994), and/or low communication between parent and child (Steinberg, et al, 1992), are at risk for delinquency (Loeber & Dishion, 1983), drug

abuse (Simcha-Fagan & Gersten, 1986), and dropping out of school (Rumberger, 1995, 1990; Frank, 1990).

The research reflects much speculation regarding the role of the "broken home" as a cause for dropping out of school. The structure of the family system, single parent or nuclear family, is not as significant a risk factor as the involvement of the parent in the educational life of the student (Ryan, Stiller, Lynch, 1994). The relationship and attachment style with the parent are the critical factor in linking parenting practices and the mid-level adolescents academic performance (Wentzel, 1994).

In 1951 John Bowlby, a British psychoanalyst, originated Attachment Theory out of the union of etiology, developmental psychology, and psychoanalysis combining cognitive and emotional development (Bowlby, 1969). This theory builds a bridge between the child development work of Piaget and the psychoanalytical work of Freud. This bridge was reinforced with empirical evidence derived from the research of Mary Salter Ainsworth (Ainsworth, 1989, 1978), Inge Bretherton (Bretherton, 1985) and Alan Sroufe (Karen, 1990) who found that without intervention into the child's attachment style, or change in the family circumstances, attachment patterns formed during infancy persist as the child develops (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1973, Karen, 1990).

Attachment theory declares that every child has as part of his/her instinctual repertoire, behaviors that have as a goal keeping their primary caretaker close by. Bowlby abandoned the Freudian notion of drives arising out of hidden forces like libido and aggression, which accumulate within and crave discharge (Crain, 1985).

Instead Bowlby saw an array of innate behavior patterns that were relationship seeking; such as crying, cooing, and smiling (Bowlby, 1969; 1973). Bowlby proceeded to define a series of developmental stages based on the bond formed through these relationship seeking behaviors that he named "internal working models". These actions are instinctual and rooted in the biological fact that proximity of one's primary caretaker is satisfying and essential to survival. (Bowlby, 1969). The establishment, maintenance, and renewal of the proximity of the infants primary caretaker begets feelings of love, security and joy (Paulson, 1994, Ryan, Stiller, Lynch, 1994, Karen, 1990; Werner, 1989; Bowlby, 1969).

Identification of the type of attachment, and the effect that it has on a child's development, was set in motion by Mary Ainsworth. Using a technique called the "Strange Situation", Ainsworth conducted a series of longitudinal studies on attachment during the infants first year of life. Ainsworth spotted three distinct patterns in the babies' reactions and labeled them; (1) securely attached, (2) insecurely attached, and (3) anxiously attached ( Ainsworth, 1978; Lamb, Hopps, Ester, 1987). Developmentalists have used the "Strange Situation" as an extraordinary tool to correlate attachment style with self-esteem (Ryan, et al. 1994), with cognitive abilities (Rice, 1990) , with persistence in solving problem (DeJong, 1992), with peer relations, with depression, and with wide array of other life situations ( Kenny, Moilanen, Lomax, Brabeck, 1993; Spuker, 1986; Bowlby, 1980).

Alan Sroufe, of the Minnesota Institute of Child Development, has been productive in applying Ainsworth's techniques. He, and his colleagues, have been able to follow various samples of children from different socioeconomic strata and,

taking the initial attachment patterns observed by Ainsworth, extend their implications to later and later periods of child development (Deutsch & Erickson, 1989). These empirical findings outline for us the behaviors that manifest themselves as a child develops (Karen, 1990, Erickson, Sroufe, & Egeland 1985). (see Appendix A)

According to Bowlby (1969, 1973), the child develops complementary internal working models of attachment through the attachment style developed in infancy with the primary caretaker (Kenny, Moilanen, Lomax, & Brabeck, 1993). Therefore, a positive internal working model of self developed in the context of secure attachment contribute to feelings of self-worth, seeing oneself as lovable, worthy, capable of getting along with others, competent, valuable and confident. According to Bowlby (1980), a negative internal working model contributes to a predisposition toward low self-esteem, feeling of failure, and increased vulnerability to depression. The internal working model establishes a basis for the style of interpersonal relationships that the mid-level adolescent will form with peers, as well as, adults outside the family.

### **2.3 PEER RELATIONS**

It not known at what point peer associations become important in predicting an adolescent's decision to drop out of school, and/or become involved in delinquency or drug abuse. Guidance in answering this question can be gained from Erik Erikson (1963, 1968) in his outline of eight psychosocial crises over the course of the life span. Each developmental crisis takes on special significance at a given

period in the life cycle because biological and social forces interact to bring the crisis into prominence. Erikson believes that establishment of a sense of personal identity is the chief psychosocial crisis for the mid-level adolescent. In Erikson's view, each developmental crisis builds on the previous ones (See Appendix B). Therefore, with respect to adolescent identity development, Erikson (1963) believes that the successful resolution of the crisis of identity versus identity diffusion depends on how well the individual has resolved the previous crisis involving trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry. Likewise, the way in which the adolescent resolves the crisis of identity will have an impact on his/her struggle with the crises of adulthood.

The social context in which an adolescent conducts his/her search for self-identity will determine whether the search develops into a behavioral crisis (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). Today mid-level adolescents live in a society that : (1) denounces and glorifies sexual promiscuity and the abuse of substances; (2) rarely recognizes the stability of close knit relationships; and, (3) erodes the sense of community that shapes their identity (Turning Points, 1990). Peers allow adolescents to be "themselves" away from the constant pressure and conflict of families and school ( Phelan, Cao, and Davidson, 1994).

Although peer groups provide adolescents with a safe, comfortable place to be themselves, association with delinquent peers is among the strongest correlates to adolescent delinquency (LaGrange & White, 1985; Loeber & Dishion, 1983). Similarly, research also supports peer group associations as a factor in school bonding and involvement (Phelan, et al 1994; Frank, 1990; Frymier, 1989).

Adolescents coordinate their choice of friends, values and behaviors to reinforce their own sense of self worth (Kandel, 1985), and to validate the decision or choices they are making regarding school and/or high-risk behaviors (Goodenow, 1993).

## 2.4 SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

School is a social community which necessitates the ability to maintain interpersonal relationships with both peers and adults. Students with an anxious attachment style (Bowlby 1980; Ainsworth, 1989) do not have the internal working models that provide the relationship skills necessary to maintain the needed interpersonal relationships that the social setting of school requires. During mid-level education the young adolescent is searching for his/her personal identity (Erikson, 1963) and developing a self perception or self efficacy of himself or herself (Bandura, 1986). Bandura has outlined four principle sources of information that a mid-level student uses to establish his/her perception of themselves or his/her self-efficacy.

1. Performance Attainment. Successes raise efficacy appraisals, while repeated failures lower efficacy appraisals. The failure increases in significance if the failure does not reflect a lack of effort by the student. Once this perception is established within the student, it generalizes to other situations.
2. Vicarious Experience. Experiences that effect self-efficacy are influenced through seeing other or similar peers perform successfully. Although

vicarious experiences are generally weaker than direct experiences, they can produce significant changes, especially when coupled with performance.

3. Verbal Persuasion. Verbal persuasion is widely used to attempt to talk students into believing they possess capabilities that will allow them to achieve what they seek.
4. Physiological State. Students rely on information from their physiological state in judging their capabilities. Often students read stress level as an indication of vulnerability to fail.

Information from these four sources is not inherently enlightening or accurate. The information is filtered through the student's cognitive beliefs about their worth and validity as a person. This learning begins within the family setting by the attachment style developed with the primary caretaker (Bowlby, 1980), and continued through the childhood developmental stages (Erikson, 1963), reaching amplification within the school setting (Bandura, 1986).

During the crucial formative period of children's cognitive development the school functions as the primary setting for the cultivation and social validation of cognitive efficacy (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). School is the setting where children learn cognitive competencies and problem solving skills necessary for school and social success. Within the school setting their knowledge and thinking skills are tested, evaluated, and socially compared (Lehr & Harris, 1988). The motivated, securely attached children who learn quickly are well served by the prevailing educational system (Stallings, 1995; Karen, 1990). However, the low achieving child's perception of his/her cognitive capability is affected negatively within the

classroom structure that places the emphasis on social comparisons (Bandura, 1986) rather than on a self-comparative appraisal (Lehr & Harris, 1988). Children who establish a pattern of failure develop a reputation with peers and teachers that is hard to overcome. These students begin the process of disengagement from school which leads to dropping out.

This process of disengagement magnifies a large number of negative school related experiences that serve as powerful influences in the decision to drop out of school. Students who experience poor academic performance are more likely to disengage than students who are academically successful (Rumberger, 1995; Farrington, 1986; Loeber & Dishion, 1983). Lack of academic success correlates with poor attendance (Finn, 1993), disruptive behaviors (Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992), and the development of a negative attitude toward school (Phelan, et al, 1994).

This brings us to the second question of this inquiry. What can the practice of education do to intervene in the decision making process that leads a student to decide to drop out of school? The interplay of attachment style, self-efficacy and risk factors present in a student's school, family, and community life give us a framework upon which to build and intervene. In a diversified classroom structure, individualized instruction tailored to student's knowledge and skills enables all students to expand their competencies and provide less of a basis for demoralized social comparison (Steinberg, 1992). The instructional and curriculum modification that can be established in the traditional classroom are endless (Cummings, 1992; Lehr & Harris, 1988). However, by mid-level some students will have displayed

multifaceted and multi layers of risk factors to such a high degree that they will need an alternative to the traditional classroom setting. Walters and Kranzler (1970) reported that by the ninth grade it is possible to predict - with 90% accuracy - which adolescents will drop out of high school before graduation.

Education has spent large amounts of money addressing the high risk behaviors such as substance abuse, violent and/or disruptive behaviors, and sexual promiscuity. In this study we focus on seeking the origin of the developmental factors that place a student at risk of dropping out of school.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The concept of Alternative Education and/or Alternative Learning Environments (ALE) is not new. Despite the emergence of a myriad of alternative learning options, two enduring consistencies have characterized alternative education: (1) they have been thought of as a “place” or special program for those unsuccessful students who are considered marginal or “at-risk”; (2) they have represented a departure from the standard school orientation and environment (Raywid, 1994). The focus of this qualitative study was to investigate the origin of the developmental factors which place a sample of students placed in an alternative learning environment at-risk of dropping out of school. Will they re-engage in the educational process and lessen the likelihood of their dropping out of school before graduation?

#### **3.1 SETTING.**

The last eight years I have worked in an ALE, which is part of a rural school district in a multiethnic setting in Oregon. This program is an off-campus alternative classroom for high school age students (14-18) who are not making satisfactory progress in the traditional high school setting. The fundamental purpose of the ALE is to assist student’s with: (1) completing graduation requirements; (2) learning to function successfully in an educational setting; (3) lessening the

behaviors that place them “at-risk” of dropping out of school. The program has five operating goals:

1. The classroom atmosphere will provide
  - A. warmth and acceptance
  - B. behavioral controls
  - C. a variety of opportunities for academic growth
  - D. development of self-discipline aimed toward self-directed learning
2. Promote a positive student/adult relationship that will enhance the student’s success within a supportive classroom.
3. Promote student’s involvement in the traditional school’s social environment as an avenue for social and emotional ties within the school community.
4. Maintain high academic expectations for students, with frequent assessment, feedback and goal setting.
5. Link the student to future roles as an adult member of the community through service learning projects, job shadowing, and work experience.

The ALE is housed in a one room school house that sits on a hill with a beautiful view of the river. It is a very peaceful setting with opportunity to enjoy the beauty of nature. The students are brought to the setting from the high school by school bus and returned back to the high school by bus at the end of the day. The setting allows for control of distraction and consistent monitoring of student behaviors during both “work time” and free times.

### 3.2 POPULATION

Students are recommended for placement in the ALE by the high school Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT). This team is composed of the school counselor, school administrator, the special education staff, and the staff from the ALE. Students are referred for a change of educational placement to the MDT by teachers, parents, any member of the team or self referred. The MDT reviews the student's attendance, academic progress, behavioral referrals from classroom teacher, and any other information available regarding the student. The team makes a determination regarding the presenting needs of student and matches those needs with possible educational environments. The student and parents are consulted, given the teams' recommendations and a change of placement is arranged.

The ALE is a placement recommendation by the MDT for students with a wide variety of needs. Some students need to be out of the "hustle and bustle" of a larger school setting with all of the distractions. Other students have been labeled as having behavior problems, which has caused some concern on the part of their classroom teachers. Some of the student's have been labeled as having an "attitude", that has affected their relationship with their peers and staff. Other students are placed at the ALE because they are behind academically due to poor attendance, lack of attention, and failing to do home work. All are in need of a smaller setting where they can receive one-to-one attention from the staff.

### 3.3 RESEARCHER'S HISTORY

My personal interest and involvement with "at-risk" children began approximately 30 years ago. After completing a nursing degree, I began working at a mental health facility with young adults diagnosed as having some form of mental illness. In reading their case histories I became aware of the large number of years of illness that most of these young people had endured, with very little change in their ability to live a productive life. It seemed to me that most of these case histories involved parents who either shared a level of mental illness themselves or denied that anything beyond "typical adolescence" was happening with their children.

Within three years a new treatment center for adolescents was opened at another facility and I transferred to a nursing administrative position in that setting. The patients diagnoses ran the full gambit of mental illness from autistic disorders and self-destructive behaviors to clinical depression and suicide. This experience furthered awareness of the role parents play in the development of healthy children.

My growing awareness of the vast numbers of victimized children in our society led me to decide I wanted to make a difference. My husband I and opened our home to foster children and began a fifteen year adventure as foster parents for adolescents who needed long term care. We had the joy of working with many children who needed warmth, encouragement, structure and beyond all else, acceptance and love. Some of these experiences brought an immeasurable amount of satisfaction and others an equal amount of pain. My awareness of the importance of parenting grew, as well as, my awareness of how differently some

children are treated by systems outside of the home setting. One such system is the public school.

My exposure to the public school system had been uneventful to this point. I attended public school, was a mainstream student who did my school work and usually, followed the rules. Our two natural children attended public school, were mainstream students who did their school work and followed most of the rules. We were viewed as involved parents who kept track of and supported our children. The majority of the foster children's relationship with the school system was different from what my husband or I had personally experienced in our high school years and different than what we had experienced with our children. We found that these children were viewed by the school staff with suspicion. That is to say, if something was wrong it was the children's fault because they were in the court "system." We also found that these children were not motivated to make acceptable or passing grades because they were convinced they were never going to "make it." The hard work of trying to change these thought processes regarding the children's educational efficacy and sense of self worth drove me back to school for a Master's degree in education and involvement in an educational setting for "at-risk" students.

