

2006

The importance of career exploration to at-risk middle school students : a thesis ...

Craig Panzer
California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes

Recommended Citation

Panzer, Craig, "The importance of career exploration to at-risk middle school students : a thesis ..." (2006).
Capstone Projects and Master's Theses. 467.
https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes/467

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. Unless otherwise indicated, this project was conducted as practicum not subject to IRB review but conducted in keeping with applicable regulatory guidance for training purposes. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

The Importance of Career Exploration to At-Risk Middle School Students

By

Craig Panzer

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements For a Masters of Arts Degree
in Education

California State University at Monterey Bay

College of Professional Studies

Department of Education

May 2006

© by Craig Panzer. All Rights Reserved

The Importance of Career Exploration to At-Risk Middle School Students

By

Craig Panzer

Approved by the Dean of the College of Professional Studies

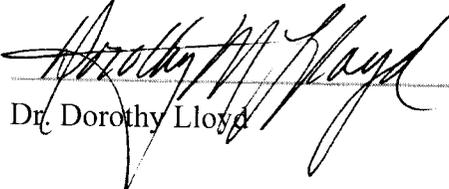


Dr. Sandy Hale 6/9/06
DATE

Approved by the Graduate Advisory Committee:



Dr. Beverly Carter 6/9/06
DATE



Dr. Dorothy Lloyd 6/8/06
DATE

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments

I am forever thankful to my wife Mandi. Without her constant support and understanding I would not have been able to finish this thesis. I am also grateful for the guidance and patience of Dr. Beverly Carter. I was honored to be one of Dr. Carter's first advisees in the Masters of Education. I would also like to thank Dr. Dorothy Lloyd for being my second reader and for all her valuable input and suggestions along the way.

Abstract

This action thesis explores the current crisis of students leaving school before they graduate. It examines the implications of incorporating a curriculum in career exploration to at risk students. The curriculum consisted of a six week unit exploring careers of which the students expressed interest. It was found that during this six week intervention disciplinary problems decreased, students asked more questions and attendance increased. This project has implications for teachers and administrators as they plan lessons, units, and make school wide decisions.

Table of Contents

Action Thesis Signature Page.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables.....	vi
Chapter I Introduction.....	1
Statement of Problem.....	1
Background.....	2
Overview.....	5
Chapter II Literature Review.....	6
What are the Characteristics of at risk students?.....	6
Would a curriculum in career exploration help reduce dropout rate?.....	9
What would a curriculum that included career exploration look like?.....	10
Chapter III Methodology.....	14
Design and setting.....	14
Participants.....	15
Data Collection.....	15
Chapter IV Results.....	18
What are the Characteristics of at risk students?.....	18
Would a curriculum in career exploration help reduce dropout rate?.....	26
What would a curriculum that included career exploration look like?.....	34
Chapter V Discussion.....	31

List of Tables

Table 1.	Attendance.....	19
Table 2.	Discipline.....	20
Table 3.	Free and Reduced lunch.....	21
Table 4.	Parental status.....	21
Table 5.	Parents graduating high school.....	22
Table 6.	Sibling dropout.....	22
Table 7.	Primary language.....	23
Table 8.	Reading.....	23
Table 9.	Expelled.....	24
Table 10.	Graduation expectations.....	25
Table 11.	Total risk factors.....	25
Table 12.	Careers to Explore.....	26
Table 13.	Type and number of questions.....	28
Table 14.	Discipline issues during speakers.....	28
Table 15.	Enjoyed guest speakers.....	37
Table 16.	High school = Job.....	38
Table 17.	Better understanding of careers.....	38
Table 18.	Likert Scale.....	39
Table 19.	Attendance during intervention.....	40

The Importance of Career Exploration to At-Risk Middle School Students

This action thesis is intended to be used as a starting point for anyone who would like to incorporate career education into their classroom curriculum. I set forth on this project to create a set of procedures that could be replicated in other classes and have similar results. My three guiding research questions were: What are the characteristics of students who are at risk of dropping out of school? Would a curriculum that incorporated career education decrease the risk of dropping out? What would a curriculum that included career education look like? In answering these questions, I hoped to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of dropping out and to give the potential dropout a reason to stay in school.

Statement of Problem

In 2001 more than 469,000 students dropped out of high school in the United States (Education, 2001). This number includes students who dropped out in high school (grades 9-12) and would be much larger if it included students who dropped out in middle school (grades 7-8). In recent years dropout prevention has become a national priority, and has attracted much attention from politicians, parents, and teachers. During the 1990's presidents Bush and Clinton set forth six national goals. The second of these goals was to increase high school graduation to a rate of 90% by 2000 (Rumberger, 2001). Yet the problem persists and is in fact increasing in some portions of society, mainly low-income, ethnic and linguistic minorities (Rumberger, 2001). For example, in Salinas, California 124 students dropped out in the 2003-2004 school year. Out of this number, 100 were Hispanic, and almost all were from low-income families (Education,

2003). The reasons for dropping out are not clear. Possible factors include; students leaving so they can work and support the family, students getting tired of failing and seeing no relevance in staying, as well as following in friends or parents footsteps.

Whatever the cause, the result is the same; a person who will not have the basic education requirements for upward social mobility.

Background

It is with the crisis of students dropping out of school that I am concerned. More specifically, I have concentrated on a solution or a way to instill a desire to stay in school. My project is designed to meet the needs of students in the Opportunity Class at Harden Middle School. They have already met many of the criteria for possible dropouts; and so they have been placed in my class. These students have discipline problems, come from single family homes, have low SES (socio-economic status), and have siblings and/or parents who have dropped out of school. In addition, many come from ethnic and linguistic minorities. Many of my former students have already left school, and this trend will likely continue as long as the students' needs are not being met. This departure might happen this year or when they enter high school. I believe that they are not to blame for all their prerequisites to dropping out, and that it is the system which must conform to their needs. If this does not happen, our nation will be left caring for a permanent underclass of disenfranchised people we had an opportunity to educate, but chose not to.

In reflecting on this problem I started thinking of my own experiences in school. The high school I attended had rich and engaging curriculum, extracurricular activities, and stressed exposure to diverse vocational possibilities. For example, my high school

there was a fully operational garage, woodshop, silk-screening studio and classes for accounting and business management. These opportunities were located at school as well as off campus through a program called BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services). Participants in this program could leave school early to attend classes focusing on vocational training. At the time, I did not realize the need, nor the benefits of these classes. However, in retrospect, and after becoming a teacher, I realize that the opportunity to expose students to possible careers in a professional setting and integrated into the curriculum is one that should be experienced by all students, especially students considered at-risk. I am interested in discovering the benefits of vocational training for at-risk students. I have found these experiences enrich student's lives and are of great value to their social and cognitive development. Further, they have a "buy-in" or focusing effect on students who otherwise might feel marginalized or disenfranchised from the school, curriculum, and society. Nevertheless, for many reasons that I will discuss later, extracurricular activities including vocational training are being excluded from the curriculum choices of many students. Schools have a narrower curriculum and many fewer opportunities for students to explore possible careers.

I teach at Harden Middle School, my students are predominately Hispanic and most come from low socio-economic families; farm working families. Our school has no music program, no performing arts, few sports, few clubs, and the humanities classes are being used to reinforce the language arts classes. This situation is not doing our students justice; it does not allow the students to branch out and grow academically. It limits their education and life experiences. Further, the school offers no vocational training to our students. Our curriculum is becoming increasingly narrow, mainly focusing on language

arts and mathematics in an effort to increase test scores on state standardized tests. I am concerned that, in the drive to do better on state tests, areas not tested are receiving less attention, becoming less important or obsolete. I also believe that this is having a devastating effect on at-risk youth and those who were having trouble functioning in the system previous to this “reform”. It is usually the case that students who were experiencing success will continue to do so, and will have opportunities to continue to experience a varied curriculum. Thus they feel the effects of the narrowing curriculum less. They also have parents who expose them to different occupational choices. It is the students who are on the periphery that will have less exposure to new experiences, including vocational choices and training. The at-risk students will be more likely to drop out of school if they see no relevance in attending and are frustrated by a system that appears to set them up for failure.

I believe at-risk students will benefit from exposure to a curriculum that includes introductions to different career choices. In my research, I found a way to integrate such a curriculum into my students’ daily schedule. I found such integration leads to a better understanding by my students of the importance of their education, more buy-in to the reasons for and benefits of school. I also gave them the opportunity to explore possible job choices while addressing skill development. I understand that not all students learn the same way. I developed this intervention to address their multiple cognitive abilities, looking at the various occupations from many vantage points. I utilized professionals from the community as guest speakers and used what we learned to make interdisciplinary connections with our established curriculum.

This project is a fraction of what should be done. I believe education should be built around the needs of the students. Today, we set standards and leave very little room for deviation from this prescribed set of “desired” knowledge. Although this curriculum is important, it does not fit all students and certainly does not lead to the success of all students. The problem is clear: students are dropping out at an alarming rate. The questions are why and what can be done?

Overview

I believe that the curriculum being taught in schools is becoming increasingly narrow. This will result in a marginalization of more and more students. It will also increase the number of students who are dropping out of school. With this project, I hoped to gain a better understanding of why students drop out, and more importantly, what can be done to slow the rate at which students are leaving our schools. This study includes a six week intervention to a class of at risk students. The intervention is a curriculum rich in career education and exploration. I chose this intervention after reviewing literature pertaining to best practices in dealing with at risk youth.

Literature Review

My objective in this project was to develop an effective intervention for students who are at risk of dropping out of school. Three questions guided my research; (1) who is at-risk of dropping out, (2) would a curriculum in career education increase their desire to stay in school, and (3) if so what would the curriculum look like. In answering my research questions, I gained an understanding of who is at risk, what intervention is effective, and how to construct such an intervention. The following literature is grouped together in relation to how it informed my understanding of one of the three research questions.

What are the characteristics of at-risk students?

In researching this question, it became clear that I would need to narrow my conception of “at-risk”. This title has been given to juvenile offenders, school dropouts, drug abusers, teenage mothers, premature infants and adolescents with personality disorders (Tidwell & Garrett, 1994). For my purposes I will use at-risk to refer to a student who is at risk of dropping out of school and/or failing to be successful at school.