Coming into a professional role in education I brought some strong beliefs about children and education. I believe every child can learn. Further, I believe every child has the right to an opportunity to gain knowledge, plus grow emotionally, socially, intellectually and spiritually. Knowledge is in the mind of the individual. It is organized and constructed through social interaction and is constantly changing.

Knowledge is not a static, absolute object but a process of knowing or coming to know. Because we are social beings, our knowledge is always effected by our surroundings. The social setting of school must be a milieu for knowledge acquisition, interpreting knowledge, assessment of that knowledge, and application of new knowledge. For the “at-risk” student, the school setting may be the only setting in which personal growth is valued.

### **3.4 DATA GATHERING**

The first year or so that I worked in the alternative education arena I struggled with wanting to make everything “OK” for these children. Moving off my parenting role and into an educator role was a challenge. Finally, after couple years in the classroom, I found a middle ground that allowed me to be nurturing when the situation required and demanding of excellence when they needed to get on with their academic tasks. As I worked with these students, I began seeing changes in some of the students’ investment in their academic tasks. I also began to see students giving up or moving away from some of their high-risk behaviors and into planning for future learning experiences. I began to ask why? What are their feelings about school? What do they remember about their early years in school?

What made them change from being at high risk for dropping out of school to striving toward completion of their high school years and earning their diploma? The research literature gives us a framework for development of the factors that place students “at-risk” of dropping out of school. Do these students’ experiences follow that framework? So, I asked them. Their answers reflect the memories, life

experiences, and impressions of one set of at-risk students and their parents. These students live in a small, rural community and have know each other, in some situations, all their lives. Many of them are related biologically or through marriage. This group have been in school together for two to three years, and, in some cases, longer. The parents and the students have a two to three year relationship with me. A bond of trust had been formed. Parents and students share freely about the events of their joint school experiences.

I chose to start this inquiry into their memories by having the group watch KINDERGARTEN COP, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. This movie provided a fun filled look at kindergartners and the behaviors that are typical of that age group of children. After the video we had a group discussion about memories they had of their kindergarten experience. Then I read them various writings from Robert Fulcrum's book, EVERYTHING I NEEDED TO KNOW I LEARNED IN KINDERGARTEN. I provided each student in the class with a writing guide for kindergarten (See appendix C). I asked them to write me a story, following the guide, about their memories regarding this stage of their educational life. Over a period of two weeks, I provided guides for the other grades - first through eighth -- and they wrote about their memories of their lives and school experiences.

Nine of the students successfully completed writing their educational histories. Of these nine, five were male and four were female, with three of the male students of Hispanic origin. An evening meeting was held with these nine students and their parents. The students and their parents were informed about the research project, the confidentiality procedures to be followed, the data gathering work to be

done. Written consent to participate was obtained (See appendix D). To establish additional validation of the student's memories regarding schools attended, teachers, and special events that happen to them, I reviewed their school records.

I completed separate personal interviews with the nine students, and their parents, who were used for the study (See appendix D). The student interviews were done in a relaxed setting, usually while eating, and my main purpose was to clarify anything that was not clear in their writing. I also used the time to give the students positive feedback on their writing of their school history. To relieve any anxiety the student might have had regarding the personal interview with their parent, I talked with them about what I was going to be saying to the parent at the time of our interview.

The parent interviews were conducted after regular school hours in the home of the participant. I took notes on what was said to me, trying to do so without allowing the note taking process to interfere with the casual, friendly atmosphere of our conversations. I did not provide the parents with an interview guide, but rather attempted to make it a conversational style interview. Using the student's writing as a guide, I asked them what they could remember about their experiences with the schools where their child was a student. Were they involved with school activities? Did they have a positive relationship with the classroom teacher and the school administrator? What kind of help did they receive?

Following the interviews, I began to analyze what the students and parents had to say. I began the process of putting their words and experiences into the framework of risk factors supplied by the triangulation of the developmental theorists

-- Bowlby, Erikson, and Bandura. Did they match, blend, or were they different? This is what the students and parents had to say --

**LISTEN TO THEIR VOICES!!!**

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS: VOICES OF THE STUDENTS AND PARENTS**

Having the students write their personal school histories was a great class project. I gave them an outline for each grade area or grade and asked to write about their memories of that time (See Appendix C). As they got involved in the project they began reminiscing about similar experiences or experiences they had shared during those grades. For some of the students it became a time to recognize how they had grown socially, emotionally, and academically.

It became clear to me as I reviewed their writings and chatted with them in an attempt to clarify some of their statements, that the students fell into three categories:

- Group 1: Adjudicated Students: Students who had been involved with the juvenile court system due to their criminal behavior or their family situations.
- Group 2: Alternate Structure Students: Students having home situations in which the adults are persons other than the students' two natural birth parents.
- Group 3: Parent Plus Child Students: Students from two parent nuclear families that have lived more than eighty percent of the child's school life in this same school district.

#### 4.1 ADJUDICATED STUDENTS

Some generalizations can be made about the students' who fall into this group:

1. Above average attendance, due in part to the extrinsic motivation of court mandates to attend school.
2. Lower academic skill levels - produced by numerous disruptions in their educational process when moved or incarcerated.
3. Lack of intrinsic motivation to learn, achieve, or even try to achieve.

Representing this group are three students and their stories.

- Tina is a fifteen year old, ninth grade student. She was placed in this ALE to learn skills related to anger management. She assumes a victim role in interpersonal relations, which creates conflict between herself and others. Additionally, some evaluation is needed of her basic academic skill levels and ability to manage the work load in a traditional high school classroom. Tina is a very attractive girl with whose early sexual experiences have left her scarred. She had difficulty setting appropriate boundaries around her sexual self, and tends act very seductive to gain attention or favors. She is currently living in a foster home and has a positive, nurturing relationship with her foster family. This has been a good year for Tina, she has made excellent progress academically, is making B's and C's in her classroom work, and is having additional success with her social behavior. She is drug and alcohol free and attends personal counseling weekly.

- Sara is a sixteen years old and in the 10th grade. Her placement in the ALE came as a result of referring herself for a change of placement. She requested the change because she wants to learn, pass her classes, earn the credits she needs to graduate from high school and go to college. At the traditional high school there are too many opportunities to leave at lunch time with her friends and/or be tempted to engage in drug activities. Sara is attractive, very quiet, shy, and is working on learning that it is OK to ask for help when she does not understand an assignment. At the beginning of my time with Sara we would hardly talk and she would not voice her opinion on subjects during class discussions. That has changed and there are times I wonder where that shy, frail, little girl went that had the same body as this confident young woman I see emerging!
- Paul is a fifteen year old, and is in the 10th grade. He was placed in the ALE to assist him with his struggle to disengage from a criminal and drug abusing peer group. He is living with his mother and is on parole from the state detention facility. He is very bright and eager to learn. We are working with him on his organizational and time management skills. Paul states that he is drug free and is a very committed to staying straight and out of the crime scene. He is engaged in school and doing a good job on his academic tasks.

The following are these three student's stories and memories of school from kindergarten to the eighth grade. Listen to their voices!

#### 4.1.1 KINDERGARTEN

Tina - I don't remember very many memories but I know I went to kindergarten ... I don't remember any fun times...only sad times , like when we went on a field trip and a fat kid sat on my lunch so I didn't have any food to eat.

Sara - I got along fine in kindergarten...I remember what my teacher looked like, but not her name...she always smelled real nice...and she smiled which I liked 'cause my Mom never smiled.

Paul - When I was in pre-school I got caught stealing the teachers toys. My teacher was Mrs. C. and I liked her a lot (sic) and she helped me learn to a lot of things...I remember painting and coloring in a really big book.

#### 4.1.2 FIRST AND SECOND GRADE

Tina - My Mom and I lived with my Grandma - - she loved me...I remember hunting Easter eggs and having a pretty new dress...I miss my Grandma...she really loved me...the last part of my second grade my Mom moved us in with this guy named M....I hated him because he hit my Mom and spanked me for not cleaning up after him...they were always his messes...I got kicked out of school for two day's 'cause I hit this boy...

Sara - What I remember about the first and second grade is really sad...I moved around a lot to different foster homes because my Mom was in jail, I hated that...Back then teachers in Louisiana could beat you with big paddles that had holes in it and I got beat on a lot (sic).

Paul - It was fun 'cause we played a lot...I found out I did not like math...reading was OK but the books were weird.

THOUGHTS - In these early years of their educational process, these students were concerned about some very basic things - food to eat, teachers smelling pretty, teachers smiling at them, the difference between subjects - math and reading. There are signs of anxious attachment style from Tina as she talks about the kid

sitting on her lunch. She lacked any empathy for him and was totally focused on her loss. In addition we hear Tina, Paul and Sara struggling in relating to other people, such as, hitting another, getting spanked, stealing toys. From Sara voice comes the results of what Erikson refers to as a negative completion of her developmental crises. At this very young age she is experiencing sadness and hatred, possibly due to mistrust, shame, doubts about herself as valuable, and guilt because her Mother is not with her.

#### **4.1.3 THIRD AND FOURTH GRADES**

Tina - Walking to school with my friends was cool...things were not cool at home ... lots of yelling and hitting...so I spent most of my time with my friends. I had my first real boyfriend in the fourth grade...he was older, like in middle school, but he was cool...He knew I did not want to be at home, so we would go to the park...we "made-out" at the park...now I feel really stupid about it 'cause I was so young, but then I remember feeling really special to him. School was OK ... but my teacher looked at me weird and said I was too wild...I don't remember if I learned anything new ...I just remember my friends.

Sara - My third grade year I got into trouble for talking and I liked my teacher anyway...I hated my teacher in the fourth grade and I missed lots of days...I learned about the courthouse, what it was for and stuff cause I had to go to court when they were going to put my Mom back in jail...instead they put her in a treatment place and me back in a foster home...I hated it, but they did not move me around a lot so that was good...I had to change school, make new friends, and go to school every day. I learned to read lots of books that year...it kind of gave me something to think about instead of my Mom...I was really mad at her back then...

Paul - My third grade was pretty cool... fourth grade Mr. H. was my teacher...It was the first time I had a man teacher...he was mean and I knew I was gone' hate school...lots of good things happened to me, like I drank alcohol and smoked for the first time...went to lots of parties ... I skipped school to party with some other guys. I was supposed to learn to write cursive, but I never did.

THOUGHTS - It appears that these students are beginning to disengage from school and engage in some high risk behaviors, such as, drinking, smoking, and hiding from feelings that are painful and sexual activities. Tina's voice seems to be saying that she is aware of teachers "judging" her. In addition to Tina's anxious attachment style, she is exhibiting what Erikson's second stage of development calls the negative pole of autonomy versus shame and doubt. Added to her development of mistrust in the first developmental crisis, she is showing low self-esteem, and hostility. Sara is starting to develop a way of coping with her pain in that she is escaping into books. However, her negative development is reflected in the hostility and anger. Paul shows his negative development during this same crisis in his compulsivity with regard to skipping school and engaging in substance abuse. Paul also may showing his anxious attachment style with regard to not having a male authority figure in his life. Nothing in his internal working model of relationships gives him the skills to engage in a successful relationship with a male authority figure.

#### **4.1.4 FIFTH GRADE**

Tina - During the summer my Mom married the "stupid" we were living with...I hated him! My friends were cool. I skipped school with one of my friends whose Mom worked all day ... sometimes we would have boys come over and we would play like we were really married. My Mom was doing drugs and stuff in her bedroom with her skinny husband and did not even care...

Sara - My fifth grade year I moved to Oregon so I could live with my Dad. I did not know him and was a little scared to move so far and

leave my friends and my Mom. They said Mom could not take care of me anymore and that Dad said he would... it was kind of like moving to a new foster home. My Dad was OK and my step-mom was really sweet ... but I didn't really belong there like the other kids that lived there ... a girl two years younger than me and a boy five years younger than me. All at once I was supposed to be the big sister that set some kinda of a good example - NOT...School was really different here ... everyone else knew each other and I did not know anyone...I could do the work and everything like that ...but I really felt weird.

Paul - Fifth grade was cool ... we made lots of stuff and it was my last year of elementary school ... we were the big kids so we stole stuff we wanted from the little kids ... I started skipping school 'cause I like to drink beer ... I started really liking girls and had a real girlfriend that I kissed, only kissed.

THOUGHTS - The fifth grade was a pivotal grade for these students. We hear loud and clear that they felt alienated from their primary care takers and we do not hear about relationships being formed with teachers or other school/community personnel. Alan Sroufe (Erickson, et al 1985), in his studies of attachment style, reported that anxiously attached children at this age become aggressive and either victims or victimizers. These voices are reflecting some of each, in that Sara is expressing feelings of being a victim and Paul is being an aggressive victimizer. When I asked each one of them about why there were not adult relationships in their lives, they said they could not remember any teacher, church leader, or recreational leader who liked them or any one adult with whom they felt a closeness. These student's do not have memories of taking part in youth organizations, such as scouting, campfire girls, or little league.

#### 4.1.5 SIXTH GRADE

Tina - Middle school was cool ... I remember hairdos, makeup, guys, parties ... the class part was OK ,too ... We got to move around to different teachers, so if you had a Dork for a teacher you weren't stuck with him all day ... science class was the coolest ... my teacher was rad and she gave me pretty good grades... other girls were a trip ... like they were jealous 'cause the boys liked me so they called me names, you know, like whore and slut ... by the end of the year I'd had it with them a got into this big old fight with them ... I got charged with assault, had to go to court, and got put on probation. Mom was pretty cool about the whole number... she said if the girls didn't want their asses kicked they should not have been calling me names."

Sara - Sixth grade was in Middle School with the older kids ... by now I had some friends ... it was OK living with Dad ... except sometimes when he was drunk he would say things that hurt me, like you look like your Mom when she was young, before she became a "druggee". I came home from a party one night - I had not been drinking, smoking, or doing drugs - nothing, but he flipped out an said I was stoned and a whole bunch of really mean stuff. That was the last time for a really long time that I came home straight ... I thought if you are gonna' get yelled at anyway you might as well have some fun. I skipped some school the last part of the year ... some of us would get high before we went home so that home was not so bad.

Paul - In sixth grade I went to school in jail ... I was locked up because I got into a bunch of trouble with girls, booze and stealing ... the good part of it was school because I learned stuff. I had to go to school every day and do all my work or get in more trouble than I wanted ... I even learned how to do math problems and they were kinda' fun.

THOUGHTS - The two girls, Tina and Sara, are struggling with their self identify.

Erikson tells us that young adolescents begin to put bits and pieces of the information about themselves which they acquire from other significant people in their lives together to form their personal identity. Tina had been getting negative information about herself from a teacher thinking she was too wild and peers calling her demoralizing names. Her anxious attachment style does not give her any

internal working model about maintaining positive relationships with others or problem solving skills that she can use to resolve her issues. She became aggressive and acts out by fighting. Sara has information from childhood about her Mother's inability to provide for her because of her substance abuse. Now she is getting additional information from her Dad that she is the same as her Mother. Sara puts together an identity for herself that fulfills that image. It seems that learning or acquiring academic skills is the last thing on their minds of the two girls, however, the excitement of learning is growing in Paul who is being forced to attend school while in jail.

#### **4.1.5 SEVENTH GRADE**

Tina - In the seventh grade I really went to hell ... I ended up pregnant and my Mom made me have an abortion ... that still really bugs me a lot ... I had started doing drugs every day instead of just at parties and stuff ... I was so angry all the time that I would just blow up at teachers, kids, and I hated my Mom ... she could do all these things but tried to tell me I couldn't ... I got really depressed. The police got involved in my business again because I got caught bringing drugs to school ... I got kicked out of school ... went to a foster home. I thought it was really a stupid place .. they would not let me go for walks alone at night, could not smoke, and they were going to make me do drug counseling and some other kind of shrink stuff ... so I ran. I did not go to school very much that year and cannot remember if I learned anything school wise ... I did learn if you are going to do stuff, don't get caught.

Sara - By the first part of my seventh grade year I thought I was really cool ... I did drugs every day but was so very sure no one could tell ... I went to school every day but did not go to very many of my classes ... my grades were really bad, but I didn't care ... if my Dad cared he never said anything to me ... my Step-mom stayed out of my face and my business if I stayed out of hers ... but at Winter Break everything sort of blew up ... my Dad told me he knew I was doing a lot of drugs and it had to stop ... He had me locked up in a treatment program ...

I hated it. Now I know it was the best thing for me and that I would have probably killed myself if he had not stepped into my mess. In treatment I did get caught up on some of the school stuff I'd missed. School can be pretty fun when you are straight enough to know what's happening.

Paul - I got out of lock up just before Christmas of my seventh grade year ... man was I glad to be out of there ... after break when I went back to school, everything (classes) was real easy for me because I did learn some good stuff going to school inside ... I understood my school work and did good on my stuff ... I was doing real good, then this girl said I did some stuff to her that I swear I never did ... no one would believe me ... so I went back to lock up. I learned never to trust girls ... everybody always believes them

THOUGHTS - The voices of these students are not speaking about relationships with teachers, other community leaders, or participation in extracurricular groups. All three of them have entered the criminal or drug abusing lifestyle, therefore academic growth or skill building is a secondary issue in their lives. Sroufe's (Erickson, et al, 1985) research on anxious attachment style children reflects that as the child reaches middle school age (11 years to 15 years), their negative feelings become walled up inside of them and they are unable to express them successfully. The voices of these three students reflect negative feelings of distrust, anger, pain, and hurt. However, they are not communicating these feelings to any adults because they have not form positive adult relationships. Their way of resolving these negative feeling is to dull the pain with drug abuse.

#### 4.1.7 EIGHTH GRADE

Tina - I was on the run for most of the summer between the seventh and eight grade ... when I finally got caught they put me back in a foster home ... with these guys the rules were about the same, but the way they put it to you made more sense ... I felt like they thought I was cool and wanted me to be safe and that they wanted to take care of me - I don't think I felt like that anywhere but with my Grandma ... when school was ready to start they took me shopping and I got new clothes, make-up, hair stuff ... boy was I bad. I went to school every day and did my school work ... I wanted them to see that I was worth all the neat stuff they were doing for me ... but my Mom wanted me to come home, so I started these home visit times ... she didn't care about me, she just wanted a babysitter for my little half brother ... I told the people that (caseworkers) but they said I had to go home anyways, so I ran again ... It was really sad because I had it so good in my foster home ... I stayed on the run about a month and then finally turned myself in and went to live with my Mom.

Sara - In the eighth grade I was put into an Alternative Class for kids who had been in trouble and needed help to get caught up because they'd been out of school or something has happened to them. I was cool 'cause we could talk to each other while we were working and the teacher really wanted to help us learn stuff ... I felt really good about going to school and knew nobody was going to hassle me about stuff 'cause the teacher in there would take care of me ... I made good grades for the first time and began to think maybe I could make it ... I remember how good I felt when they told me I could ask to put in this class instead of the real Central classes...

Paul - I was living back home with my Mom for my eighth grade year ... I had a really mean homeroom teacher that thought I was scum, Mr. B. ... I like got into a bunch of trouble stealing cars with three guys and when they picked me up I had drugs on me ... So, I went to lock up until about Spring Break and then out on parole ... I have changed a lot since then ... I'm straight, I do not do crimes and if I can stay at this school (the ALE) I know I can graduate. I need to be here because I don't always know when I am getting off track and a little too wild .. here you guys tell me and make me accountable for my attitude and stuff...

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS - Bowlby's Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; 1973; 1980) tells us that an child's style of attachment can be changed if a secondary care

giver takes the time to reformat the child's attachment style. Tina is beginning to feel her worth as a person and losing some of her negative feelings. She had reengaged in the learning process, however, her lack of trust was reinforced when she felt she was not being heard by her caseworker. Sara was beginning to feel cared about and her sense of herself as worthwhile and capable was being developed. Paul was able to communicate his feelings and goals. This would indicate that their attachment style is changing and they are gaining confidence in their abilities to maintain interpersonal relationships. Their voices speak of feeling hurt, sad, angry, and shamed. The negative development these children have experienced (Erikson, 1968) has left a void which took over their childhood and did not allow their creativity to be heard and to grow (See Appendix B). The joy and satisfaction of achievement are not here; not even in a whisper.

#### **4.1.8 VOICES OF THE PARENTS**

Tina's Foster Parent - We have enjoyed having Tina in our home ... she is quite moody and her moods change quickly ... Tina has not heard from her Mother and Stepfather is about four months ... the authorities think maybe they have left the state because of the child abuse allegations pending against them, I have no way of knowing for certain ... Tina likes school and really likes you, I think because things stay the same out there (the ALE) and she feels that you care about her ... She is getting better about sticking to things and not giving up.

Sara's Dad - Thank God she is finally doing better ... there for awhile with all the drug stuff and skipping school, I was not sure she would make it ... During her seventh grade year the school folks were great ... I knew she was doing the junk but I had no idea who to call to get any help ... Mrs. X stepped in and made some phone calls and we got Sara some help ... Being with you this year had been an answer ... she seems to be getting stronger everyday.

Paul's Mom - Paul has always been a strong willed kid ... never did like to behave himself ... he would sneak around and do what ever he wanted even if he knew he was going to get a beating when we found out. I do not know why he turned into a criminal ... we are not criminals, not really ... He did some naughty stuff at school, but he has always liked school ... now he is doing good ... you guys really stay on top of him out there at school (ALE)... he seems proud of his school papers and projects. When he was younger some lady wanted me to take him into our doctor and see if I could get him on some pills of some kind to slow him down, but I didn't want my kid on pills ... a little beer is not going to hurt, but not pills.

It would seem that the school personnel were available to these parents and offered help. The importance of school working with parents comes through loud and clear when hearing the hopelessness Sara's Dad felt during her drug abuse crisis. I believe the school needed to look at Paul's Mother's attitude toward the suggestion that Paul be placed on medication to help with his impulse control. She had some perceptions about treatment that needed clarification. School personnel and parents must be partners in the educational planning and problem solving for a student. It can become very confusing for students if the expectations of the student are different at school and at home. Much can be done to eliminate the factors that place a child at-risk of dropping out of school if communication between the student, the parents, and the school staff is open.

#### **4.2 ALTERNATE STRUCTURE STUDENTS**

The students in this group have been and /or are being reared in a home situation where the adults in the home are not the student's two biological parents. Several family structures have been represented in the population at the ALE over the last five years. Included are homes with two biological parents, step dad and

biological mom, step mom and biological dad, mom only, dad only, as well as, mom or dad and a significant other. Generalizations about these students include:

- (1) average or below average attendance;
- (2) academic skills are average or above, however, academic output is often below average;
- (3) difficulty taking responsibility for the choices.

The following three student's stories represent this Alternate Structure group.

- Ray is a fifteen year old young man. He lives with his Mother and younger brother. He was placed at the ALE to allow increased one-on-one attention that would enable him to maintain his motivation to finish his assignments and increase his grade point average. He is very bright and when he puts effort into a project, he does an outstanding job. He often does not apply himself to assigned academic tasks and has many assignments that are left half completed or not turned in for grading. Right now he seems to be going through trying on adult behaviors such as, smoking, drinking, and some light recreational drug use, - He is attempting to find his place in the young adult world. He is not interested in athletics, is not sure he wants to be an academic all star and dreams of sitting under a tree and sketching all day. He does possess excellent reasoning skills and an openness in talking about the pros and cons of decisions he is making at this time in his life. He has much, much potential and could become a bright and shining star on future horizons.

- Patty is a sixteen year old young lady. She lives in a household with her Mother and Stepfather of approximately 2 years. Her older sibling is out of the home and her younger brother is living with her Dad. She has a history of sexual promiscuity and makes decisions regarding boyfriends that place her in abusive and dangerous situations. Patty was placed in an ALE to keep her on track academically and away from the influence of her high - risk peer group. She is highly intelligent, very competitive, and likes to have the last word in any conversation - she will argue about most anything. Patty has just obtained her first job and is saving for an automobile. She is working to complete her credits for graduation ahead of schedule so she can graduate early and move into an apartment of her own. She says that she intends to go to college and get a degree in law so that she can work with juveniles who need protection from adults who do not really care about them and the system as a whole (whatever that is)!
- Mark - a sixteen year young man who lives with his biological Father and his Step Mother. He was placed in an ALE to learn some organization skills and to give him a placement where he could move around on those days he is overly anxious and cannot sit still. This young man is very athletic and wants to play sports on a college level. He is very scattered and some days cannot focus on academic tasks. He has been tested to assess his hyperactivity but did not qualify for any intervention. He has the ability to learn, to make application of new knowledge, and to think critically about issues. His desire

to comply with doing these tasks on anyone's schedule other than his own personal time line is most often the biggest challenge to his success.

The following are the memories of the Alternate Structure Students from kindergarten to the eight grade. Listen to their voices !

#### **4.2.1 KINDERGARTEN**

Ray - My teacher was a weird chick that taught me about snakes ... we always dug holes in the play ground and got in trouble for that, but kept doin' it anyways ...

Patty - I went to a private school at the church ... my teacher was Mrs. R., and I liked her ... my favorite time was sharing circle just before our naps... I remember feeling very loved by my teacher.

Mark - When I was five I went to kindergarten ... I had fun times, like I kissed a girl for the very first time ... my teacher was really nice but she must have pissed me off or something because my Mom said I told her I was going to poke her eyes out with a fork ... she was a good teacher cause her helped me learn to read ... my best friend and I used to ride 4 -wheelers until we crashed one day and he broke open his spleen ... he went to the hospital for a while and I found a new best friend.

#### **4.2.2 FIRST AND SECOND GRADE**

Ray - first grade sucked ... I had to stay in at recess all the time because my work was never done ... second grade was really boring ... I had to take homework home and fill up whole pages with just one letter ... my Mom like sat there with me asking stupid questions like did I miss my Dad ... I do not think she really wanted an answer ...

Patty - my teacher name was Mrs. W. and I did not like her... she made me eat the snacks even when they were nasty... we did play which I liked ... I learn to make my letters.. In the second grade I had Mrs. V... she was very strict and we did not get along .. she taught me

how to spell and to make sentences ... I also remember we had to read a book a week and I won a free pizza for reading the most.

Mark - In first and second grade I hated going to school ... when I got there I always had fun ... half way through the first grade I pushed a kid off the top of the jungle gym thing and got kicked out of school ... in the second grade we moved away from all my friends ... I made only one friend at the new school ... he lived down the street from me. The school work was OK, I don't remember having any trouble with the work - my Mom said I got good report cards.

THOUGHTS - From the voices of these students it sounds as if during infancy they formed a secure attachment to their primary caretaker. Patty was able to recognize feeling loved by her kindergarten teacher. This could mean she had an internal working model that allowed her to form attachments to others. However, in the first and second grade she speaks of a negative relationship with her teachers. This may not have as much to do with her attachment style, as her struggle to complete her development through Erikson's stage of initiative versus guilt. Mark's voice reflects his struggle with Erikson's crises of autonomy versus shame and doubt, as well as, initiative versus guilt. Mark speaks about negative feeling of hatred regarding going to school and aggressive behavior in the incident where he pushed another child off the jungle gym and ended up out of school. The hostility and compulsivity reflect a negative development of these two crises.

It is amazing that these students still can remember the names of their teachers from so long ago. Their voices say that these people were very important to them, thereby, reflecting an internal working model for relationships that allows them to maintain interpersonal relationships. It is good to be reminded that some of the incentives laid out as motivations, such as Patty's pizza for reading the most books, really do create memories.

### 4.2.3 THIRD AND FOURTH GRADES

Ray - in the third grade I had Mrs. F. for my teacher and she made me stay in at recess because my work was never done ... I guess maybe I was a little "tard"(sic) ... I remember me and my friend Jonathan found a dead bird in the yard and stuck it in her basket for papers ... In the fourth grade I went to the same school and had Mrs. S. ... I made a new friend and we always sat in the back of the class making fun of these three ugly girls in our class - I can't remember their names ... Mrs. S. hated me so when ever she wanted us to write something I'd write about guns, death, and war ... she said I was depressed because my Dad had left my Mom ... so she told my Mom I needed to see a shrink ... I still think that was crazy ... why did I need to see a shrink? My Dad left ,not me, and it was my Mom and Dad that were fighting so why did I need to see the shrink ... kids always get the shaft...I did learn my multiplication table then.

Patty - My teacher was Mrs. P. she was pretty nice ... I liked learning that year, it was fun ... I learned to write in cursive and to multiply ... I did get into some trouble and got sent to the office where they spanked me with a ping - pong paddle for saying "screw" (I bet you wish that was the worst thing I ever said now, huh?) I also got caught by my friend's mom kissing my friend's brother and everybody flipped out. In the fourth grade my teacher was Mr. ZU. ... I still lived with my Mom and Dad but my older sister had gotten sent to a foster home, but my little brother was still there, no getting rid of him, I have tried ... I remember being in the stamp club and doing a project for the science fair - that was so cool ... what was not cool was my Mom and Dad fighting and dragging me to counseling and AA meetings with them. When my Dad finally left and I got to see him only on weekends, I remember crying some of the time ... it was horrible... now he is in (xxx) and I don't see him very often.