Many authors agree that, while there is no foolproof way to predict students who will drop out, there are indicators that identify who might be at-risk. In identifying risk factors, Philip Gleason and Mark Dynarski identify family dynamics, previous school experiences and personal and psychological characteristics as areas to consider in determining the possibility of dropping out for a particular student (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002). More specifically, these characteristics include single parent, low SES, disciplinary problems, being overage for grade, high absenteeism, and low self-esteem. Students who meet several of the above-mentioned criteria are more likely to drop out

than students who only display one of the characteristics (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002). However, these authors also suggest that other factors should be considered. Factors such as ecological, other psychological, and unexpected events that present problems for the student should be considered along with the more traditional factors (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). One of the factors that was found to have a relatively low implication was the level of educational attainment by a parent of an at risk student. This finding is in contrast to the data found by Robert Haveman. In a longitudinal sample of 1300 students he found the educational background of the parents to be the most significant factor in determining high school graduation (Haveman, 1990). He also found moving and divorce are negatively associated with graduation from high school, especially in students ages 12 to 15 (Haveman, 1990). These conflicting findings demonstrate the difficulty of predicting possible dropouts and the sometimes randomness of the phenomenon of dropping out.

Another factor one might include in determining the at-riskness of students is their peer relations. A student who has a close friend who has dropped out and “joined the adult world of full-time employment” is at risk of dropping out themselves (Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997, pg. 363). At-risk students have an average of five times the number of friends in the working world than do non-risk students (Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997).

In 1988 the National Center for Educational Statistics surveyed a cohort of eighth grade students and has followed up with this group at least four times. In 2000 it was determined that approximately 8% of those in the cohort had not yet graduated from high school or attained any equivalent (Ingels, 2002). Among the characteristics shared by

this 8% are very low SES and having a mother who has not graduated from high school (Ingels et al., 2002). The follow-up also included data for high school completion status based on ethnicity. According to the report, Asian or Pacific Islanders had the highest percentage of completion (99%) while Hispanic or Latino had the lowest, with 85% completing high school or the equivalent (Ingels et al., 2002).

It has long been a goal of schools, states, and our federal government to reduce the number of dropouts. During Clinton's presidency national goals were established in education (Education, 1998). One of the eight goals was to increase high school graduation to a rate of 90% and to close the gap between the graduation rate of minority and non-minority students (Rumberger, 2001). However, in looking at current trends, Russell Rumberger suggests dropout rates will increase in the coming years. He points out that, as students from poor families who belong to racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities increase, so will the dropout rate (Rumberger, 2001). Another trend that is leading to an increase in dropouts is the push for accountability, ending social promotion, and instituting a high school exit exam (Rumberger, 2001).

The number of students dropping out of school is disconcerting. These students' needs are not being addressed, and society will suffer as a whole if the problem persists. The above literature points out that those students with low SES, friends or siblings who have dropped out, a history of low academic achievement, and high absenteeism are more likely to leave school before graduation. It is also clear that when a multitude of these characteristics is evident the likelihood of dropout increases. Many intervention programs have been created to limit the number of dropouts, with varied effectiveness. My next question deals with what can be done to decrease the likelihood of dropping out.

Would a Career Training Education (CTE) or Student to Work (STW) program, integrated with the curriculum decrease the dropout rate among at-risk students?

Developing effective ways to address the rate at which students are dropping out in the United States is difficult. There are many reasons why students leave school. Therefore, it is difficult to develop an intervention that addresses all of the variables. In reviewing literature on intervention programs, two characteristics were present in all the successful intervention programs. One is the relevance of the curriculum to the students' lives, developing buy-in to the school and its goals and purposes (Finn, 1989; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Rumberger, 2001; Soleil, 1999). The second characteristic that appeared multiple times was the presence of vocational and/or career training (Burrow, 1992; Castellano, Stringfield, Stone, & Lewis, 2002; Finch & Mooney, 1997; Finn, 1989; Kerka, 2000). These two characteristics come together when student's career interests are being interwoven into the curriculum, thus increasing the relevance of that curriculum. Students are more likely to see the relevance in school if they are learning about careers they wish to pursue in the future (Castellano et al., 2002; Soleil, 1999).

The findings of the above authors are important when looking at why students drop out, especially when the realization that our schools are geared toward the student who is planning on continuing their education in college (Burrow, 1992). In most schools the college preparatory curriculum rarely includes training in specific careers, thus decreasing the relevancy students might feel in their education. As current reform efforts "reduce student options by focusing on specific curriculum patterns, extensive standardized testing and outcomes directing students toward postsecondary education" they "increase the likelihood that more at-risk students will not complete high school"

(Burrow, 1992, pg. 28). Approximately twenty million non-college bound students leave high school before graduation (Burrow, 1992). If these students had other options, or a chance to have training in a specific career would they have dropped out?

Many studies suggest students drop out because they do not feel a sense of belonging or relevance in school (Finn, 1989; Rumberger, 2001). Often students see relevance in career exploration and “experience that can be used as they begin to set tentative career goals” as a necessary component of their school experience (Arrington, 2000, pg. 104). Having a vocational component may be particularly important to an at-risk student and often affects them positively (Finn, 1989). In analyzing the National Longitudinal Survey of 1997, James Stone III found that students involved in school-to-work programs were less likely to leave school early (2002).

This literature makes clear the importance of relevance to students, especially those who are at risk of dropping out. However, for many reasons, the curriculum is becoming narrower in its scope. Career education is not being used to spark the interests of students who might be influenced to stay in school. My last section of this review investigates best practices in relation to including career education into a classroom.

What would a curriculum in career exploration look like?

Introducing career training to at-risk students is not a new idea. It is often seen as a necessary part of intervention programs; however, it is difficult to find a “one size fits all” example. The reviewed literature did have some commonalities and exposed themes that led to successful interventions.

One of the more effective themes was that career exploration should be student-driven. In other words, the students should discover the types of careers and interests that

will be explored in class (Arrington, 2000; Finch & Mooney, 1997). However, others warn that teachers need to be sure students explore new ideas, not just careers that are popular on TV or in pop-culture (Cutshall, 2001). These authors suggest exposing students to a variety of careers before students select what to explore in more depth (Arrington, 2000). This can be done through the use of career aptitude tests or occupational videos (Castellano et al., 2002). This literature suggests that a teacher should have a pre-exploration or screening activity so that students' real interests are exposed and the careers explored represent those interests. Teachers need to make the exploration relevant to the student while also allowing for a broad study, including careers from many areas and different subjects, keeping in mind what the future will bring in term of occupational choices (Wright, 2001).

Kelly Arrington identifies three strategies for implementing career awareness.

- Curriculum infusion: identifying career competencies to be taught and “folding” them into academic curriculum
- Assessment of current career interests: including family histories, interest inventories, personal narratives, etc.
- Life skills/personal development: including cooperative learning, self-esteem, self-confidence, individual learning styles, etc.

(Arrington, 2000)

These preliminary steps allow a teacher to gain understanding of the students' abilities and interests, which he/she can use to determine career types to be explored.

An intervention needs to be specific to the students it is meant to help. Three areas that need to be considered in designing and intervention are the psychological and

sociological nature of the students and philosophical framework of the teacher (Nancy Danley, 2002). Nancy Danley describes these as considerations in justifying how to shape an intervention:

- Psychological: knowing the students learning styles and how to best address their abilities
- Sociological: knowing where the students come from socially and how to use their social realities to shape intervention
- Philosophical: knowing what your own (teacher) reasons are for the intervention and how do they affect the outcome (Nancy Danley, 2002).

Knowing who your students are and where they come from is an important consideration in all curriculum and instructional choices. In designing a curriculum in career exploration it is important to differentiate between exploration and training (Finch & Mooney, 1997). For practical purposes a teacher should, when attempting to intertwine occupational education with established curriculum, avoid training students for specific careers. An exploration of a career, especially at the middle school level, is a more appropriate and effective endeavor (Finch & Mooney, 1997). One such exploration that was suggested was a week long study of a career. The plan called for an introduction to the career, completion of a K-W-L, guest speaker, class discussion, quick writes, completion of a bulletin board, among other things (Cathleen Benning, 2003). In this study it was found that students had a positive gain in their understanding of the careers they explored as well as an increased feeling of relevancy in their education (Cathleen Benning, 2003). Career exploration reveals a further benefit in the students being

introduced to the community as well as the community being invited to participate in their schools. As members of the community are asked to become part of the education process, they experience a “buy-in” to schools and students (Castellano et al., 2002). This exposure may come in the form of guest speakers or visitations to a particular place of business.

The above review of literature has informed my decisions in the creation and execution of my project. I gained an understanding of the various risk factors and the reliability of those factors. It is clear that relevancy is an important aspect of students’ perception of school, and that career exploration is one way to increase relevancy. However, there are many ways to introduce this curriculum, and a teacher must have a good understanding of their students to make appropriate instructional choices. In the next chapter, Methodology, I draw on the ideas set forth here, in the literature, and my experiences with the students in my class.

Methodology

Design and Setting

Geoffrey Mills (2003) describes action research as “any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers... with goals of gaining insight... and improving student lives...” (pg.5). This research project is one with an overall aim of improving students’ lives, and falls within this design. The purpose of my study/project was to determine if an exploration of career choices led to an increased feeling of relevance at-risk students have about their education, and if it reduced their desire to dropout. An action research case study design that included both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods was used to answer my three research questions. 1) What risk factors lead to dropping out? 2) Will introducing a curriculum in career exploration increase the at-risk students’ desire to finish school? 3) What would such a curriculum look like? I chose this design because it allowed me to attend to the needs of my students and to create, execute, and determine the effectiveness of my project. Qualitative data collected included answers to my interview questions and students’ reactions to guest speakers. Quantitative data, such as attendance records and referral frequency, were used to gain insight into the effectiveness of the project.

The study took place at Harden Middle School in Salinas, California. The school is a 7th and 8th grade public institution. I have taught History at this school for five years, however, this year I have taken on the position of instructor for the Opportunity class. An Opportunity class is a special day class for students who have been deemed at-risk by their previous teachers.

Participants

This class consists of approximately 22 students. At the time of the intervention, the class had 12 males and 10 females. The ethnic characteristics of the class were as follows: nineteen students were Hispanic; two were white; and one was Filipino. All students in the class chose to participate. There were no other students or other selection criteria. All students were interviewed, participated in the intervention, and their data used in this study.

Data Collection

I obtained data using several methods, including interviews, career aptitude tests, student records, an exit survey and my observations of students. Each served a purpose in gaining a clear and accurate picture in determining the effectiveness of the intervention.

Interview. The interview itself had multiple purposes; it was used to collect data as to the risk factors of my students and also to determine what careers we should explore. I based my questions on the literature I reviewed for this study, mainly from Gleason and Dynarski (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). In this paper the authors assert that, although there is no list of absolute characteristics that make a student at-risk of dropping out, there are some factors that may lead to a student dropping out. After all students were interviewed the data was compared to the risk factors discussed in Gleason and Dynarski. The interview was conducted in 15 minute time slots during school. A copy of the interview can be found in the appendix. The second purpose of the interview attempted to uncover career interests the students might have and whether they thought

school was preparing them for that career. After the interview the data was used to make preliminary decisions as to what careers to explore.

Career Aptitude Test. I used a career aptitude test (see appendix) to narrow the types of careers we explored. Since time was short, I wanted to touch upon the most relevant careers. This test was administered by a representative from the Regional Occupational Program (ROP) and consisted of a survey of interests that was used to group the students into one of six categories, each of which had a list of possible occupational interests. Between the interview and the test I was able to determine six careers that could be of interest to everyone.

Student Records. Data were collected using the students' academic records. The data collected from student records consisted of the students' history of attendance as well as disciplinary problems (referrals, suspensions, etc.). Their data were used for two reasons. The first was to further determine if the students met the factors of an at-risk student. For example, attendance and disciplinary problems are among the most telling signs of a student possibly becoming a dropout (Burrow, 1992; Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Finn, 1989). The second reason their data were collected was to serve as a baseline for later comparison with attendance and discipline during the intervention. I looked for improved attendance, especially on the day we explored careers. Students in Opportunity receive an "I" whenever they do something deemed inappropriate by the teacher. These I's can lead to a referral. I looked for a reduction in the number of I's and referrals.

Exit Survey. Students were asked to complete an exit survey that consisted of questions about the effectiveness of the intervention. The survey had five short answer questions and a Likert-scale. The survey was completely anonymous to reduce any

pressure the students might feel. I used the answers in this survey to add to my overall understanding of the effectiveness of the intervention.

Observations. My observations of the students' behavior during a guest speaker's presentation consisted of the number and type of questions being asked and the attentiveness or non-attentiveness of each student. The questions asked by the students were categorized: "under the surface" or "above the surface". "Under the surface" questions are ones that are more complex and require a deeper understanding of the material. "On the surface" questions need less explanation and can be answered in a very brief way, usually one word. These observations were kept on a class seating chart and consisted of the questions and the codes "U" for under the surface and "A" for above the surface. I also used to form to keep notes as to the attentiveness of students: specifically, are they actively participating, not participating, or something else.

Results

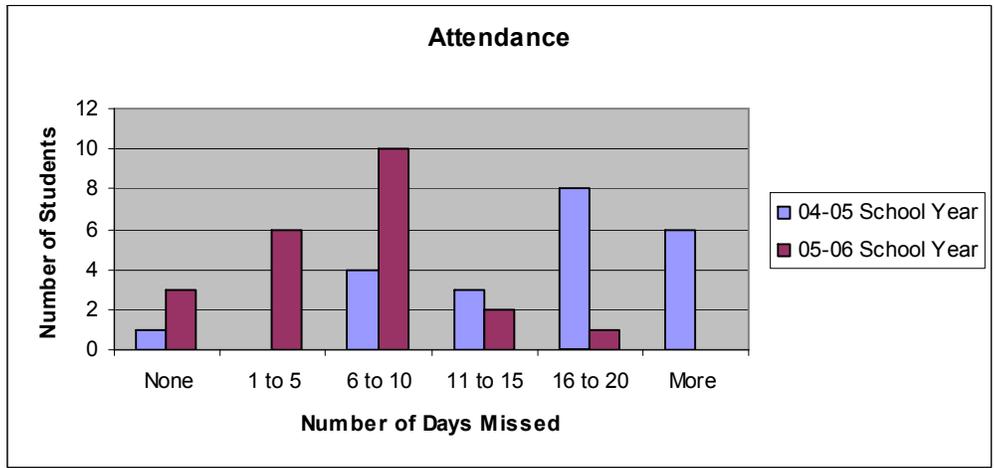
The results that follow are based on student interviews, observations of the students, student records, and an exit interview. Using these tools I was able to partially answer my three research questions. All of the results are tied to one of the following questions: Do my students have the characteristics of at-risk students? Would a unit on career exploration be beneficial to these students? If so, what would the unit include. The first question required me to develop a list of the at-risk factors that might lead to dropping out of school and determine if my students exhibit any of these factors. The second question led me to explore what has been done to combat the drop out problem. What follows are my findings and a discussion of how they informed my understanding of the guiding questions.

What are the characteristics of students who are at-risk of dropping of school, and do my students exhibit any of these factors?

Reading literature pertaining to at risk students, I was able to develop a list of possible characteristics of a student who might drop out of school. This list included aspects of the students ranging from home life, past school experience, psychological and ecological factors. I used students' records and an interview to gain an understanding of my students' risk factors. The interview had two purposes; one was to determine risk factors and the second was to reveal what the students' career interests were. The risk factors on which I gathered data were as follows: attendance; SES; disciplinary issues; living with single parent; parents' education; amount of homework completed; sibling dropping out; primary language; number of expulsions; whether they read for fun; and

their educational expectations. These were factors that were mentioned by many authors as possible indicators of a potential drop out.

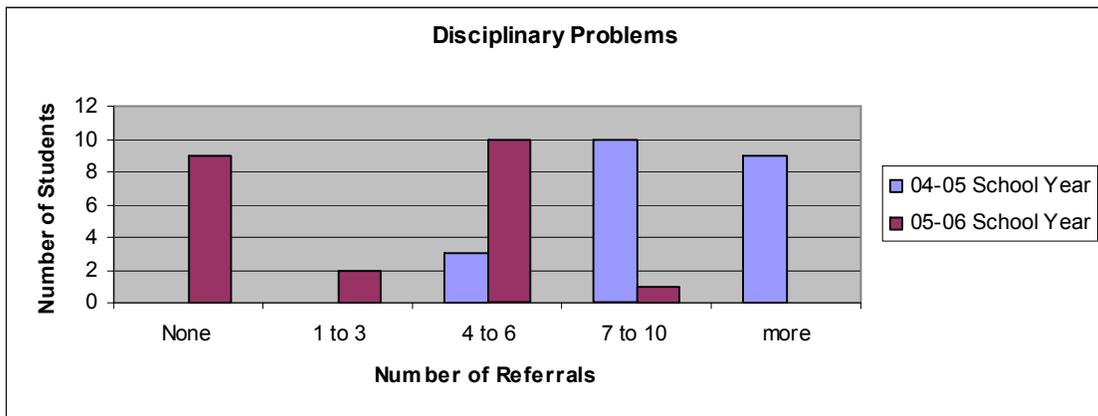
The data reported below includes findings with respect to the students' risk factors. The first set of data includes students' attendance, both last year and this year. Since this study took place approximately two thirds or 114 days into the 2005 -2006 school year, I only accounted for the absences recorded in the same period of time the previous year. The following bar graph shows the number of days missed by the twenty-two students who participated in this study for school years 2004 -2005 and 2005 -2006. The twenty-two students who participated in this study were in mainstream classes during the 2004 -2005 school year. This year they are in the Opportunity class. The graph shows a significant drop in the number of days missed this year compared to last year. Philip Gleason and Mark Dynarski defined attendance as a risk factor when a student has missed twenty days (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). Six of my students meet the criteria for this risk factor last years, however none do this year.



Days	Year	None 100%	1-5 99%-95%	6 to 10 94%-91%	11 to 15 90%-87%	16 to 20 86%-83%	More then 21 82%
114	04-05	1		4	3	8	6
114	05-06	3	6	10	2	1	

The data collected for attendance shows a decline in the number of absences from the 2004-05 school year to the 2005-06 school year. This change is especially noticeable in the students who missed 16 days or more in 2004-05, which totaled 14 students. When compared to the 2005-06 school year, only 1 student falls into this category. If a student missed more than 16 days out of the 114, they were in attendance 86% of the time. A student can not be promoted if he or she is in school less than 85%.

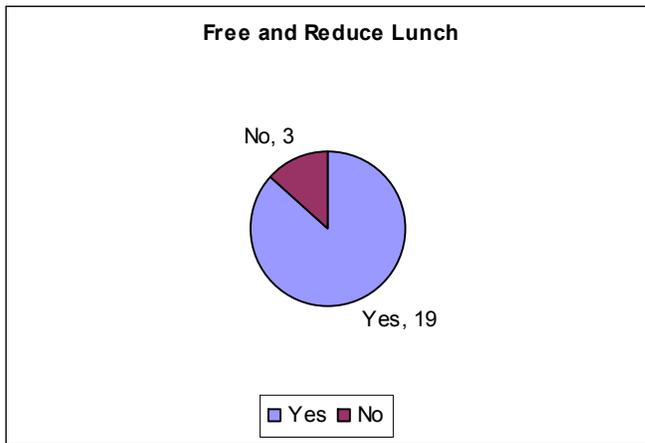
The following chart shows the number of referrals written for the students in my class. A referral means that the student was sent to the office because they were not behaving in a way the teacher felt appropriate. On-going disciplinary problems during the school year is considered a risk factor by many authors (Burrow, 1992; Finn, 1989; Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). Looking at the students records, I was able to obtain the number of referrals written for any particular student. As with the data collected for attendance, I accounted for the number of referrals written in the first 114 days of the 2004 -2005 school year. This was necessary to show a comparison between two identical periods of time. The following bar graph shows the number of referrals written for the participating students. All referrals were disciplinary referrals.



Number of Referrals	None	1 to 3	4 to 6	7 to 10	more
114 Last year			3	10	9
114 Current	9	2	10	1	

Other risk factors observed fell into the category of family background, which includes SES, living with a single parent, parents' education, having a sibling dropout, and language spoken at home. The following sets of data contain the findings from these areas. A student was determined to have low SES if he or she received free or reduced cost of lunch. Only three of the twenty-two students are not on free or reduce cost of lunch; conversely, nineteen students are considered having low SES.

Interview question #2: Are you on free and reduce lunch?