Mark - The third grade my teachers were Mrs. S. and Mrs. F. - she was really nice to me ... she gave me extra stuff to do when I finished my regular work so I didn't get so bored and stuff ... I learned my multiplication tables and she (teacher) gave me games and stuff to practice my math facts ... I was really into school ... one really good thing that happened to me was I starting playing baseball ... it was a male bonding thing me and my Dad did ! My fourth grade teacher was Mrs. N. I got drafted onto a major league baseball team which really made me feel cool ... the uncool thing was my Dad moved out ... so my Mom took me (to play ball) and stuff ... it was not the same but she did try ... I kind of had a hard time right then and I didn't want to

go to school or play baseball - I just wanted to stay in my room and be left alone...

THOUGHTS - Bowlby's Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1980) tells us that if something happens to break or disrupt the bond with the primary caretaker, the child is subject to internal pain that can result in varied degrees of depression. The impact of their parents' divorces on these three students' ability to function and the varied degrees of depression is very clear. Mark's voice tell us that he lost interest in learning at a time when he was beginning to excel in mathematics. Ray's voice tells us he became angry and continues to hold onto the feeling that young people are victims of adult decisions. Patty voice reveals she was in a great deal of emotional pain and that pain may have been the motivation behind her sexual acting out.

#### **4.2.4 FIFTH GRADE**

Ray - my fifth grade teacher was Mr. L. ... he was kind of a grown up hippie ... it was pretty cool because every Friday we got to do arts and crafts projects ... another cool thing was I could pretend I was sick and my Mom would let me stay at home.

Patty - in the fifth grade we moved to Oregon to get away from my Dad and his drinking ... we lived in a drug infected apartment complex ... I was on the hockey team and won a trophy ... we finally moved to our own house which was good but I had to change schools. I made new friends and made friends with these two girls that lived next door who were in middle school ... Their Mom was a drugee and we would find needles and stuff laying around the house - which was always a mess - we would clean it all up and "hang"...

Mark - I was in Mr. N. and Mr. B. class in the fifth grade ... I remember going to outdoor school some place up by Astoria, that was really neat ... I got kicked off the baseball team that year for getting bad grades - I hated that...

THOUGHTS - Ray's voice sounds like he may have found a subject or hobby, arts and crafts, that he enjoyed. Bandura's Social Learning theory tells us that children take in information about how competent they are from the events that happen them, as described earlier. Ray's voice has been reflecting his belief that he was a "tard" or slang for retard, because his school work was not done at the same rate as other students and he had to stay in from recess. He speaks of his perception that his fourth grade teacher hated him so to retaliate he wrote his essays on subjects he felt would upset her. From the experience of trying to help him through what his parent and the teacher saw as a problem, Ray developed an self perception of himself as a victim. This laid the ground work for a low self efficacy that flooded over into several areas of his life. Patty's voice reflects her first steps into the high risk world of an older peer group, as well as, the drug abuse lifestyle. Mark's apparent depression that resulted in no investment in school achievement, may have cost him the activity that could have possibly aided in his recovery. Over and over again the voices of students seem to reflect that the consequences for their behavior cost them the opportunities which could have aided them in overcoming the developmental struggles that have gotten them in to an unhealthy situation.

#### **4.2.5 SIXTH GRADE**

Ray - sixth grade was at the middle school ... I don't remember who my teachers were ... I do remember liking this one girl - but I can't remember her name ... school work was OK, not too hard and I

learned some new stuff ... I remember I took an art class and that was really cool.

Patty - middle school was rad ... lots of older kids and some really cute boys ... school classes were OK but I knew most of the stuff he was teaching ... I started to smoke that year (yes, I still smoke and I know you want me to quit but I am not going to, so do not even ask me.).

Mark - my teacher was Mr. G. and Mrs. S. and I liked them both ... she told me I was a good looking young man that was very smart and could do what ever I wanted if I would just decide, I have never forgotten that ... I got good grades that year and played major league baseball ... my Dad came to some of my games which I liked ...

THOUGHTS - These three students are each reflecting the sounds of early adolescent development. Ray appears to be overcoming some of his feelings of uselessness that may have grown out of his struggles with achieving Erickson's fourth developmental crisis - industry verses inferiority. A negative result of this crisis results in feelings of gloom and uselessness. Ray sounds more hopeful and engaged in learning. He also is aware of the opposite sex and developing an interest in a relationship. Patty's voice speaks to her starting to smoke cigarettes which is an adult behavior. Taking on adult behaviors and adult roles is part of identity formation which is Erickson's fifth developmental crisis. Her interest in older students and an awareness of older boys reflects the difference in the physiological development between boys and girls. At this age girls experience a physical growth spurt that results in them becoming taller and their secondary sexual features, such as breasts, developing faster than the male student. Therefore, interest in boys that are older becomes a norm. Mark's depression seems to be lifting. The positive affirmation from his teacher made an impact on Mark. This is part of the bits and pieces that he will put together to form his identity. Social learning theorists would

say that Mark will use this information in forming his self appraisal of his ability to perform, or his self-efficacy.

#### 4.2.6 SEVENTH GRADE

Ray - I had lots of teachers in the seventh grade, but I only remember M. G. 'cause she was nice to me ... I never got into any trouble but I liked to space out and draw pictures instead of the other stuff I was suppose to do, so my grades sucked ... I did have a girlfriend that year but I can't remember her name ... I do remember she taught me to French kiss - that's important to know, right?

Patty - In the seventh grade I was in an alternative class with Mr. M. I always went to school because I really liked him ... we did all sorts of really neat stuff and I got turned on to how much there is out there to learn ... that year I started going out with my friend J.'s older brother ... I got into trouble for smoking weed, drinking beer, and sneaking out of my house at night. My Mom and I were fighting about that stuff all the time plus, she did not like my boyfriend - well, I did not like her boyfriend either and she was doing the same stuff ... I guess if you are the Mom it is OK.

Mark - my home room teacher was Mrs. W. ... I liked meeting new people that year ... I began to realize that I did not have to take crap off any kid ... My two friends and I started getting into fights with these other guys and I got suspended but other then that my attendance was pretty good ... I don't remember if I learned anything new in classes ... I did learn not to get caught by the cops if you decide to skip. My Mom decided I was out of control so she talked to my Dad and I moved in with him. At first I felt bad ... now it is OK ... my Mom is a neat lady but I always thought I had to kind of take care of her ... now my Dad takes care of things and I am just the kid.

THOUGHTS - Erikson's developmental crisis for adolescence is identity versus identity diffusion. During this stage of development, adolescence have a wide array of choices to make as they search for who they are as individuals. Typical of this stage are unpredictable mood swings, dressing neat on day and sloppy the next, short term relationships with members of the opposite sex, and struggles with power

issues with parents and other authority figures. There are adult roles and behaviors to experience in an experimentation phase to see what feels right for them as a person. Their voices speak of the turmoil of young adolescents -- children trying on adult behaviors, searching for boundaries, pushing their parents limits. Also, some defiance is coming to the surface, which can be positive if handled effectively or turn negative if not managed. It is good to hear Patty express some excitement at the world of learning and a desire to be intellectually challenged.

#### **4.2.7 EIGHTH GRADE**

Ray - my second year of middle school there were lots of cool people around and I began freaky like them ... math was the worst thing that year because there was this jock type seventh grader who wanted to hurt my body badly but I always escaped after school ... I did not get into much trouble, I got lunch detention a couple of times for talking and drawing when I was not suppose to, but that's it ... the biggest thing I learned was that jocks suck and should all be slain.

Patty - 8th grade was a really cool year ... I had tons of friends and very special boyfriends ... I did most of what I wanted to do ... I went to school every day and did my school work, so my grades and stuff were OK ... I did get high on weed and I did drink at parties, and I guess you could say I was a little wild ... I got arrested for the first time for curfew ... my Mom flipped out ... she was dating the guy she is married to now, so I guess she did not want him to think I was out of control - which I probably was. My little brother was a real pain - he lives with my Dad now, so I get some peace. My Mom thought I needed help so she put me in a mental hospital ... I was there four days ... they didn't do anything to me, but it taught me to be careful what I say to my Mom and what I get caught doing ... I do not want to go back there...

Mark - my eighth grade homeroom teacher was Mr. G. ... I played football, basketball, and baseball on the A Teams ... I thought life was good ... I did skip school some with my friends, so my attendance was not really good ... the class work was so simple that even if I was not there, I could still do the work ... you know, that is what is wrong with

school ... when it is too easy you just fool around ... I got into trouble for small stuff like skipping, but I talked my way out of most stuff.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS** - The voices of these students have outlined for us the turmoil that accompanies the psychosocial changes that are developmentally appropriate for a young adolescent. The turmoil of these years, however, was amplified for them by the loss of a bonded relationship with a primary caretaker, which follows Bowlby's Attachment Theory. The struggle to maintain an all important positive interpersonal relationship with their classroom teacher is confirmed over and over by these students. It is also apparent, that these students were looking for approval and acceptance from the secondary caretakers in their school environment. Peer groups provide adolescents with a safe, comfortable milieu in which to try on adult behaviors and strive for a sense of independence which Erikson says they must complete. However, association with an older, delinquent peer group is among the strongest correlates to delinquency, therefore, Patty is placing herself in a high risk situation.

#### **4.2.8 PARENT VOICES**

Ray's Mother -- he is quite a challenge ... he has always been a very sensitive boy but almost - I guess you would say - eccentric. He likes to work with his hands, to paint pictures, to draw, most anything creative. I have taken him to places where he can be exposed to art and crafts ... it is his passion ... along with this he is ornery ... we went through a phase when he talked about nothing but Satan, death, fighting and killing ... it scared me to death ... his teacher called and we talked ... we both tried to find out if he was suicidal or what ... he became very hostile about the whole subject ... this began about the time his dad and I split, so I thought maybe it had to do with him being angry because his Dad left ... I took him to a counselor a few times but he was not cooperative ... the counselor said he was doing this to

get attention and not to make it a big a deal ... so, I left him alone about the whole subject ... right now I feel good about him ... he has responded well to being in the ALE ... he feels as he is important to you and the other staff, so he wants to do his work so that he can keep your trust in him. I think because you have encouraged his art work and let him have time to work on his art projects ... he understands he needs to earn the privilege by doing his other work ... I do not have to argue to get him to school ... it is good!

Patty's Mother - she is finally starting to grow up, I hope ... she has always been a very strong willed child ... wanted her own way ... and made my life miserable until she got what she wanted ... after her Daddy and I separated ... we moved to Oregon because my sister is here ... she and her younger brother threw a fit, but I had to get away from him (Dad) and his drinking ... at first she did OK, then she got in with a crowd of kids that were really wild - smoked, drank, did drugs, and I think, some sexual stuff ... the more I told her no the worse it got ... I talked with her counselor at school and she said I should have a mental health person do an assessment on her ... the only way my insurance would pay for that was if I put her in the hospital, so I did ... she was so mad ... I would not do that again because it caused too much damage to our relationship ... she hardly trusts me at all any more ... that is one of the reasons I like having her at the ALE .. she trusts you and I know it is small enough setting that you can keep your eye on her and let me know if there's a problem ... she is not doing drugs or drinking and seems to care about herself now ... she seems happier than she has for a long time.

Mark's Father - the problems Mark had are my fault ... I should not have left him with his mother when I moved out ... you know what they say that kids are better with their mother, but that is not true for Mark ... he is too much like me and if I could not live with her I do not know how I expected him to ... I did not know he was having all the problems with skipping school, fighting, and not getting decent grades ... he had developed a real bad attitude ... we have been working on getting that turned around and his mouth under control ... the ALE has given him a chance to get caught up on some of the basics school classes that he needed to learn ... his math scores are back up and he is doing good there ... he actually read a book and knew what he'd read ... so I think we are going to make it ... sports are very important to him and now that he is in high school sports he has to get passing grades and behave himself to be able to play.

THOUGHTS -- in the voices of these parents are heard a desire that their children develop into healthy, productive young adult citizens. They are heard taking

responsibility for their decisions which may have been the basis for some of the increased turmoil that their students faced in their early adolescence. These parents are supportive of their students' education and hold high expectations for them. The school was helpful in assisting with resolving some of the student's troubled areas.

#### **4.3 PARENT PLUS CHILD STUDENTS**

These students represent that percentage of the ALE's population which live with both their biological parents and have attended school in the same district for at least eighty percent of their education. Generalizations for this group include :

1. absenteeism is above average;
2. academic skills vary, however, application of those skills is minimal;
3. socializing appears to be their top priority.

The following three students and their stories represent this group.

- Greg - is an eighteen year old male who is graduating with a regular diploma this year. He has been in the ALE for three and one-half years i.e., since the middle of his ninth grade year. He is an Hispanic male with a very strong personality, much, much charm and charisma. Greg is popular with the other students. The girls think he is sent from above. He was placed in the ALE to minimize his social contacts during school hours and attempt to redirect him into academic arenas. The past three years we have seen an apparent turn around in his attitude. When he came to us he was a leadership figure in the local gang -- some say he was the leader. However he has never

admitted that to me. These kids were fighting, stealing, racketeering, you name it !! After many conversations, projects, and much encouragement, he is clean and sober. He is graduating from high school and enrolled in the Community College for fall term. When I asked him to write me one paragraph that reflected what had been instrumental in his change he said;

You saw that I was something other than a just gang banger. School work was never hard I just didn't pay attention. You challenged my manhood when you said I acted like a punk! That made me mad at first but, it got my attention and I knew you really cared about my progress. You always said I could do it (graduate and go to college) if I wanted it bad enough -- and I am going.

- Terry - a fourteen year old boy who has lived in the same house, with his natural parents since birth. Terry is not learning disabled but it takes him time to process directions and he is easily frustrated. When his frustration reaches his limit he becomes verbally abusive and at times, when pushed, has become combative. He was placed at the ALE in an effort to provide him with the one - on - one attention he needs to understand his academic work. Once he is motivated and clear about an assignment or task, he does a great job. Terry has exceptional leadership skills that he has used to gain himself a reputation as a fighter and tough guy. Redirecting those qualities and assisting him in learning some patience is our major task.
- Mary - is a fifteen year old sophomore this year. Her nuclear family consists of her father, her mother, and Mary. However, she has a large extended family that lives in the area. Therefore, she has several cousins who have attended the same schools in the district. The family name carries a

negative reputation that has been two or three generations in the making. Mary has had much difficulty living down her extended families' reputation. She is very bright, articulate, and enjoys learning. However, she has a mean temper that she does not always successfully control. She was placed in the ALE to increase her anger management skills and give her an opportunity to practice those skills. Secondly, she was placed out of the mainstream at the traditional high school, to assure her safety from students who carry grudges over issues with her cousins, but target Mary.

Let's listen to their voices!.