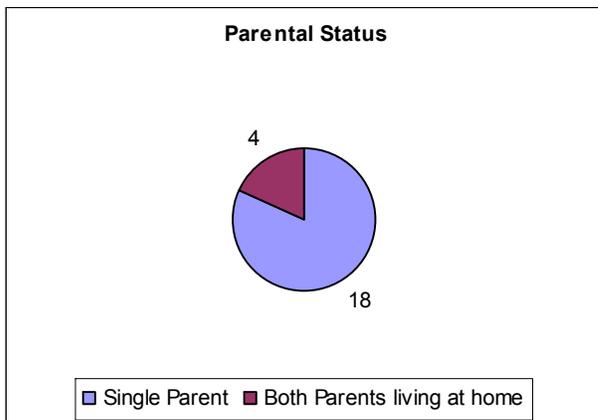


Free and reduce

Yes	No
19	3

The next two factors include information about the students' parents, specifically their level of education and marital status. These were considered some of the more telling risk factors by many of the authors. The first graph shows the number of students who live with a single parent. The data collected showed that 18 of my students live with a single parent, and four with both parents.

Interview question #5: Do you live in a single parent home?

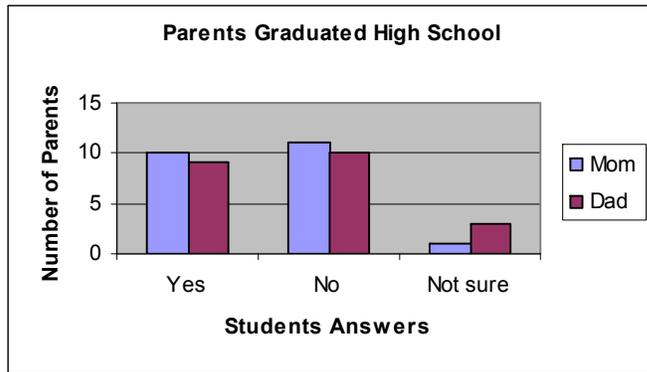


Live with single parent

Single Parent	Both Parents
18	4

The following chart displays the data collected from the students regarding their parents' level of educational attainment. Parents' education level becomes a risk factor when it is low. A parent who did not finish high school would indicate a low level of education. Eleven students reported that their mothers had not finished high school and ten stated their fathers had not received a high school diploma.

Interview question #6: Did your parents finish high school?

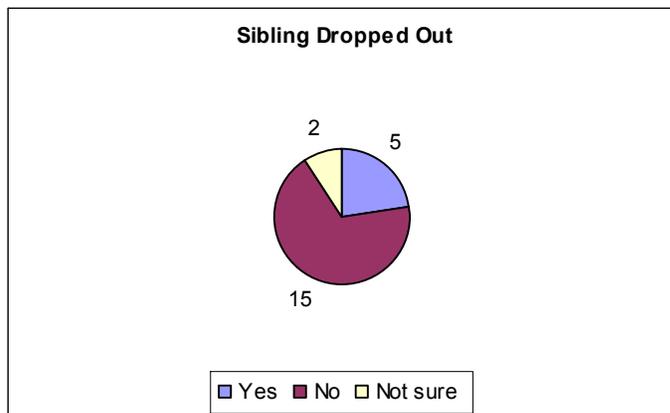


Finished High School

	Mom	Dad
Yes	10	9
No	11	10
Not sure	1	3

Another risk factor that may add to the possibility of a student dropping out of school is the presence of a sibling who has already dropped out, thus setting an example for the younger child. The next data set represents the number of my students who have a sibling who has dropped out of school. At the time of this interview five of my students had siblings who dropped out; two were not sure if their brother or sister dropped out, and fifteen did not have a sibling who dropped out.

Interview question #7: Do you have a sibling who dropped out of school?

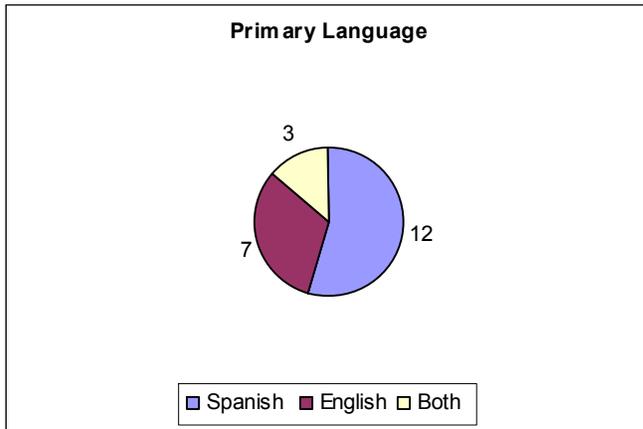


Has a sibling that has dropped out

	Yes	No	Not sure
	5	15	2

The last family characteristic I considered was the primary language spoken at home. This characteristic becomes a risk factor when the primary language is not English. More than half the class had a primary language other than English.

Interview question #8: What is the primary language spoken at home?

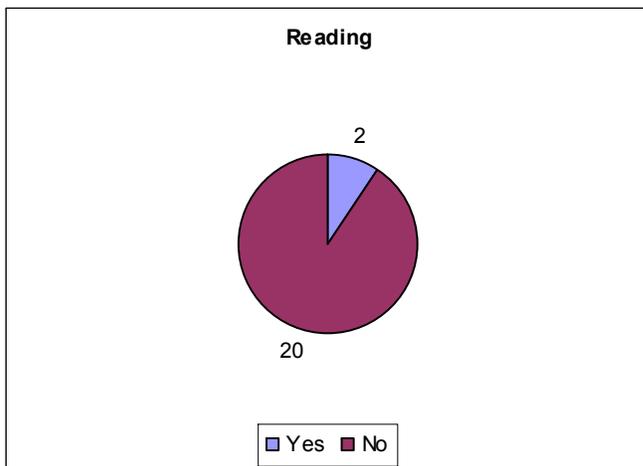


Language spoken at home

Spanish	English	Both
12	7	3

Other data collected included previous school experience, personal and psychological factors, such as reading for fun, whether the student thought they would graduate from high school, and whether they had ever been expelled from another school. By themselves, these risk factors are not among the most accurate when predicting who will drop out; however, when in combination with other factors, they may lead to dropping out.

Interview question #9: Do you read for fun? Two students said they read for fun.

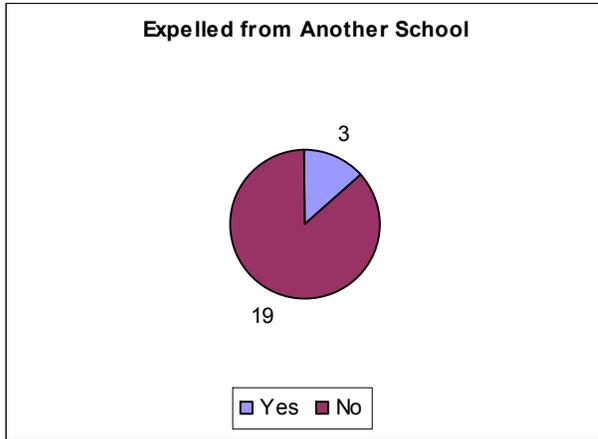


Read for fun

Yes	No
2	20

The next pie chart displays the findings for interview question #10. This question asked the students how many schools they attended in the past five years, which is an indicator of how many schools from which they may have been expelled. Three out of the twenty two students in my class have been expelled from a school.

Interview question #10: How many schools have you attended in the past five years

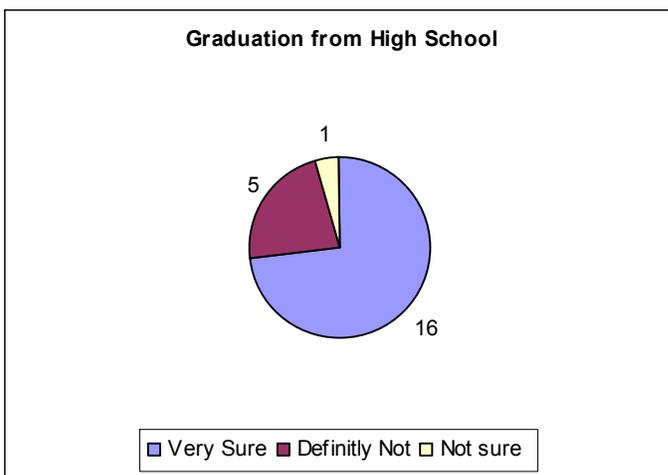


Expelled from other school

Yes	No
3	19

Five students did not feel they would finish high school. Although this does not mean they will not achieve this goal, it is an indicator as to their perception of their abilities, which could lead to giving up or feeling defeated, and so dropping out.

Interview question #11 How sure are you that you will finish high school?



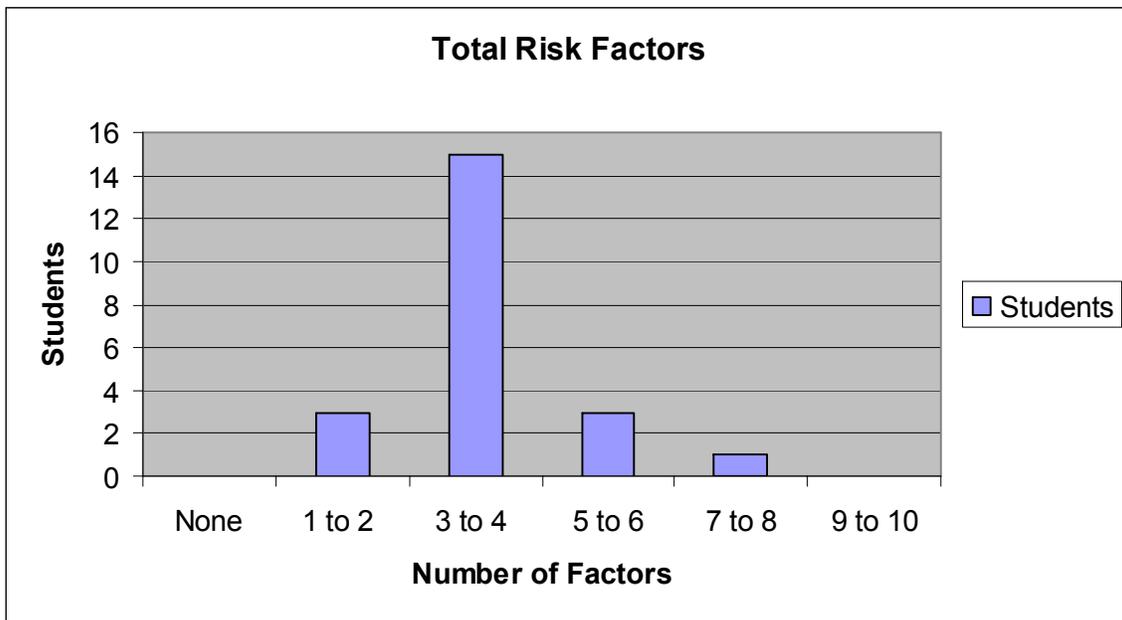
Expect to Graduate

Very Sure	Definitely Not	Not sure
16	5	1

The remaining questions from the interview had to do with ecological characteristics of the students and their peer relationships. I asked the students if they felt safe in their neighborhood. Three of the students stated they do not feel safe. They reported hearing gunshots and a lot of crimes in their area. Five of the students had friends who have already dropped out of school and gotten jobs. These factors, living in a poor area being surrounded by high concentration of dropouts have been linked to students dropping out themselves (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002).

Summary of Risk Factors

All of the twenty-two students studied had at least one risk factor, with most students displaying three to four risk factors. None had all ten factors, however, four student had more then five factors and one student exhibited eight risk factors that could lead to dropping out.



The first guiding task was to explore the risk factors of students who are likely to drop out of school. According to the above data, all of my students would be considered at risk, with varied degrees. To accurately answer this question it would require following students progress through high school and seeing if they graduate. For my purposes their data allow me to move into the next stage of my project.

In order to discuss the resulting answers to the next two questions, it is necessary to change the order they were initially introduced. I will first review the curriculum included and what data helped inform the creation of this curriculum. Following that, is a discussion of the results relevant to the effectiveness of the intervention.

What would a curriculum in career education look like?

Taking into account the literature I read on career education and my own knowledge of my students' skills and abilities, I designed the following six-week unit on career exploration. The following is a summarized version of this unit. All forms can be found in the appendix.

This six week unit should be used to introduce middle school students to careers they express interest in pursuing. Throughout this unit students will have the opportunity to express their own career interests, hear from someone in the career, explore the skills and abilities needed, present their own interpretation of a career and engage in other activities that will expose them to different careers. All materials, with the exception of the occupational videos and career aptitude test, can be found within this unit. It is highly recommended that planning, especially setting dates for guest speakers begins at least one month before it is to be completed.

Unit Objective: The students will understand what skills and abilities are required to obtain a number of different occupations. They will also discover that their education, present and future, is extremely relevant in the pursuit of all careers we explore. Finally, through inviting community members into the class, students will develop a sense that their community does care about them and their future.

Material: All forms are included in this unit. If the school district has a vocational or technical school, such as ROP (Regional Occupation Program) or BOCES, ask them for career introduction videos and career aptitude tests. Other places to procure these materials include: internet; video store; library video collection; or a local staffing agency. If video can not be found, replace this part of the exploration with a mini-lecture that summarizes the career. Once a list of careers is developed, contact the local chamber of commerce and work with them to contact the desired guest speakers. Also, ask students if any of their parents would like to come in and speak. One other resource for guest speakers is your school's community liaison or the person who arranges career day.

Procedure: The unit should begin with a whole class discussion as to the importance of education in reference to the students' future lives and occupations. Ask students if they think what they are learning is going to be relevant later in life. After this discussion, explain to students that they will, over the next six weeks, explore different careers. Further, explain that the objective in this exploration is to make real connections between what they are doing now and what they hope to do in the future. The following schedule is an example of how this intervention might proceed.

Pre-intervention Activities

- Introduce career exploration
- Develop a list of possible careers to explore
- Create a Bulletin Board with a place to list careers, skills and abilities, and a calendar for the entire unit
- Review procedures for each career (forms and activities)

Week One – Six

Day One

- Hand out KWL and Career Track Form (CTF)
- Show video or mini-lecture
- Review what students know about the career and what they want to know
- Develop appropriate questions for guest speaker

Day Two

- Review KWL and CTF
- Introduce guest speaker
- After speaker debrief what the student have learned
- Lead a whole class discussion as to how the skill and abilities they students are learning now may or may not help them in the future
- Add the Occupation to Bulletin Board and add any new skills and abilities to list
- Collect completed KWL and CTF

Day Three

- Quick write to review the previous day career

- Begin tying in skills and abilities to other lessons, for example:
 - Lang Arts: quick writes, poetry, fictional stories that include information covered by guest speaker or another career of interest.
 - Social Studies: research skills; find pay scales or local openings using the internet, communication skills could be worked in through presentations or group work
 - Math: use appropriate level math to explore careers, (pay, hours, years of college, etc.)

Day Four and Five

- If possible, visit places of interest to students

Post-intervention Activity

Have students' complete an assignment that ties in some of the information they learned during the six weeks. For example, I had students' write a five paragraph essay. They selected three of the careers we explored and described the skills and abilities needed to obtain that job along with how there current education is helping them gain those skills and abilities. I used the following pre-writing essay map to help students.

Name _____

Introduction: Write an essay that incorporates three of the careers you learned about during the last six weeks. Choose the three you enjoyed the most and describe the ways in which your education is helping you prepare for a career after school.

List the three careers: _____, _____, _____.

Introduction

Topic sentence: Open your essay with a sentence that lets the reader know exactly what your essay is about.

Three Careers: Write three sentences introducing the three careers you will be discussing.

Conclusion of you Introduction: Write a sentence that restates your purpose for writing this essay.

Second Paragraph: In this paragraph describe one of the careers you mentioned in your introduction and how you're being prepared for some parts of this career now.

Career _____

Skills and Abilities needed _____

What do you do now that helps you get better at the skill and abilities you mentioned above _____

Now put these things together in a paragraph:

Third Paragraph: In this paragraph describe one of the careers you mentioned in your introduction and how you're being prepared for some parts of this career now.

Career _____

Skills and Abilities needed _____

What do you do now that helps you get better at the skill and abilities you mentioned above _____

Now put these things together in a paragraph:

Third Paragraph: In this paragraph describe one of the careers you mentioned in your introduction and how you're being prepared for some parts of this career now.

Career _____

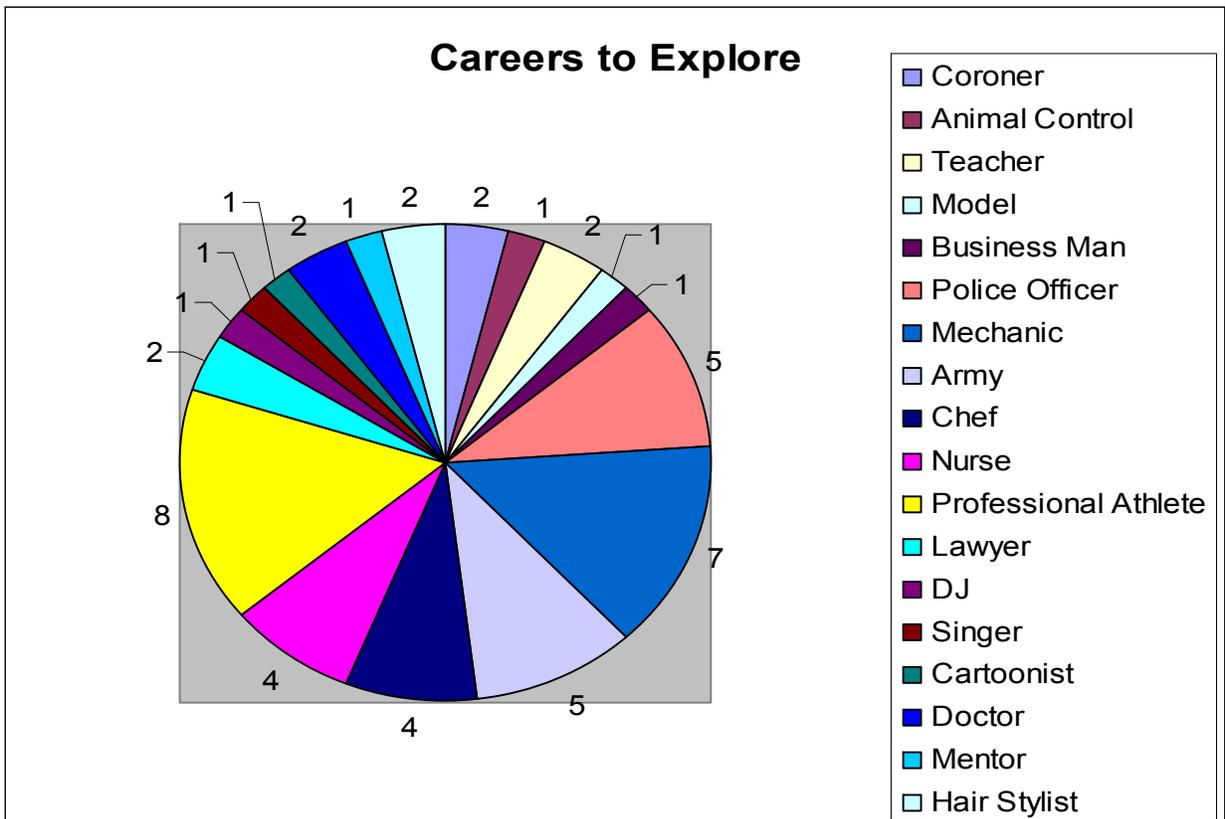
Skills and Abilities needed _____

What do you do now that helps you get better at the skill and abilities you mentioned above _____

Now put these things together in a paragraph:

Conclusion of essay: In this paragraph restate your main point or topic. Briefly restate your three careers and the reason education is important. End your essay with a statement that ties it all together. For example, "These are just a few of the possible careers one may pursue. For more information ask your teacher, parents, or research on the internet. The more you know the better chances you have of getting a job you like."

My decisions in shaping this unit were also influenced by the data I collected which reveal the students' career interests. The data were collected during the interview. The students were asked what type of occupation they would like to pursue after school and what type of careers would they like to explore in class? Some students had multiple answers. The following are the answers given for these questions. The six most popular careers were professional athlete, mechanic, army, nurse, police officer, and chef. The class agreed that our guest speakers should be based on these answers.