#### **4.3.1 KINDERGARTEN**

Greg - I did not go to pre-school or kindergarten ... we had just moved here from Mexico and my Mom or my Dad had gotten jobs that paid enough to send me ... my Mom did spend time with me reading book and teaching me to count and to spell my name ... she has always been real good to help me ... she is a great woman.

Terry - I learned cool stuff in kindergarten ... just like in the book you read us ... tie my shoes, ask for things don't just take what you want, wash my hands, all that stuff ... also, I learned to read simple books and how to write my name...

Mary - the only thing I remember about kindergarten is being scared to go ... oh yeah, my grandma bought me this cute little plaid dress.

#### **4.3.2 FIRST AND SECOND GRADES**

Greg - I do not remember much ... my teacher was Miss. W. ...I do remember getting juice and cookies ... we had a rumble at the Big Toy and, of course, my team won ... in the second grade my teacher was Mrs. P... I liked her -- she was older and seemed sort of like a kind

Grandma ... she never said anything loud or mean to us but you just knew not to misbehave ... I had my first of a long line of problems with math ...

Terry - my first grade teacher was Mrs. J. and second grade was Mrs. P. ... I remember that I was a little brat and my Dad had to come to school about me ... man did I straighten up for a while ... but then my friends and I started getting other kids to do things for us so they got into trouble not us ... I don't remember school work being hard and I passed so guess I did OK...

Mary - I learned to do my alphabet, to count to ten, and how to sing these little songs - I loved that part ... I remember my teacher, can't remember her name, used to draw a name from a jar every day to decide who would feed the fish ... that was a big deal ... In second grade I brought my Cabbage Patch doll to show and tell ... some of the boys made fun of it and said I looked just the doll ... I was overweight and a little nerdy ... you know what - one of those same boys is sitting in this room right now and he still makes fun of me -- maybe it is his problem not me ...

THOUGHTS - these three students had the same second grade teacher. In their voices you can hear some of the attitudes forming that continue to be problematic for these students. Mary speaks of being afraid, of being a nerd or unacceptable to peers, and of her underlying interest in learning. These issues may relate to Mary having some development that is at the negative end of Erikson's trust versus mistrust continuum. Greg's voice echoes the need to be a big man on the playground and having a "team" that can win. Erikson's second developmental crisis, autonomy versus shame and doubt, speaks to children who struggle with this crisis developing shame and doubt which are eliminated with accomplishments.

### 4.3.3 THIRD AND FOURTH GRADES

Greg - my third grade was bad ... Mrs. O. was my teacher and, man, did I hate her ... I got into trouble and blamed for things everyday, she

was really down on me ... once she was helping this other kid for a really long time and I wanted help, so I wrote him a note that said he was dumb and stupid and he ran out of the room ... she made everybody write dumb and stupid and I got caught ... during fourth grade I had a very cool teacher named Mr. E. ... I learned about several subjects that year ... we went places on fields trips ... he told me I was going to be a great athlete when I got older ...

Terry - my third grade teacher was Mrs. W. ... she was a really nice lady who read to us and all that good stuff ... my fourth grade teacher was Mrs. M. ... I thought she was better than Mr. E. who some of my friends had and said he was the coolest ... I never got into any big trouble ... got recess taken away a couple of times, but nothing big ... I liked school ... thought it was fun ... I learned to spell harder words, read books for fun, and how to write in cursive ... we worked on learning our multiplication facts but I don't think I did because I still don't know them very well.

Mary - in third grade my teacher was Mrs. O. ... I do not remember much about doing school work but my grades were good and I went every day ... I do remember the Christmas Program and the school carnivals - they were fun... My fourth grade Mr. W. was my teacher ... gosh I hated that man and still do to this day ... He would piss me off and I would go off on him and run out of the room and go home ... I think he was the worst teacher I have ever had ... He would not treat me as an individual but kept saying you are one of the (xxx)'s, nothing but trouble... I will not have trouble in my class so keep that in mind ... it would have been OK, except that I had not done anything to cause any trouble ... I hated him!!!

THOUGHTS - These voices are speak loudly to what Erikson's fourth developmental crisis -- industry versus inferiority -- considers to be the positive end of the continuum. Children who are meeting this crisis on the positive end have a sense of excitement about expanding their knowledge and mastering new skills. That excitement and eagerness to learn is voiced by all three of these students. The students are also starting to become more aware of the perception others have about them. Bandura refers to this as personal self efficacy. Their voices speak loudly regarding formation of their perceptions of their self - worth, or self efficacy,

outside the family system. Greg' voice speaks of his teacher being "down on him" and Mary is struggling with confusion over who she is versus her teacher's perception of her. Terry is into school and enjoying his experiences, however, not learning his multiplication tables that year seems to be the start of his getting behind academically.

#### **4.3.4 FIFTH GRADE**

Greg - fifth grade my teacher was Mrs. B. ... she was pretty cool ... we learned about how different rocks are formed and the layers of the earth ... math was a real bummer that year ... I just didn't get what she was trying to teach us, but I did ask for some help and I finally understood ... one of the really bad things that year was that Dad was the custodian so he knew everything that I was doing ... some kids decided I was a narc because of my Dad knowing everything ... my little group of friends and I got on our bikes after school one day and took care of them and that was that ...

Terry - my fifth grade teacher was Mr. Mc. ... we worked on wood and made a log cabin and a stool ... I remember really liking to read that year ... we did some neat stuff with obsidian rocks, like make arrow heads ... we took a long bike trip - it seemed long then, but not now ... we had some rumbles out by the big toy and I beat-up this one kid pretty bad ... I was sorry but sometimes you got to take care of business...

Mary - I did survive the fourth grade and was in Mr. Mc. room in the fifth ... I remember making this really stupid foot stool - my Mom still has it - what a joke ... I learned many things that year ... I read books ... practiced writing my letters over and over again, almost like I thought writing cursive was an art project ... my grades were OK, probably because I stayed in class and did my work instead of running home like a baby... my body started to change and I had what I thought were huge boobs ... the other girls had little ones, but not me ... some of the guys noticed, too ... the boys wanted to touch them to see what they felt like, so I did a really mean thing ... I told this guy named (xx) he could touch them and kiss them if he and his friends would beat up this guy who had been hassling me ... maybe I was a prostitute in the making, following in my Aunt's footsteps.

THOUGHTS - I am noticing their voices do not speak of the level of conflict with their parents that we have heard from the previous voices. They are however, into the early stage of Erikson's identity versus identity diffusion. This is the developmental stage in which trying on adult roles to assess whether or not they feel like the individual is overwhelming for students. Greg and Terry are taking on a role of problem solver through physical violence. It is a leadership role for both of them which may also address some negative development in the other crises where the result is hostility and low self-esteem. Mary is showing some strong awareness of her developing body and her sexuality. The adult role of prostitute is an outcome she fears for herself. She may be struggling with a negative development in the earlier crisis areas of guilt and inferiority. She searches for a sense of who she is in relationship to the rest of the world.

#### **4.3.5 SIXTH GRADE**

Greg - sixth grade was at the middle school ... my group of friends all split apart and I had to make new friends ... the only way I knew to get acceptance is by fighting, so I started to gather up a new group of friends who agreed with me that we did not take "s---" off of anyone, especially whites... by the end of my sixth grade we were tight and had control of the middle school - we thought ... My homeroom teacher was Mr. B. ... he kept close track to see that we kept on our assignments ... most of my classes were good ... I do not remember having any trouble in class and I went to school everyday.

Terry - in sixth grade I had to change schools and go to the middle school ... I hated that because there were more kids there and I did not know hardly any of them ... so, I got really mean to everybody and started fighting almost everyday ... never with girls or women teachers - my Dad would have kicked my butt ... I got suspended a couple of times and by then I had a couple friends who were fighters too, so we decided getting into fights with these jerks on the school grounds was

not worth the hassle, that we could wait until after school ... My school work was really hard ... the teachers were always too busy to explain to me what I was suppose to do ... I felt like a retard ... so I would just not ask anymore or I like make the teacher mad so she would sent me into the hall ... so nobody really noticed how retarded I was...

Mary - my sixth grade year I became a little gangster girl ... two of my cousins were at the middle school too, so we would hang around together and look all hard and bad ... in the morning I would use like a half a can of hair spray to make my hair stand up all big and stuff ... I had a major crush on D. , I mean major - lucky I did not get pregnant or something ... My school grades went down because I started skipping with my cousins and D. ... I got into trouble for skipping and they told me I was turning into a hoodlum ... it was OK because I had at least done something to get into trouble for... I wasn't even mad about getting caught.

THOUGHTS - the perception of themselves and their low self esteem is heard loud and clear. Terry's feelings of low self efficacy forming, along with, his embarrassment regarding his slowness to understand reflect Bandura's theory that students form their self efficacy through social comparisons to their peers.. Their voices reflect that moving into new surroundings at the middle school was a difficult transition for them. The excitement over the change to a middle school is not heard in these voices that was heard in the voices of the previous students.

#### **4.3.6 SEVENTH GRADE**

Greg - seventh grade I felt good about myself ... I had friends to cover my back ... I played on the football team and was good at that ... My classes were easy and I got good grades ... That was the year I got to know R. who is still my best friend ... the assistant principal was always calling me into the office and asking be about stuff that had happened and if my "gang" was responsible ... like what gang, I had friends but we were no gang ... it made me mad...

Terry - seventh grade was fun for me ... I was in a small class with only one teacher most of the day and he would help me get the

assignments figured out and then I'd do them ... I got into trouble for fighting these smart-ass little sixth graders, but they had to be taught a lesson ... My attendance was real good ... I got my first MIP (minor in possession of alcohol or drugs) that year ... my Mom went into orbit but my Dad said if I was going to drink to do it at home and stay at home ...

Mary - I was starting to grow out of my gangster girl thing in the seventh grade, probably 'cause my cousin went into the high school and my other cousin and I were not all that into being bad ... I did get into some fights with kids that I did not really know but who wanted to fight me ... I got beat up this one time and did not go to school for awhile ... my parents got a letter from the school that said they were going to get fined \$100.00 if I did not come back ... my Mom was righteously pissed and went and told the school that I would be back on Monday and that they better make sure nothing happened to me - she was steamed ... my attendance was pretty bad and so were my grades.

THOUGHTS - Their voices speak to their struggles to complete Erikson's crisis of identity versus identity diffusion. Mary continued to show signs of negative developmental issues through acting out her hostility by fighting other people. She, also, has begun to disengage from school and take on the adult role that other adult female families members have modeled for her. Greg stayed with the big man on campus role but denied the negative behaviors that are common knowledge. Terry's academic problems have been addressed with placement in a small self contained classroom. However, being allowed to take on the adult role of drinking alcohol as long as it is at home, sends a conflicting message to an adolescent who is searching for his identity.

#### **4.3.7 EIGHTH GRADE**

Greg - the first part of my eighth grade was really good ... most of my teachers did a good job of teaching and I remember doing some new

math and writing long reports on the computers, that was good ... I played football and was good at that - I rushed 300+ yards in one game ... after football I started to get into some trouble with my friends ... we started to do some crimes - small stuff - just for excitement ... I remember one weekend I was gone with my parents, out of town, and the guys pulled some stuff they should not have done ... Monday the cops are at our door, my Mom's crying and stuff, and they are telling my parents that I was part of all the stuff that had gone down ... my Dad tried to set them straight, but they insisted that I might not have been in town but I knew all about it ... from that time on I told the guys not to do any stuff unless they checked with me first - if I am going to get blamed, at least I want to know ahead ... when I think back to that spring and summer, man do I have a lot to be thankful for ... all the crazy stuff we did ... no one got killed or shot or anything ... I did have a hoodlum attitude back then ... I was a real loser back then ...

Terry - I was in the same class for eighth as for seventh ... I began to skip school a lot because my Mom started this job and she went to work about 9:30 ... sooo my buds and I (three of us) would go over to my house, drink a few beers and play nintendo and hang ... we did this maybe twice a week ... we got caught by the school liaison officer one day and all hell broke loose - we all got MIP's, that made my second MIP ... it is weird, we were not hurting anyone ... school was boring most of the time ... I ended up going for drug assessment thing ... what a trip.

Mary - in the eighth grade I felt all big and bad because the sixth and seventh graders were afraid of me ... I used to give them a really mean look and they would run ... then Mrs. J. told me if I did not stop doing that she would have the police charge me with intimidation and I'd go to jail ... I was so naive back then that I believed her and stopped being so brazen about my little game ... this was my year to play several different games ... I'd skipped school and go hang out at the high school with my cousins ... I smoked weed for the first time on one of those adventures ... I was still in passionate love with D. but he had this other girl friend at the high school, so I did mean stuff to her ... I was really weird ... that was also the year I met you ... you came to our class three afternoons a week to help us learn to resolve conflicts ... did you know that was about the only times I came ... you may not think so but I did learn from you ... I still remember you said not to ever lose your cool because then the other person has all the power and you look like a fool ... I still am a fool sometimes but I am getting better ... when I look back to what could have happened to me that didn't, man do I know I am one lucky little beast ... both of my cousins have quit school and have babies ... me with a baby?, I still

want to be the baby... I am going to stay in school, not get pregnant, get a degree in biology and maybe be a women's doctor - you watch I'll do it !!!

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS** - it is good to hear their voices resonate some sense of hope for their futures. I do remember meeting Mary at the middle school when she was in the eighth grade. She was in a anger management class that I facilitated. She was very much at-risk of dropping out of school and entering into the a drug abuse lifestyle coupled with sexual promiscuity. She did have a softer side which liked to be hugged and she is right, she was still a baby in many, many ways. It would appear that Mary has a secure attachment style, but that she has negative development through out Erikson's eight crises. It takes Mary a long time to trust others, she has days when she is very hostile, she has a low self esteem and feels guilty when the work she completes is not perfect. Greg and his little "groupies" were known to me by reputation when they were at the middle school. He was forming a stronger role for himself as the leader among the male Hispanic population. I believe that what may have been a negative developmental crisis in the earlier years, has become an adult role that he is assuming. It is interesting to me that this group of students had the most stable lifestyle conditions, but struggled with and equaled, or in some cases increased their levels of high risk behavior.

#### **4.3.8 VOICES OF THE PARENTS**

Greg's Father - my boy has had many troubles in school ... he is a good man and not the criminal he tried to be for a while ...we are very proud that he is graduating and want to say thank you for all your work with him ... you believed in him and he knew that and worked hard to please you ... all I want for him is to have a better life than I

have had (tears) ... I had to start working in Mexico when I was very young and did not get an education ... we brought our family here so they could have a better life and we both have worked hard, loved our kids and tried to teach them to do right ... now it is happening ... my boy is a man and is going to college .. my dreams are coming true...