My last question in this section has to do with the effectiveness of the intervention. Their data was collected during the actual thirty day career exploration unit discussed above. This is relevant to my second question: Would a curriculum in career exploration decrease the chances of students dropping out? To answer this question, I returned to some of the risk factors discussed earlier, specifically attendance and discipline.

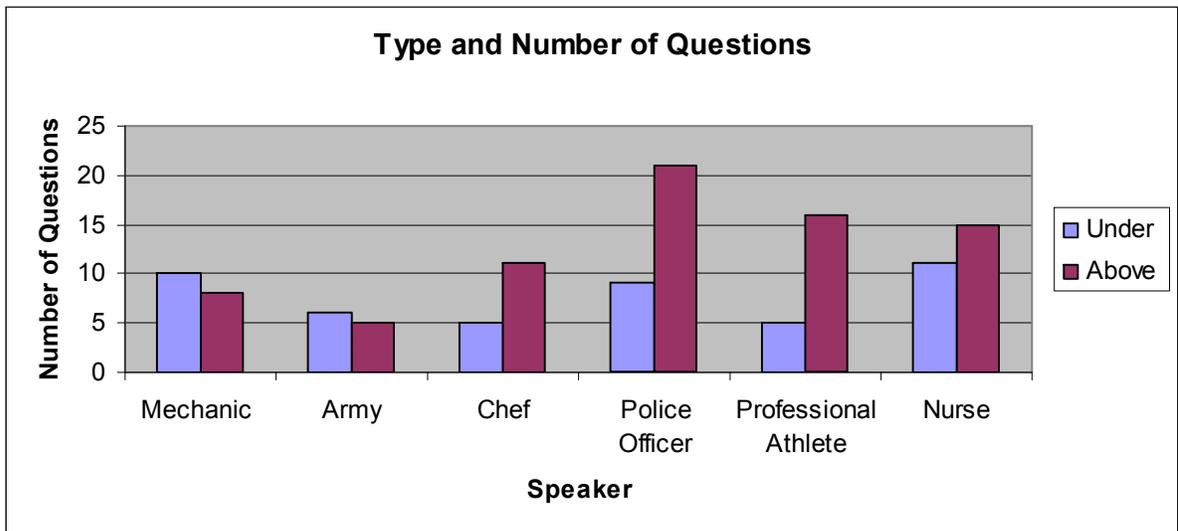
Class Observations: These results were collected during the guest speaker presentations. The class observation form (see appendix C) was used to collect the type and number of questions asked during a speaker. I also used the form to gather data as to the attentiveness of the students, attendance, and other participation. The students' questions were classified into two categories: under the surface or above the surface. Under the surface questions are in-depth and require more explanation than above the surface which usually can be answered with one word. The following are examples of the types of questions the students asked each speaker.

Under: more complex/ deeper understanding

Above: simple / less explanation

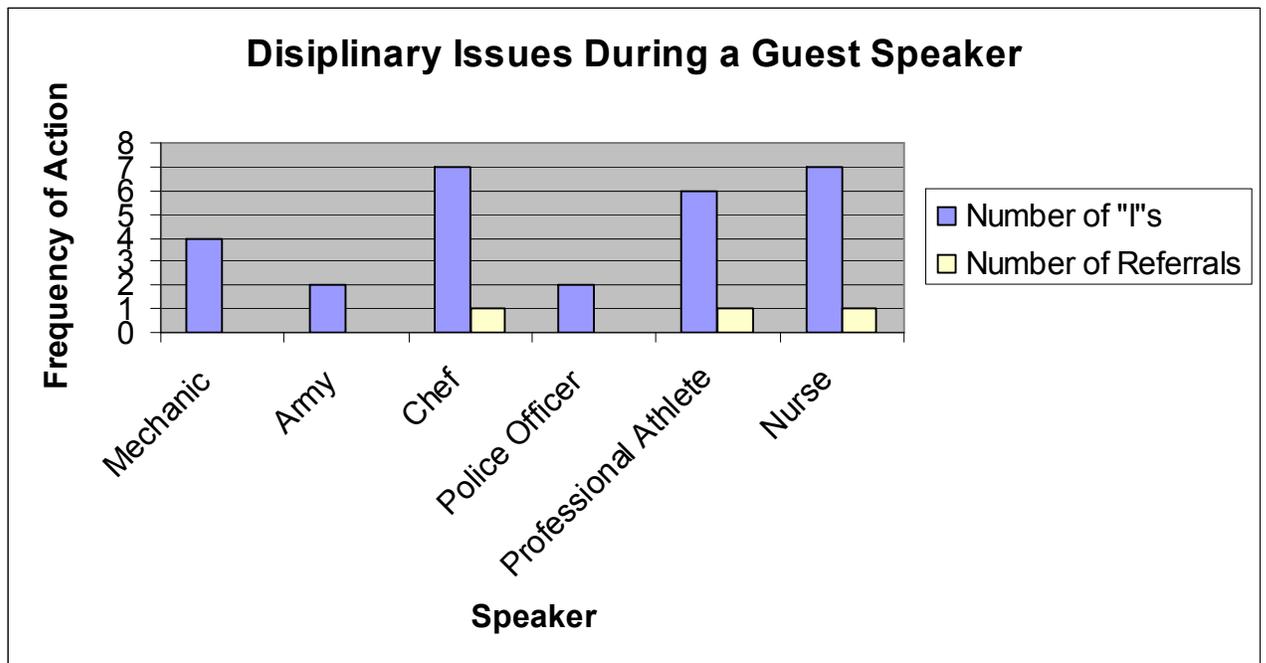
"What can I do now to prepare for the job"	"Where do you work"
"What do you think of the war in Iraq"	"Have you been to Iraq"
"How did your middle school and high school help you get this job"	"Have you ever burned yourself"
"How does it feel when you arrest someone? Do you like it"	"Have you ever shot someone"
"What are the chances I will be a professional athlete? What can I do now"	"How much do you make, or did you make"
"What are other types of nurses that you could be"	"Do you see a lot of blood"

The next graph shows the data collected during the guest speakers in respect to the type and number of questions. The guest speakers are in order of appearance from left to right. The graph shows a noticeable upward trend in the number of questions as the intervention proceeded, especially with the above the surface questions. The purpose of collecting their data was to show a level of engagement. Students asking more complex questions may indicate a greater level of engagement.



	Under the Surface	Above the Surface
Mechanic	10	8
Army	6	5
Chef	5	11
Police Officer	9	21
Professional Athlete	5	16
Nurse	11	15

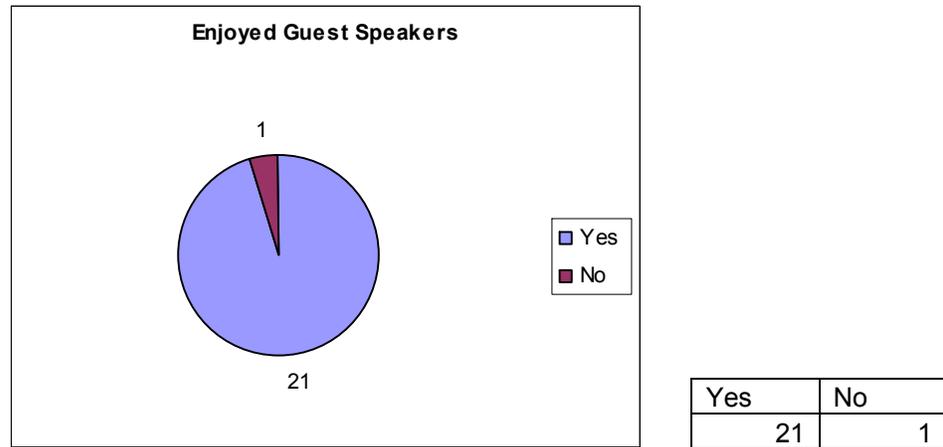
A student’s attentiveness was judged by their asking questions and being engaged in the presentation. The opposite was also noted. If a student was not engaged, it was noted on the class observation form. Students in this class receive “I”’s for any inappropriate behavior. The number of “I”’s was also noted on this form. The following series of graphs report the findings of these observations.



A possible reason for the sporadic distribution of “I”’s might be connected with the type of speaker, specifically the atmosphere they created. For example, the two guest speakers with the lowest number of “I”’s could be considered members of more authoritative occupations, police officer and an Army representative. However, an overall reduction in the number of referrals was noted earlier. This is significant when considering the students’ engagement and the value of the information being presented.

Exit Survey: The exit survey was used to gather data in respect to the students' perception of the intervention. It was given at the end of the intervention and was anonymous. The survey consisted of five questions and a Likert scale. Three of the questions required short answers, and two questions were simple yes and no answers. The following data displays the findings from this survey.

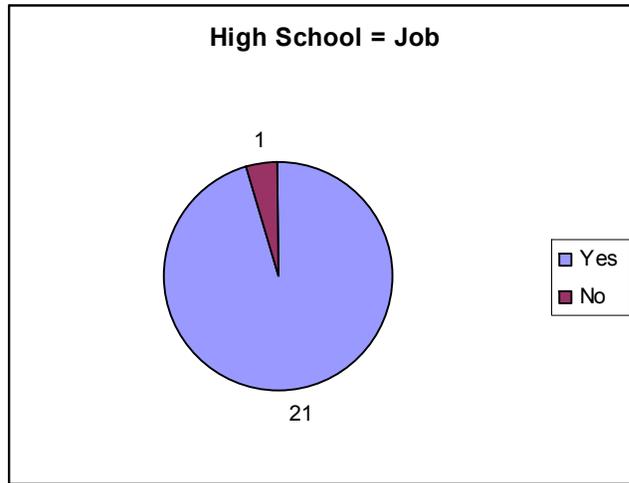
Question #1: Did you enjoy having guest speakers in your class, yes or no and explain why? Twenty one students answered yes to this questions and one student said no.



Question #2: Do you think school should incorporate more career awareness activities, why? All students answered yes to this question.

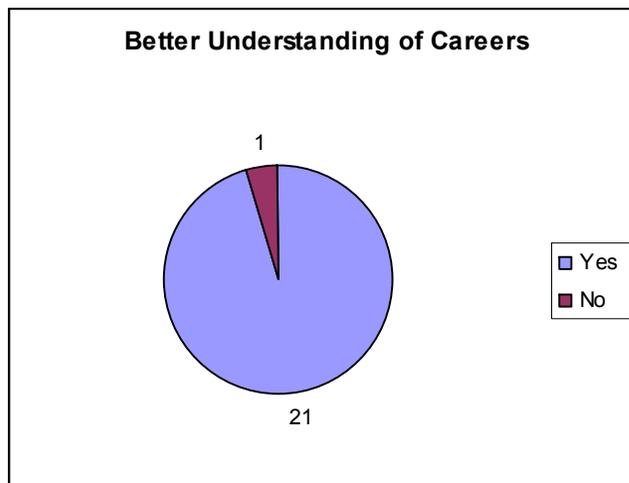
Question #3: What would you change about this project? All responses can be found in the appendix; however, all answers fell into the following categories: make it longer; more careers; go to the work place; more time for speakers; and no change.

Question #4: Do you think you need to finish high school to get the job you want? Twenty one students answered yes to this questions and one answered no.



Yes	No
21	1

Question #5: Do you think you have a better understanding of the skills and abilities you will need outside of school because you heard from the speakers? Twenty one students answered yes to this questions and one answered no.



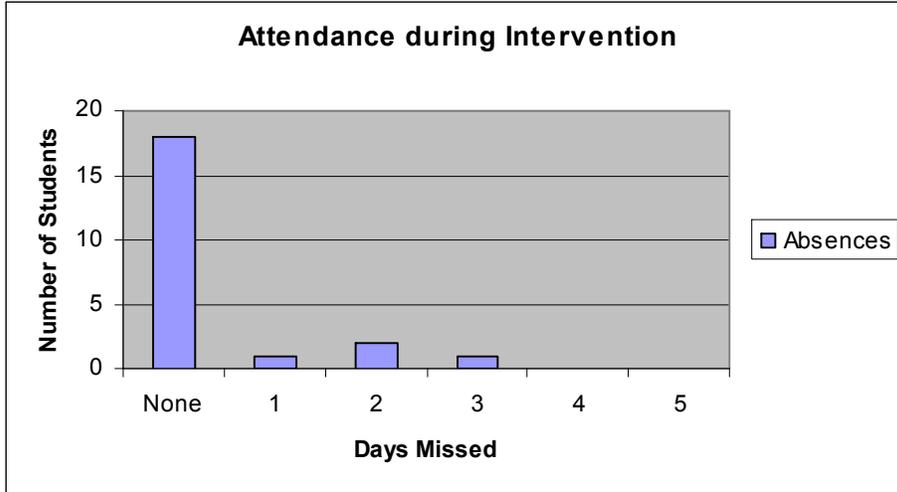
Yes	No
21	1

Likert Scale: This scale contained four statements about which the students were asked to agree or disagree. The students had the following choices; strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The following graph shows the students responses to this part of the exit interview.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I think the information we cover in school is going to help me after graduation	9	12		1
I think school should have more career ed?	18	1		1
Schools are meeting the needs of all students	2	2	15	3
School is relevant to my needs	3	2	12	2

All but one student either agreed or strongly agreed with the first two statements. These statements show the students’ feelings on the idea of career education in school. They feel it is relevant and there should be more. On the next two statements, the majority of the students disagreed with and indicated dissatisfaction with the way the system is right now. Eighteen students believed school is not meeting the needs of all students and fourteen believed school is not relevant to their needs.

The next set of data includes my findings for attendance during the thirty (30) day intervention. This time period is part of the 114 days in 2005-06 for which I collected attendance data.



30 Day Intervention	None	1	2	3	4	5
Days Missed	100%	96%	93%	90%	87%	84%
Students	18	1	2	1	0	0

It should be noted that their data are drawn from a shorter period of time. When comparing their data to that of the yearly attendance, it is helpful to look at the percentages rather than the actual days missed. During the intervention, 18 students were in attendance 100% of the time and 4 missed at least 1 day. All 22 students were present at least 90% of the time during the intervention compared to 19 students during the 2005-06 school year. During the 2004-05 school year, 5 out of the 22 students were present at least 90% of the time. This shows an increase in attendance from one school year to the next and especially during the intervention.

All of the data discussed above were used to inform my understanding of the three questions that guided this action thesis. Through this process, it became clear to me that in fact a considerable amount of additional research would be necessary to fully answer

the questions. However, even with these limitations, the data collected during this project do have implications that are important to teachers, parents, and administrators. I will address these issues and return to my original guiding questions to determine the extent to which my questions were answered.

Discussion

The April 17th, 2006 cover of TIME calls the United States a Dropout Nation, and claims that 30% of American students will leave before they finish high school (Thornburgh, 2006). This is an alarming number of students. A solution to this problem should be at the heart of future education policy. This project was an attempt to address this problem in a small class setting. The purpose of this action research was to examine the effects of incorporating a curriculum in career exploration with at-risk students. More specifically, it asked whether such a curriculum would lead to an increased desire for at-risk students to stay in school. I was interested in finding a way to increase the “buy in” factor of my students, and at the same time allow them to make the connection between what they are doing now, and their future.

In many schools across the nation students’ choices in classes are narrowing, especially in high poverty areas and schools with high concentrations of minorities (Kaufhold, 1998; Kohn, 2000). This is certainly the case at my school where many students must double up on language and math classes at the expense of humanities and electives. As students’ choices are eliminated and more emphasis is placed on standardized tests, the likelihood of students dropping out increases, especially for at risk students (Burrow, 1992). Since it is not likely that the system will change in the near future, I set out to work within it and provide an easy to use, practical curriculum that would expose students to possible career choices. The curriculum included surveying students’ career goals and exploring those where they expressed interest. During the six-week career exploration unit, we held class discussions, watched videos, researched, had guest speakers, among other things in order to expose students to the careers. During this

intervention I collected data on attendance, attentiveness, behavior and career interests of the students.

Guiding Questions

As I moved through this project three questions guided my research. Each question had a purpose; and I could not have moved to the next question without having considered the previous one. My first question pertained to the characteristics of at risk students. Second, I considered what could be done to decrease the risk of these students dropping out of school. Finally, I set out to find examples of best practice when creating a program design to introduce careers exploration.

In considering the first question, I quickly realized that I needed be specific in my use of the term “at risk”. In this project, I use this term to refer to a student who is at risk of dropping out of school. As I moved through the research done by other scholars, teachers, and administrators, it became clear that there is no easy answer or any one solution to the dropout crisis our nation faces. It is equally difficult to determine who will drop out of school. However, some authors have developed lists of risk factors that could lead to students leaving school before graduation (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Finn, 1989). These authors agreed that possible factors included students living in poverty, having discipline issues, coming from single parent households, having siblings/friends who dropped out, low parent graduation rate, and low academic skills. I used these to develop questions for a student interview. The results of the interview clearly showed that all of my students had multiple risk factors. This part of my research is limited to simply knowing that my students exhibit these factors, not necessarily that they will drop out of school. Further research could include following these students to high school and

tracking their completion rate. Also, a wider list of factors could be used, one that includes factors that the students themselves thought put them at risk. Even with a wider array of risk factors one can not predict who will dropout. A student could exhibit none of these factors and yet dropout because of a family emergency or other unforeseen circumstances. Conversely, a student could exhibit all of the factors and graduate with honors. For the purposes of this study, I identified my students having multiple risk factors, and thus could move onto my next question; what can be done to increase their desire to stay in school?

In researching successful intervention programs for at risk students, two features were consistently present. One was that the curriculum needs to be relevant to the students' lives and desires. The second characteristic was the presence of some sort of career or vocational education (Finn, 1989; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Rumberger, 2001). These characteristics seemed to be at the heart of most programs, and so they were included my intervention. My students do not have electives or any sort of extracurricular activities. Their choices are narrowed to the core courses. It is my opinion, as well as that of many authors I read, that this will increase their likelihood of dropping out. When teaching, I try to make the curriculum relevant to the students lives, although I think this helps, it is not a substitute for the students being able to choose what they will learn and at the same time realize the importance of school.

In this era of high stakes testing, it is difficult for a teacher to take time to do something "extra" or that is not in the standards. One of the negative effects of this is that students loose out on experiences that might expand their notion of the world. Further, there is the possibility that they will think they are not part of their educational

process and that others are making the decisions for them. Keeping this in mind, I set out to design a curriculum in career exploration that was effective in introducing the careers but also simple enough to be used by most teachers. Reading literature pertaining to developing a curriculum in career exploration, I found many suggestions, ranging from complex reorganization of schools to infusing career education into the current system.

My project included a six week introduction to careers. Each week we examined a different career. We started with an introduction video and class discussion, then heard from a guest speaker in the profession, followed up with writing assignments and/or debriefing exercises. This protocol was repeated each week. At the end of six weeks the students wrote an essay as a culminating activity.

The interview that I used to determine risk factors was also used to gain an insight into my students' career interests. Once the interview was complete, I had the information I needed to make decisions with respect to what careers the class would explore. Using the school community liaison and the local chamber of commerce as connections to businesses and people in our community, I contacted the most popular careers. This part of the project was unexpectedly easy, and people from the community were extremely willing to give time and resources to help with the project. As discussed earlier, I observed students during the speakers and found several interesting trends in the data. On average, the number of referrals decreased significantly during the intervention when compared to the previous year. This infers the students were not misbehaving during the speakers and implies they were interested. Conversely, it suggests that they were not so engaged in their classes last year. There was also an increase in attendance during the intervention, another indicator that the students might have found this

experience more rewarding, and influenced their decision to attend school. I do believe that the increase in attendance and lower disciplinary problems suggests that the students found the intervention useful, rewarding, and relevant. The goal was to keep the students in school, keep them interested and provide a connection to the real world, a goal that I believe was achieved.

Two other indicators observed during the intervention were the number “I”’s the students received and the number of questions they asked. A student receives an “I” for any inappropriate behavior. During the intervention the student received far fewer “I”’s than during regular class time. Also, the students asked more questions, especially complex questions, than they do normally. These factors suggest students were engaged in a way that they are not during normal class.

After the intervention, I gave the students an opportunity to express their views of the career exploration unit. I gave them an exit survey with four questions and a Likert scale with four statements. Twenty-one of the twenty two students had favorable opinions of the intervention. Based on the responses to the exit survey, I think it can be said that they would like to engage in this sort of activity all year long. This project was a modification of the students’ normal schedule, one that could not be changed too much. It was limited in time and depth. A more in-depth intervention would, I believe, yield even greater results in student engagement.