Terry's Mother - he has always been a black and white kid ... if I told him to be home at six for dinner he came at six - not 5:55 but six ... the people at the school had him tested because he did not seem to understand or be able to follow direction ... they said he cannot organize too many steps at one time ... so if he is given one direction at a time he does good ... he is smart and knows how to do the work, just needs it in small steps ... you folks out at the ALE have been a real answer to prayer for him ... he really likes going to school and I can tell he is growing up ... we do have a little family issue that has effected him ... he sees his Daddy and his daddy's friends have a few beers and get to talking mean and rough and Terry thinks that's how it is ... J. and I have had several talks about this thing and I think his Daddy is starting to understand that it is not good for Terry to follow in his footsteps... Terry has two MIP's and he is not yet sixteen, this is not acceptable for my son.

Mary's Mother - she is my special angel ... I got pregnant with her when I was fifteen and her Daddy was seventeen ... I was very depressed and was going to commit suicide, but I felt God tell me I was going to give birth to a very special angel, and I did. She has always been very fragile and gentle. She has had some hard times because this is a small town and everybody knows or thinks they know other peoples business. I came from a family of five girls and two boys ... when I went to school here we were known as white trash ... most of the time I felt like white trash because my folks did not have the money to buy us nice clothes, you know ... her Daddy grew up in (KKK) and his family were truckers ... after he graduated we got married and have lived here all our married life... sometimes he is gone over night but not very often ... it has been a good marriage ... some fights but nothing like abuse or anything. Mary has been on me to go back and get my GED and take some college classes so I can get a part-time job or something to occupy my time. She thinks I spend too much time trying to keep my dysfunctional sisters and their kids out of trouble - she is probably right ... now that Mary seems to be going on the right track, maybe I will go back to school myself ... she really scared us for awhile there when she started getting all wild and weird ... finally we just sat down - the three of us - and had a good old fashion family talk and Mary got the picture that we are the parents and she will do it our way, which is behave herself ... my nieces getting pregnant and quitting school shook her up also ... I'm

glad she is with you at the ALE ... I know she is safe, that she is learning, and that she likes being there.

THOUGHTS - the voices of these parents do not reveal that there has been a partnership between them and the school district, but they are certainly supportive of their child's education. It is of interest to note that of the six biological parents represented here, only one parent completed high school and none of them have gone to college. The research literature speaks of a lack of "cultural capital" by many parents of at-risk students. In other words, the parents do not have the experience of being successful in a secondary school, do not have the ability to understand homework assignments, and feel like second class citizens when they consider questioning school personnel about their child. We can hear echoes of this dynamic with this set of parents.

The students and their parents were very helpful in sharing with me their stories regarding the educational process of their students. Their openness and candor regarding problems and issues these students have had and in some cases are still battling, is remarkable. I have spend an enormous about of time building a safe relationship with both these students and their parents. Their willingness to share is the fruit of that labor.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION: WHAT DO THE VOICES TELL US

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the developmental deficits that place students at risk of leaving school before completion of graduation requirements. The theoretical framework for this study was the triangulation of Bowlby's Attachment Theory, Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development, and Bandura's Social Learning Theory. These three theories provided a foundation of developmental deficits which have become indicators of factors that place a child at-risk of dropping out of school and entering into an antisocial lifestyle.

Several issues caught my attention as I read and re-read the students' school histories. I was amazed that these kids could remember the names of their classroom teachers as far back as kindergarten -- the same kids who could not remember to bring back a signed parent permission slip or a current event article from the daily newspaper, could remember their first grade teachers' name. What an unbelievable impact those teachers had on these kids!! A second issue that stood out to me was how young some of the students were when they began to disengage from school -- third and fourth grade. Third, there is a question that now nags at me. Why are some of these ninth and tenth grade students who are severely at-risk of dropping out of school, the same students who have lived in the same house and community with both biological parents, attended schools in the same district, been considered at-risk since elementary school and placed in

“special ALE” for several years, still at-risk? Why have their behaviors not changed?

From the students voices we clearly heard the importance of the student -- teacher relationship. Attachment theorists believe that the nature of the individual's attachment relationships in infancy continues to have an influence on the person's capacity to form satisfying interpersonal relationships in adolescence and adulthood. The initial attachment relationship formed in infancy provides the basis for what theorists call internal working models. This model generalizes across interpersonal relationships to determine whether an individuals feel trusting (secure style) or apprehensive (anxious style) in relationships with others and whether individuals see themselves as worthy of another's affection. Those students who had developed a secure attachment style were able to maintain social relationships with teacher and peers. However, the student who was anxiously attached did not have that ability and struggled to maintain interpersonal relationships. This placed the student at-risk of not being able to function in the social setting of school. We heard in these student's voices the many different types of struggles they had in their interpersonal relationships with teachers, peers, and parents.

These struggles reinforced the key role that the classroom teacher plays in determining changes in a student's attachment style. The classroom teacher becomes the secondary caretaker or secondary role model for children. If the internal working model that the child formed in the home during infancy is going to be modified or changed, it is the classroom teacher in those very early preschool and primary grades who has the opportunity to show the child a different model for

engaging in relationships. In the school histories the students spoke fondly of teachers in their early grades who smiled at them, teachers who smelled good, who gave treats to eat, and in general, gave out the message that the child was special. Every classroom teacher needs a working knowledge of how children with anxious attachment styles present themselves and what that individual classroom teacher can do to assist the child in developing a secure style of attachment.

The struggle to maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers became central to the students existence as they entered middle school. Their voices revealed that struggles with interpersonal peer relationships started in primary grades. They spoke of fighting, pulling pranks and an untold number of anti-social yet childish behaviors that caused the adults in their lives much concern. However, as these students approached middle school they spoke of taking part in activities with peers that reached beyond childhood pranks and became increasingly antisocial, high risk, and self destructive. Their voices spoke of smoking, drinking and drug usage as early as the fifth or sixth grade. These activities with their friends took over a majority of their conscience thinking and academics took a back seat. According to Crain (1985), the students' emotional need to feel accepted by and acceptable to their peers is an age appropriate developmental step during middle school. However, for students with an anxious attachment style, the struggle to maintain relationships that satisfy this developmental need is amplified. Their voices told of some of the roles they took on in an attempt to gain acceptance or feel accepted by others.

Parents are the most significant influence on a child's development. The developing child is exposed to the parental behaviors, values, and attitudes to the near exclusion of any other potential influences. From the voices of these students parents we hear emotional expressions of frustration regarding their children's behaviors and attitudes which they identify as harmful. We heard also, a strong determination to protect their children from harm, but a feeling of fear and helplessness concerning how to accomplish this task. These parents had high expectations, hopes, and dreams for their children and a strong desire for them to be successful students and successful adults.

Eric Erikson refers to these developmental steps as psychosocial crises that build one upon the other. Erikson describes each of the eight crises as a continuum of positive and negative poles. Resolving each crisis does not entail coming through the crisis entirely negative or positive. Rather, it is important to come through the first stage of development feeling more trusting than distrusting. Each crisis builds on earlier experiences and the child's unsuccessful experience with a crisis will cause the child to have a difficult time with crises encountered in the future. Successful crisis resolution at some point is imperative (See Figure 5).

The reality of this dynamic is heard in the students' voices. The insecurity of their voices reflected their perceptions of classroom teachers' opinions of them not only as students, but as people. The developmental crisis of autonomy versus shame (early childhood), if not completed toward the positive end of the continuum, brings low self-esteem, hostility, and compulsivity. Their voices revealed repeated examples of these factors in their relationships with classroom teachers, parents,

Figure 5: Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963)

DEVELOPMENTAL AGE	BASIC CRISIS	
	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
INFANCY	TRUST	MISTRUST
EARLY CHILDHOOD	AUTONOMY	SHAME AND DOUBT
PRESCHOOL AGE	INITIATIVE	GUILT
SCHOOL AGE	INDUSTRY	INFERIORITY
ADOLESCENCE	IDENTITY	IDENTITY DIFFUSION
YOUNG ADULT	INTIMACY	ISOLATION
ADULT	GENERATIVITY	SELF ABSORPTION
MATURE AGE	INTEGRITY	DISGUST, DESPAIR

and peers. The next crisis, initiative versus guilt (preschool age), if not met positively brings guilt over being alive and possibility, the inability to function. Next comes industry versus inferiority (school age), the negative side being laziness and feelings of inferiority. When the crises are met toward the negative end of the developmental continuum, a child develops who does not trust, is hostile with a low self-esteem, feels guilty about everything, and has no desire to improve. From the voice of Greg we hear an example of this developmental reality. Greg spoke of his teacher being “down on him”, needing his “team” (gang) to watch his back, fighting other kids as a way to solve problems and maintain leadership status, and his growing anger at any suggestion that he is not perfect.

Erikson's developmental crisis during adolescence is identity versus identity diffusion. This is the time in development when students begin to reflect on their place in society, on the ways that others view them, and on their options for the future. The key to resolving the crisis of identity versus identity diffusion lies in the adolescents' interactions with others. The student will take bits and pieces of

information given to them by others in their world that are important to them and weave these into a sense of who they are in society and how they perceive that society views them. This completes the circle in which the individual student's attachment style impedes their ability to maintain interpersonal relationships.

One of the high risk behaviors that reflected this lack of ability to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships was in the students' memories of their early sexual behaviors. Their voices spoke of engaging in sexual activities at a very young age. They were learning some painful adult lessons about sexual behaviors while they were still children. Their voices and behaviors spoke of their low self-esteem and their striving for acceptance without a positive regard for themselves.

The school setting became a nightmare for some of these students. At school the negative feelings they carried around with them were magnified. As previously noted, the students' voices talked of beginning to disengage from school as early as the third or fourth grade. When I asked some of the students why they felt this way at such an early age they told me this was the time when they knew they were different from many of the other kids. This was the time in their education when students were separated into reading and math level groups. Students became aware of boyfriends and girlfriends, who was popular and who was not so popular; who were the jocks and who could not throw a ball no matter how hard they tried. This was also the time the children start doing "sleep overs" and, for some, they had an opportunity to view how families, other than their own, related together. Children began to form close bonds of friendships with peers and

peer families that closely resembled their own. This seemed to be the age at which the at-risk peer groups started to form.

The older children were more pronounced in their need for acceptance by a peer group. During middle school many of these peer groups became “gangs” with the goal of protection for each other. School attendance and academic success became secondary to the security they felt from knowing they had the group’s protection and acceptance. Several of the students’ voices revealed that skipping school to be with their friends was a common occurrence. This spoke to a disengagement of not just one student, but an at-risk peer group exploring life outside the norm for their age.

The voices of the students and their parents spoke to the positive effect that accompanied the change in the students’ placement into the ALE. The students spoke of re-engagement in the learning process. They spoke of feeling they had a future and some reason to stay in school and earn their high school diploma. Some of them spoke of feeling relaxed or calm enough to think about what was being taught and how that applied to their lives and the goals they had for their futures. The foundation for this change began with a shift of focus from their behaviors that were not acceptable to what it is that caused those behaviors to occur and how the student could control or change those causal factors. The ALE provided students with a place to receive that acceptance and to begin to view themselves with higher positive regard. The affective training that the at-risk student must have if they are going to stay in school is primary to their education. If their anxious style of attachment is not turned into a secure style, time, money, and energy in trying to

teach even the simplest of academic skills is wasted. Our society is a social culture - if an individual cannot maintain interpersonal relationships, they do not have the most basic life skills necessary to participate successfully in the school setting or the community at large. Educators will not achieve their mission - to educate children to be productive, functional citizens in an adult society - if students are not provided with the interpersonal skills which will lead them to have successful relationships with others.

The voices of the students were silent in a very important arena. None of the students talked about Sunday School teachers who made an impact on their lives. Nothing is heard of recreational leaders, (i.e. Little League, Boy or Girls Scouts, etc.), who were involved with these children. This is a population of children who were not being given the same socialization opportunities that were available to other children. When I questioned both students and their parents about this phenomenon their response was revealing. They not only did not know how to get their kids involved in these activities, but they did not have the money to pay for their children to take part. The children did not want to participate in these community based activities because they felt like an outsider with those peer groups.

The low socioeconomic status of some of these families is a reality. The money it costs to provide shelter, food, and clothing often takes all of the financial resources that are available to the family. Therefore, the money to buy clothes to wear to church or even clothes for the children to wear to Sunday School is not available. Community based recreational or club activities are also very expensive.

The registration fees, uniforms, club dues, special sport shoes, and other equipment is an overwhelming expense. Even though families lack the available finances and lack knowledge of how to become involved, their children have the same socialization needs as other children.

The developmental theories give us a framework for understanding the attitudes and behaviors of at-risk students. The voices of the students cause the theories to come alive in very practical terms. The voices of the parents tell us that the most dysfunctional or ill equipped parents want their children to be successful and develop into well educated, well socialized, productive adults.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **SUMMARY: WE CAN CHANGE THE VOICES!**

Many of the voices of the students and the voices of the students' parents spoke of the relationship with me being the key factor to their student making the decision to stay in school. I am not a miracle person with at-risk kids. Reversing the school alienation process for students is not possible for an individual teacher or program. There must be a dedication and determination from the entire educational team -- the district superintendent to the instructional aide -- to work together toward change for the at-risk population. Here are some ideas to consider.

#### **6.1 STAFF CONSIDERATIONS.**

For a school district to have an effective program, there must be a determination to stick with these hard to like students and not to give up on their potential success. These students' need someone who will listen to what they have to say. When I say "listen," I mean do not judge, do not give advice, do not criticize, just listen and affirm the student's worth as a person. This can be very difficult, or even painful for the teacher, instructional aide, or counselor who is listening. Some of the stories these children tell make you want to cry, as you heard from their voices in the previous chapter. Listening to what they have to say is the first step to building the child's sense of worth as a person. This is one of several reasons that the staff to child ratio in a classroom or program serving at-risk

students should be small, such as one staff for every five or six students. These students are so emotionally deprived that they will "burn out" a staff if one staff member is trying to maintain a relationship with too many students at one time. The ideal situation is one in which the same students are assigned to a staff member for more than one year. This gives the teacher/student relationship a chance to develop at the same time that the student achieves some level of social and cognitive maturity.

Successful teachers of at-risk students have high expectations for the students academic progress and behavior. The behavioral and academic expectations, which should never be lower than the expectation in a traditional classroom, must be clear, reasonable, and developed with the student's input. Student success is the goal! These expectations must be outlined in such a way that success is ensured. We do not expect babies to walk until they have learned to crawl. We cannot expect at-risk students, who may have never successfully completed an assignment, to start out by completing a complex, three week project. They must first feel the sense of fulfillment from successes in the hourly, daily, and weekly work they have completed. I have said to more than one student, "You cannot get by in this class by passively sitting and playing dumb. You can learn and you will learn!"