I believe this action thesis has implications for other teachers, administrators and policy makers. Although simple in its nature and execution, it shows an obvious connection between students’ perceptions of school and their willingness to show up to classes. As the curriculum becomes narrower, it excludes more students and decreases

the overall number of students who find school relevant. Not all students are meant to, or desire to, continue their education in college. Their skills and abilities are not being met by the standardized curriculum found in many schools. This project looked at the effect of career exploration. However, any student driven topic could be used to spark student interest, keep them in school, and help them understand the importance of education. Teachers need to leave time for this sort of activity; in the long run it will provide far greater results than “teaching to the test.” Administrators who are struggling to keep students in school might try to provide curriculum that is closely tied to the students’ interests and see their daily attendance increase. This is not a new concept. Teachers know that students work better when they part of their educational process. However, making students part of the process, in many ways, runs contrary to the current reform effort of standardized tests and “canned” curriculum.

In looking back on the different aspects of this project I can say the one thing I will certainly implement to future classes is the interview, not in the formal way it was completed for this project, but the idea of sitting with each student and talking about life. I gained a depth in understanding and appreciation that I have not had for any group of previous students.

At the heart of this study was the notion that we as teachers have in many ways removed ourselves from the student. Unfortunately, if curriculum decisions continue to be made by people who are furthest from the students, not in the classroom, and do not take into account the students interests the dropout rate will continue to increase. I look forward to continuing my research as I attempt to find ways to incorporate the interests of

students into my classroom. This project, I believe, is proof that such endeavors will yield inquisitive, productive, and satisfied students.

References

- Arrington, K. (2000). Middle grades career planning programs. *Journal of Career Development, 27*(2), 103 -109.
- Burrow, J. (1992). Responding to at-risk students. *Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education, 15*(1), 28 - 35.
- Castellano, M., Stringfield, S., Stone, J., & Lewis, M. (2002). *Career and technical education reforms and comprehensive school reforms in high schools: Their impact on education outcomes for at-risk youth* (Information Analyses). Columbus: National Dissemination Center for Career and Technical Education.
- Cathleen Benning, R. B., Pam Sausaman. (2003). *Improving student awareness of careers through a variety of strategies*. Saint Xavier University.
- Dynarski, M., & Gleason, P. (2002). How can we help? What we have learned from recent federal dropout prevention evaluations. *Journal of Education for Students At-Risk, 7*(1), 43 - 69.
- Education, C. D. O. (2003). Dropouts by ethnicity, *Ed-Data*: California Department of Education: Educational Demographics Office.
- Education, O. O. E. A. S. (1998). Goals 2000: Reforming education to improve student achievement. Report to congress. In D. o. Education (Ed.).
- Education, U. S. D. O. (2001). Public high school dropouts and completers from common core data. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education: National Center for Educational Statistics.

- Ellenbogen, S., & Chamberland, C. (1997). The peer relations of dropouts: A comparative study of at-risk and not at-risk youths. *Journal of Adolescence, 20*, 355 - 367.
- Finch, C., & Mooney, M. (1997). *School to work opportunities in the middle school: Concepts and issues*. Berkeley: National Center for Research in Vocational Education.
- Finn, J. (1989). Withdrawing from school. *Review of Educational Research, 59*(2), 117 - 142.
- Finn, J., & Voelkl, K. (1993). School characteristics related to student engagement. *The journal of negro education, 62*(3), 249 - 268.
- Gleason, P., & Dynarski, M. (2002). Do we know whom to serve? Issues in using risk factors to identify dropouts. *Journal of Education for Students At-Risk, 7*(1), 25 - 41.
- Haveman, R. (1990). *The relation of educational attainment to childhood events and circumstances*. Madison: Institute for Research on Poverty.
- Ingels, S., Curtin, T., Kaufman, P., Alt, M., Chen, X., & Owings, J. (2002). *Coming of age in the 1990s: The eighth-grade class of 1988 12 years later*. Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Kaufhold, J. (1998). What wrong with teaching for the test. *The school administrator, 55*, 14-16.
- Kerka, S. (2000). *In brief: Fast facts for policy and practice*. Columbus: Office of Vocational and Adult Education.
- Kohn, A. (2000). Standardized testing and its victims. *Education Week, 20*(4), 46-60.

- Mills, G. (2003). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.
- Nancy Danley, C. W. (2002). Career education by design: Making it fit your school (pp. 1 - 11): Baldwin County Board of Education.
- Rumberger, R. (2001). Why students drop out of school and what can be done, *Dropouts in America: How Severe is the Problem? What Do We Know about Intervention and Prevention*. Harvard University.
- Soleil, G. (1999). Creating effective alternatives for disruptive students. *The Clearing House*, 73(2), 107 - 113.
- Thornburgh, N. (2006, April 17, 2006). Dropout nation. *Time*, 167, 30-40.
- Tidwell, R., & Garrett, S. (1994). Youth at risk: In search of a definition. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 72(4), 444.

Appendices

Appendix A

Student _____

Age: _____ Is the student overage for the grade? _____

<p>Information from records Attendance: _____ Free and Reduce lunch: _____</p> <p>Information from my observations Does little homework? _____ Disciplinary problems? _____</p> <p>Family Characteristics Do you live in a single parent home? Did your parents finish High School? Do you have a sibling who dropped out of school? What is the primary language spoken at home?</p> <p>Previous school experiences Do you read for fun? How many schools have you attended in the past five years?</p> <p>Personal and psychological How sure are you that you will finish High School? Do your parents talk to you about school? Have you thought about what type of occupation you would like to pursue?</p> <p>Ecological Characteristics Describe your neighborhood in terms of safety or Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Do you have any peers who have dropped out? If yes have they joined the workforce?</p>	<p>What type of job do you want to pursue after school?</p> <p>What skills do you think you will need to get this job?</p> <p>What are some other occupations your interested in pursuing?</p> <p>Do you think school helps prepare you for these jobs?</p> <p>What do you see as missing from school, classes, clubs, etc.</p>
---	---

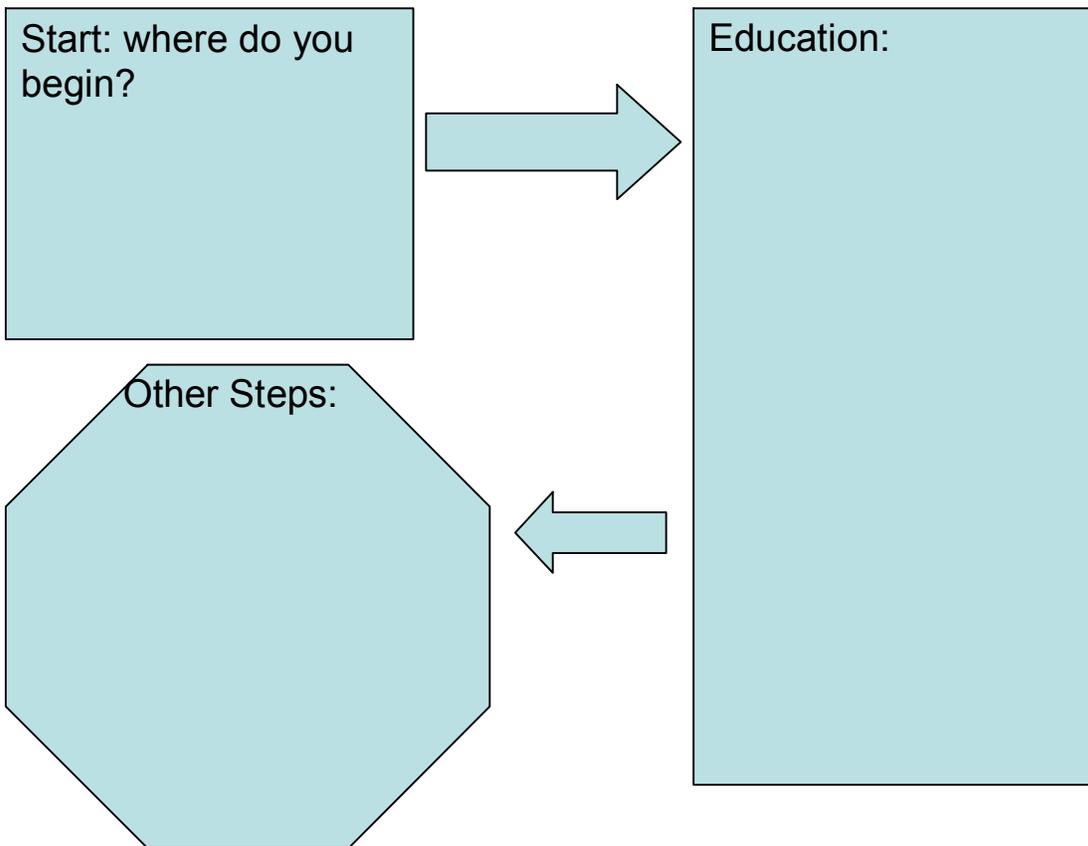
Appendix B

Name _____ Occupation _____ Date _____		
Know What Learn		
What do you already know about this career?	What do you want to know about this career?	What did you learn about this career?
	Education	
	Skills	

Appendix C

Name _____ Career _____ Date _____

Career Track Form



Other Careers you could go into with similar education and skills:

Appendix D

Bryanna	Angel	Luis
Ruby	Mike	Abraham
Brianna	John J.	
Enrique	Ellena	
Diahna	Daniel	

Speaker
Date
Attendance
 P=present
Question Codes
 U=under surface
 A=above surface
Attentiveness
 O=other participation
 Notes will be made on students space

Appendix E

Exit Survey

Project

Did you enjoy having guest speakers in your class, yes or no and explain why?

Do you think school should incorporate more career awareness activities, why?

What would you change about this project?

Career Awareness

Do you think you need to finish high school to get the job you want?

Do you think you have a better understanding of the skills and abilities you will need outside of school because you heard from the speakers?

Circle a number on the scale that best fits

Question	Strongly Agree-----Strongly Disagree			
1) I think the information we cover in school is going to help me after graduation?	1	2	3	4
2) I think school should have more career education?	1	2	3	4
3) Schools are meeting the needs of all students	1	2	3	4
4) School is relevant to my needs, I see the purpose of school	1	2	3	4