For a teacher to develop a relationship with an at-risk student that will reverse the student's alienation, the teacher must be willing to be a "real person" to the student. Allow a sense of humor to show and realize that it does not make you less of a professional to enjoy and have fun with the students. There have been times

when I felt it appropriate to share some of my struggles or situations in which I felt like a failure. Many times these become very teachable moments when life changing lessons can be taught.

Most of these students are familiar with power struggles and negative punishment. They will test a teacher's standard or push the limits to see how strong the teacher is and if they are willing to stand behind what they say. When making a teaching assignment or deciding to accept a teaching assignment to work with this population of student, the teacher must have some special personal qualities, such as:

1. strong sense of their self-worth and competence;
2. sense of humor that allows them to laugh when crying is appropriate;
3. clear boundaries regarding what is personal and not for public discussion;  
(For example, I may be willing to discuss their sex life with them but not my sex life with them!)
4. good working knowledge of motivational techniques;
5. working knowledge of positive discipline;
6. secure sense of self-efficacy regarding their teaching ability;
7. flexible, patient, firm, consistency in classroom management; and
8. knowledge of child development and and appreciation for and respect of different lifestyles.

The truth is the teacher and all ALE staff are compelled to consider the total child. It takes time, but if a teacher is truly concerned that the student's cat died or that he has a headache, the student will be more likely to believe that the teacher

cares. If they believe you care, they will care -- a relationship will be forged and re-engagement with learning will happen (Noddings, 1992).

## **6.2 POWER STRUGGLE**

It is most important that the teacher and all staff members fulfill the role of the "adult" in the classroom. Adolescents especially, but at-risk kids in general, are looking for strong adults who mean what they say and say what they mean. Therefore, it is important to pick your battles. When an at-risk student is doing something that is driving you to the edge of your sanity, take a deep breath and decide if the issue is worth the battle. If you decide the issue must be confronted see the issue through to a "win - win" situation. Be very clear about the issue you are confronting, the change you are expecting, and the goal you are striving to reach. Follow these times of power struggles with a time of reassurance that the personal relationship between you and the student is still intact and that the confrontation was over a behavior, not the student or the student's value as a person.

Many of the struggles with at-risk students' center around their inability to take responsibility for the behavior, their homework, or their personal belongings. Allowing the student to develop a set of work expectations, standards for personal behavior, and clear cut, detailed guidelines about consequences for failing to comply with the expectations they outlined is a great step to solving two problems. The student can gain some sense of ownership or control over the situation (which many have never felt and is the basis of anger) at the onset and you, as the

teacher, are off the hook to establish consequences. It does take some time, and often it is hard to get the student to think through the details, but it is well worth the time and energy. Always find a way to be the supporter of the student generated plan rather than an enforcer or police officer of a non-student generated or student accepted plan.

### **6.3 PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

I cannot write enough about the importance of parent involvement and parent education in succeeding with at-risk students. The majority of parents of at-risk students are, themselves, school dropouts. Therefore, they have not experienced the sense of accomplishment that comes from fulfilling the requirements for high school graduation. Their relationship with the school they attended ended negatively and they do not view middle or high school as a positive, happy, growing time. Often as a parent, they have been called to the school to discuss their child's behavior in the classroom and on the play grounds, and this never brings joy to a parent's soul. Parent-teacher conferences may not have been joyous times but times when they heard negatives regarding their child. However, I have found repeatedly that parents want their children to succeed and not to make the same mistakes they made. I cannot tell you the number of parents who have said to me, "All I want is for him/her to have it better than I have. Tell me what I need to do." Many times we fail to take the time to tell them what they need to do or what it is their student needs to accomplish or needs from them, to be successful. These parents, often times, are not the type of people with whom we would choose to

spent a great deal of time. However, the same multi - generation dynamic that is operational in abuse, addiction or other human failings is operational in school dropouts. If we are going to stop the cycle we have to become involved with the parents and the students, sometimes beyond our comfort level.

#### **6.4 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Young people leaving school before completing requirements for graduation is a problem in education. However, it is not just a problem of education; it is a social problem. Our schools are only a microcosm of our communities. School dropouts are a by-product of many of the social problems of our day. These students who are at-risk of leaving school early are members of families who are at-risk. To be successful in reducing the dropout rates, communities must become involved in supporting and reducing the risk factors which are operational in a family system rather than addressing only the child's behaviors.

Many of the at-risk student population are alienated from the community at large because social stratification within the community created the alienation. Efforts to teach a student that they are members of a community that have recreational, religious and social services, and employment opportunities, are best accomplished if they see those opportunities happening in their families.

## **6.5 VIEWING AT RISK YOUTH FROM A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE**

At-risk youth do not develop in a vacuum. They develop within the multiple contexts of their families, communities, and cultures. Adolescents' high-risk behaviors are influenced by peers, relatives, and other adults with whom they come in contact as well as schools, religious organizations, and community groups to which they belong. At-risk youth are a product of environmental and social influences. To assist our understanding it is necessary to hold in mind Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (Crain, 1985) for understanding social influences (See Appendix F). The youth is at the center of the system.

### **6.5.1 THE MICROSYSTEM**

The most immediate influences are within the "microsystem" (See Appendix F) and include those with whom the youth has immediate contact. For most youth, the immediate family is the primary microsystem, followed by peers groups and school. Other components of the microsystem are health services, religious groups, community recreation groups, and various social groups to which the youth may belong. Microsystems change as the youth moves in and out of different social settings. For example, the youth may change schools, stop attending church, or drop out of some activities. In general, the peer microsystem increases in influence during adolescence, providing powerful social rewards in terms of acceptance, popularity, friendship, and status. The peer group may exert negative influences such as encouraging irresponsible sex, substance abuse, criminal activity, and

school abandonment. This sets the stage for a whole array of reinforcing and attractive high-risk behaviors. The level of influence the peer group has upon the decision making ability of youth is directly proportional to the health and strength of the components in the microsystem.

### **6.5.2 THE MESOSYSTEM**

The "mesosystem" involves the reciprocal relationship among the microsystem settings. For example, what happens at school influences what happens at home and vice-versa. A mesosystem analysis looks at the frequency, quality, and influence of interactions such as how family experiences are related to school adjustments, family characteristics and their relationship to peer pressures. A microsystem and mesosystem can reinforce each other or exert opposite influences. The impact of high-risk behaviors rise if the basic values of the mesosystem and microsystem diverge.

### **6.5.3 THE EXOSYSTEM**

The "exosystem" is composed of those settings in which the youth does not play an active role, but which nevertheless influences him or her. For example, what happens to the parents at work influences the parent and the parent influences the youth. Similarly, community organizations affect the youth in many ways. The school board establishes curriculum, the school calendar, and hires teachers. A city

council may open or close a youth center or swimming pool. All the actions impact the children of a community.

#### **6.5.4 THE MACROSYSTEM**

The "macrosystem" includes ideologies, attitudes, mores, customs, and laws of a particle culture. It includes a core of educational, economic, religious, political, and social values. The macrosystem determines who is an adult and who is a child. It influences educational standards and relationships between the races. For example, middle-class parents in the United States often have different goals and philosophies of child rearing than do those in low socioeconomic status groups; rural families may have different parenting values than urban families. Therefore, in considering the social development and high risk behaviors of youth, we have to be aware of the context in which the youth developed.

There is growing concern about the exploding numbers of at-risk youth and increases in their level of violence, unhealthy behaviors, and lack of educational aspirations. Many programs have been established within our public schools and communities to try and impact these youth and prevent them from dropping out of school and penetrating the drug abuse and/or criminal lifestyle.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (Crain, 1985) reminds us that dealing with the at-risk youth in isolation is not going to be effective. The entire microsystem that surrounds the at-risk youth must work together if change is to happen. Therefore, the entire family's educational needs, job training needs, social services needs, and community involvement must be assessed and the services available to meet those

needs. This will strengthen the mesosystem that surrounds the youth. The peer influences or “natural” curiosities of the youth will be balanced against a strong mesosystem value structure that will increase the youth resilience. Resilience will enhance the youth’s ability to internalize the mesosystem’s value structure and lessen their level of risk and their likelihood of involvement with high-risk behaviors.

## **6.6 CONCLUSION**

There is no single learning environment, teaching strategy, or community action program that will work for all students and their families. However, school districts can be the catalysts for identification, during the formative years, of family systems in need of support services. School based programs, that have the support of administration, can use a variety of adult and child teaching strategies to empower a family to reach the high expectations held by the family, school and the community.

## **6.7 FURTHER RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS**

This qualitative study underscored the importance of an Alternative Learning Environment in which students can rebuild themselves to be the person they can be and move the negative developmental factors toward the positive end of the continuum. A successful ALE must provide individualized consideration for each student within the following parameters:

1. **POSITIVE CLIMATE.** Historically placement in an ALE has been viewed as a punishment or as a negative statement about the student. A shift in paradigm would challenge us to evaluate and negotiate needed learning supports which ensure the success as the motivation for placement (Scherer, 1994). This shift must start with the administrative team that places students into an ALE and be maintained by the staff. The students placed within this setting must be treated with respect and assured of a "fresh start" to academic success.
2. **INDIVIDUAL GOALS.** Every student has a learning style, unique needs, and personal strengths. Using the students strengths to establish short term goals will increase the student's sense of self-worth and will cause a positive shift in self-efficacy (Stiehl & Bessey, 1993).
3. **PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY.** Safety at school is an understated issue for many students. For learning to happen, students must feel that their person and their opinions are respected (Sylvester, 1994). Many students in an ALE carry with them negative information about themselves, which they learned at home as part of their developmental process, that created a fear of expressing themselves or an uncertainty about the validity of their opinions.
4. **CLEAR EXPECTATIONS/CLEAR CONSEQUENCES.** Clear expectations have a freeing effect on learning. Often students who struggle in their academic work are students whose lives have a high measure of chaos. The

elimination of chaos and a clear, step by step plan for reaching goals can free a student to excel (Raywid, 1994).

5. **AFFECTIVE CURRICULUM.** At the beginning of this century, Dewey challenged educators to educate the whole child. Awareness of the student's emotional and social skill deficiencies is a large part of assessing the whole student. We know that emotions effect attention span, which in turn effects memory and learning. Skills building must be infused into the curriculum for the at-risk student. Critical skills include organizational techniques, assertiveness training, anger management skills, and positive friendship building skills (Sylvester, 1994).
6. **A SENSE OF BELONGING.** Finn (1989) suggested that the initial risk factor that leads to withdrawal from school is the lack of participation in school activities. Involvement in the school as a "community" and therefore, membership in that community will enhance educational engagement and social bonding. The quality of social relationships in schools is relevant to the student's sense of belonging and the extent to which the student feels personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school environment (Goodenow, 1993).
7. **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT.** Evidence of the importance of parental involvement is provided by studies of dropouts (Rumberger, 1995, 1990). Parents of at-risk students lack the "cultural capital" (Stallings, 1995; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992) commonly found in families of students who encounter school success. Cultural capital refers to parental familiarity with the school

system, lack of comfort with interacting with their student's teachers and a lack of knowledge about how to access information about the school.

Through the relationships built with teachers and other students within the ALE, the developmental deficiencies that are the basis for many of the risk factors can be met. Filling these developmental gaps will lower the level of risk and increase the student's sense of worth, enhance their self-efficacy, and intervene in their disengagement from school. It would be worth the inquiry to obtain school histories from students who are not considered at risk. Do they also have negative developmental gaps? If so, how have they compensated for those? What effect does peer group play for this group of students?

It is exciting to believe that the day is coming when all children -- whether from an affluent suburb, urban ghetto, or rural school -- will have equal educational opportunities. It is not an impossible dream to believe that classroom teacher can teach the whole child. Together, concerned citizens across the disciplines can make anything happen!

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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A****STYLES OF ATTACHMENT**

<b>AGE</b>	<b>SECURE STYLE</b>	<b>ANXIOUS STYLE</b>
18 MONTHS TO TWO YEARS	ENTHUSIASTIC	FRUSTRATED WHINNY
	PERSISTENT IN SOLVING EASY TASKS	
	EFFECTIVE IN USING ASSISTANCE WHEN TASKS BECOME MORE DIFFICULT	
PRESCHOOL (3 TO 5 YEARS)	FLEXIBLE CURIOUS SOCIALY COMPETENT SELF-RELIANT	LESS FLEXIBLE LESS CURIOUS SOCIALY INCOMPETENT LACK SELF-RELIANCE
SCHOOL AGE (6 TO 10 YEARS)	SYMPATHETIC TO DISTRESS OF PEERS	UNSYMPATHETIC TO PEERS
	ASSERTIVE ABOUT WHAT THEY WANT	AGGRESSIVE
	LEADERSHIP QUALITIES	
	NEITHER VICTIMS OR EXPLOITERS IN PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS	EITHER VICTIMS OR VICTIMIZERS
MID-LEVEL (10 YEARS PLUS)	ABLE TO COMMUNICATE NEGATIVE FEELINGS SUCH AS ANGER, JEALOUSY IN A MEANINGFUL WAY	NEGATIVE FEELINGS WALLED OFF  DIFFICULTIES IN COMMUNICATING  SULLEN OPPOSITIONAL

Alan Sroufe, Minnesota Institute of Child Development (1985)

## APPENDIX B

### PSYCHOSOCIAL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

(Adapted from Erikson, 1963 and Wescneider, 1988)

#### Developmental Period: INFANCY - TRUST VERSUS MISTRUST

Basic Crisis Erikson sees a sense of trust as the most vital element of a healthy personality. The formation begins at birth and is crucial during the first year of life.

Abused Children: Maternal deprivation by an addicted/abusive mother can undermine the establishment of an infant's trust. The infant's physical needs may be met, but trust may not be established due to a lack of emotional stability.

#### Developmental Period: EARLY CHILDHOOD - AUTONOMY VERSUS SHAME

Basic Crisis: Erikson reasons that a child must be able to achieve autonomy, yet accept useful guidance of others. This means, maintaining a delicate balance between reasonable, firm guidance and cooperation.

Abused Child: Addicts/abusers treat other people as objects and this may carry over to the child within the home. If a child observes parents hitting, yelling, sexually abusing to handle their impulses, the child learns to be undisciplined with no impulse control. Autonomy is denied. Human beings are only objects to be used to satisfy impulses.

#### Developmental Period: PRESCHOOL - AGE INITIATIVE VERSUS GUILT

Basic Crisis: Conflicts between initiative and guilt begin at approximately four or five years of age. The child begins to ask questions about his environment. This stage is marked by imitating adult behavior. The key to successful development during this stage is consistent limit setting and predictable responses to the child's behavior.

Abused Child: Inconsistency and emotional instability are dominating factors in the addictive/abusive home. The child is forced to deny his creativity and conform to the self-centered part of the addict or abuser. The inconsistency makes the child develop, not only guilt, but a sense of doom.

### Developmental Period: SCHOOL AGE - INDUSTRY VERSUS INFERIORITY

Basic Crisis: A child entering elementary school begins to develop a need to feel useful as well as a growing ability to explore, create, and achieve. Survival in school begins when the child first steps outside the home environment and depends upon the amount of self-esteem that the child has developed within the home. Also important is the amount of support provided by the parent when the child encounters problems.

Abused Child: The feelings of gloom, uselessness, and mistrust that the child has developed in an abusive/addictive home, can carry over into the school setting. The parents lack of involvement with the child creates a lack of awareness by the parent of the child's struggle to achieve.

### Developmental Period: ADOLESCENT-IDENTITY VERSUS IDENTITY DIFFUSION

Basic Crisis: Adolescence brings on the struggle of "who am I?" This identity crisis is a normal attempt to establish a sense of clear identity as a young adult. Many adolescents feel negative and a need to behave in a rebellious manner.

Abused Child: If this identity stage has been entered into with an excessively developed sense of uselessness, being an object and not a human, inferiority, and shame - this normal crisis is intensified. Adolescence can be like a self-fulfilling prophecy for those adolescents coming out of an addictive/abusive family.

### Developmental Period: YOUTH ADULTHOOD - INTIMACY VERSUS ISOLATION

Basic Crisis: This stage of development is concerned with the young adult's ability to establish intimate relationships with others. When close relationships are not attainable, feelings of isolation arise.

Abused Child: Young adults who have been raised in an addictive/abusive family do not have the opportunity to develop the social skills necessary for success in relationships. Therefore, these adults may find themselves emotionally isolated and lonely.

### Developmental Period: ADULTHOOD - GENERATIVITY VERSUS SELF-ABSORPTION

Basic Crisis: Erikson assumes that a mature adult is capable to intimacy and has a strong identity. In addition, the adult has positive qualities to pass on to future generations.

However, a high percentage of adults raised in an addictive/abusive home have little to offer children that is positive. They have been deprived of learning how to form interactions with others, therefore are paralyzed in relationships with their children. This is even more intensified if the adult has become an addict, thereby, the dehumanizing process continues.

Developmental Period: SENESCENCE - INTEGRITY VERSUS DISGUST

Basic Crisis: Erikson's last stage of development involves acceptance of responsibility for one's own life without blaming others or circumstances. This stage of maturation is not going to be achieved by the adult raised in an abusive/addictive family. Therefore, the adult will become dependent on outside circumstances for survival.

**APPENDIX C**  
**STUDENT WRITING PROMPTS**

# KINDERGARTEN

**WRITE YOUR MEMORIES OF THIS VERY SPECIAL TIME IN YOUR LIFE.**

**1. DID YOU GO TO KINDERGARTEN OR PER-SCHOOL? IF SO, WHERE? IF NOT DO YOU REMEMBER WHY NOT?**

**2. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE FUN TIMES YOU REMEMBER?**

**3. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SAD TIMES YOU REMEMBER?**

**4. WHO WAS YOUR TEACHER AND WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THAT PERSON?**

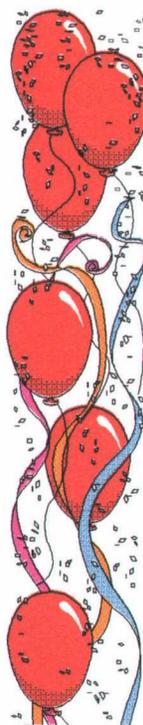
**5. WHERE DID YOU LIVE DURING THIS TIME OF YOUR LIFE? WHO ELSE LIVED THERE?**

**6. DO YOU REMEMBER WHO WAS YOUR BEST FRIEND? WHAT DID YOU DO?**

# FIRST AND SECOND GRADES

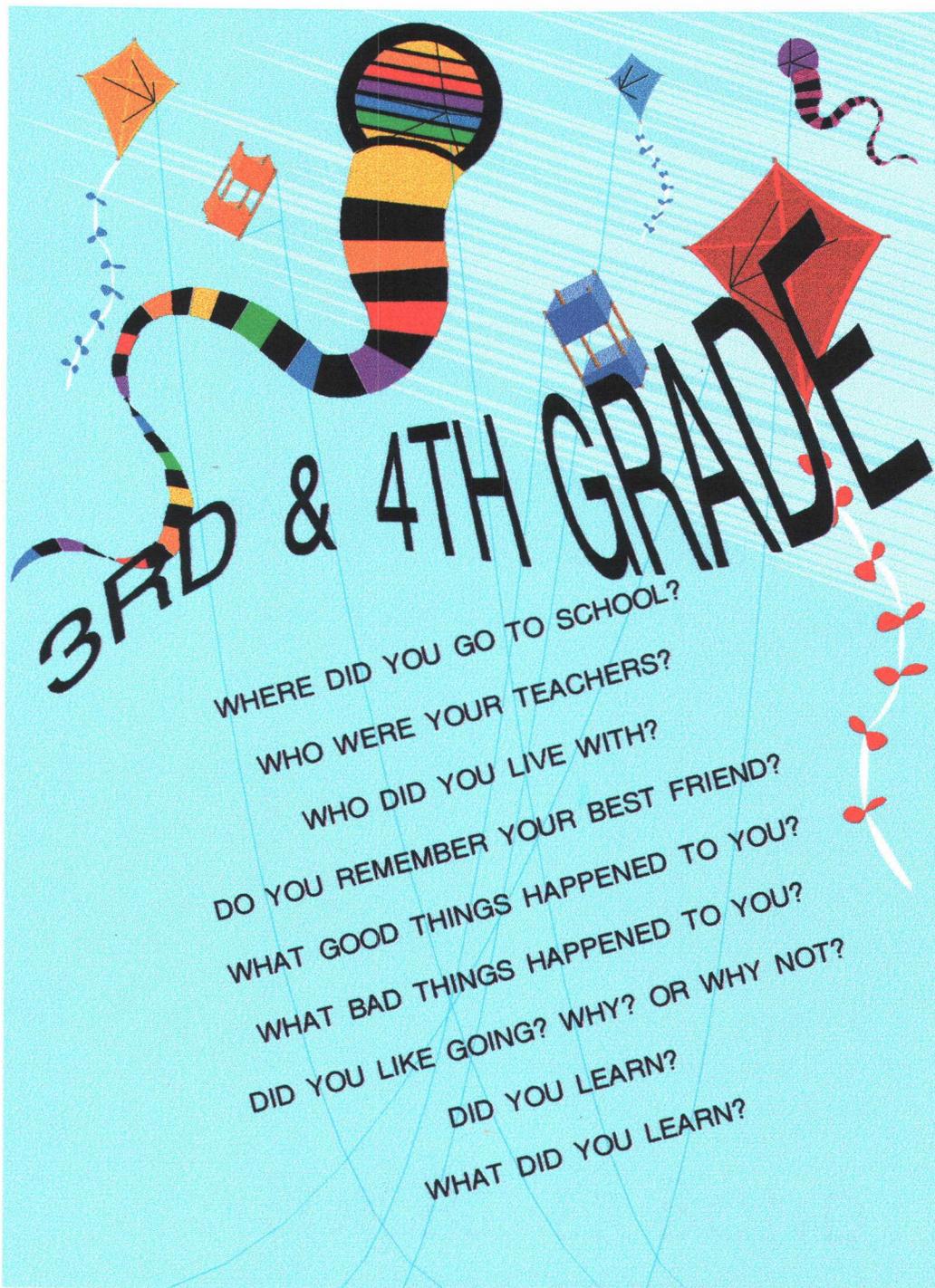
PURPLE  
IN FIRST GRADE, MR. LOHR SAID  
MY PURPLE TEPEE WASN'T  
REALISTIC ENOUGH, THAT PURPLE  
WAS NO COLOR FOR A TENT, THAT  
MY DRAWING WASN'T GOOD  
ENOUGH TO HANG WITH THE  
OTHERS. I WALKED BACK TO MY  
SEAT. WITH A BLACK CRAYON,  
NIGHTFALL CAME TO MY PURPLE  
TENT.

IN SECOND GRADE, MR. BARTA  
SAID, "DRAW ANYTHING." I LEFT MY  
PAPER BLANK AND WHEN HE CAME  
AROUND TO MY DESK, MY HEART  
BEAT LIKE A TOM-TOM WHILE HE  
SAID, "THE SNOWFALL. HOW  
CLEAN AND WHITE AND  
BEAUTIFUL."



WRITE YOUR STORY. BE SURE TO  
INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

1. WHERE DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL AND WHO WERE YOUR TEACHERS? WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THEM?
2. WHERE DID YOU LIVE AND WHO LIVED THERE WITH YOU?
3. WHAT WAS THE BEST THING AND THE WORST THING THAT HAPPENED TO YOU?
4. DO YOU REMEMBER BEING IN TROUBLE?
5. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER LEARNING?
6. WHO WAS YOUR BEST FRIEND AND WHAT DID YOU DO TOGETHER?



# 3RD & 4TH GRADE

- WHERE DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL?
- WHO WERE YOUR TEACHERS?
- WHO DID YOU LIVE WITH?
- DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR BEST FRIEND?
- WHAT GOOD THINGS HAPPENED TO YOU?
- WHAT BAD THINGS HAPPENED TO YOU?
- DID YOU LIKE GOING? WHY? OR WHY NOT?
- DID YOU LEARN?
- WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

# FIFTH GRADE

YOU ARE GETTING OLDER NOW!  
HOW IS IT GOING?

1. WHERE DID YOU GO TO  
SCHOOL AND WHO WERE YOUR  
TEACHERS?

2. WHERE DID YOU LIVE AND  
WHO ELSE LIVED THERE?

3. WHO WAS YOUR BEST FRIEND  
AND WHAT DID YOU DO  
TOGETHER?

4. WHAT DID YOU LEARN IN THIS  
GRADE? ANY TROUBLE THIS  
YEAR WITH ANYONE?

# 6TH GRADE

WHERE DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL?

WHO WAS YOUR TEACHER?

WHERE DID YOU LIVE AND WHO ELSE  
LIVED THERE?

WHO WAS YOUR BEST FRIEND?

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER MOST  
ABOUT SCHOOL?



# 7TH GRADE

WHERE DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL?

WHO WAS YOUR TEACHER?

WHERE DID YOU LIVE AND WHO LIVED THERE WITH YOU?

WHAT DID YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT THIS GRADE?

WHAT WAS THE WORST THING ABOUT THIS GRADE?

DO YOU REMEMBER GETTING INTO ANY TROUBLE?

HOW WAS YOUR ATTENDANCE?

WHAT LESSONS DID YOU LEARN IN THIS GRADE?



# 8TH GRADE

**O.K. THIS IS THE  
LAST WRITING  
IN YOUR  
SCHOOL  
HISTORY. THIS  
IS THE TIME TO  
ADD ANYTHING  
YOU MAY HAVE  
FORGOTTEN.**



**YOU KNOW  
WHAT THE  
QUESTIONS ARE  
THAT NEED TO  
BE INCLUDED IN  
YOUR WRITING.  
SO, GO FOR IT -  
MAKE THIS  
YOUR STORY!!**

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### FRAMING OR SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTION

**Title of research project:** PREVENTING SCHOOL DROPOUT THROUGH AN ALTERNATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

Student sample question:

1. In your school autobiography you said that you hated the fourth grade because no one liked you. What do you think made the friendships you had with the other kids change?
2. In the sixth grade you missed school much more than you had before that year. Do you remember why?
3. You really had some problems with low grades, poor attendance, and getting into conflicts with your peers during the first half of your eighth grade year. However, later in that year you seemed to "get it together" and did fine. This year (ninth grade) you have had a really good year. What made the change?

Parent sample question:

1. Up until the fifth grade your student was almost a model student. However, in the fifth grade things began to change - his absences increased and his behavior with other students became more aggressive. What are your insights into events that might have triggered these changes?
2. In the ninth grade your student really struggled - poor attendance and low academic performance. However, now he/she seems to be on-track. His/her attendance is above average and his/her grades are also above average. What do you think happened to cause this positive change in your student?

**APPENDIX E**  
**HUMAN SUBJECT FORM**

OFFICE  
OF  
DEAN OF RESEARCH



OREGON  
STATE  
UNIVERSITY

312 Administrative Services  
Corvallis, Oregon  
97331-2140

541-737-0670  
FAX: 541-737-3093  
INTERNET  
nurnm@ccmail.orst.edu

February 6, 1996

Principal Investigator:

The following project has been approved for exemption under the guidelines of Oregon State University's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

Principal Investigator(s): Joanne B. Engel

Student's Name (if any): Carolyn J. Myers

Department: Education

Source of Funding:

Project Title: Preventing School Dropouts Through an Alternative Learning Environment

Comments: Examine parent/child informed consent document and correct typos.

A copy of this information will be provided to the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. If questions arise, you may be contacted further.

Sincerely,

Signature redacted for privacy.

Mary E. Nunn  
Sponsored Programs Officer

cc: CPHS Chair

## INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**Title of research project:** PREVENTING SCHOOL DROPOUT THROUGH AN ALTERNATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

**Investigators:** Joanne E. Engel, Ph.D. (541) 737-5989  
 Carolyn Jeanne Myers, Staff-Eola School (w) (503) 362-8599  
 (h) (503) 585-7414

**Purpose of the project:** This action research is designed to evaluate the effect of school based interventions on the factors that place students at-risk of dropping out of school.

**Procedures:** I have received an oral and a written explanation of this research study and I understand that as a participant in this study the following thing will happen:

1. Students will be asked to write an autobiographical sketch their school history. Including this positive times, the negative times, when changes were noticed in school interest, etc.
2. Both, parents and their student, will participate in separate interviews regarding what has been helpful and what has not been helpful in keeping their student involved in school.
3. I understand the student's school records will be reviewed as part of this inquiry.
4. As a former teacher or administrator of a student participant in this inquiry, I will be interviewed to confirm and validate information gained from others sources.

**Confidentiality:** I understand that any information obtained from me will be kept confidential. The only person that will have access to this information will be the investigators. No names will be used in any data summaries or publications. If questions or concerns arise contact Dr. Engel or C. Myers.

**Voluntary participation statement:** I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may either refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

My signature below indicates that I have read and understand the procedures. I give my voluntary and informed consent to participate in this study.

---

TEACHER/ADMINISTRATOR

DATE

---

RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE

DATE

---

RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE

DATE

**APPENDIX F**

**Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model**

