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ON BEING A TRUANT:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF STUDENTS
IN A COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL

by

Diane Berger McClure

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
University of San Diego

1988

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1988

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ABSTRACT

Title: Being a Truant -- A Phenomenological Study

This dissertation was a phenomenological study of eight students in a comprehensive high school who exhibited symptoms of truancy. Student interviews, student journals, and field notes were examined and the content analyzed. Students who began to display a truancy pattern and who displayed symptoms of truancy in a previous school year were selected from a stratified random sample. Students were chosen to represent the ethnic and gender percentages of their school.

During the first instances of truancy, behavior modification steps which incorporated successful elements of major exemplary truancy programs, were assigned to students. Students not responding to such behavior modifications were interviewed and asked to maintain journals in which they introspectively addressed issues that result in truancy. The students' perceptions and experiences were the expert data on which the study was based. From this data, the phenomenon of truancy as it was defined by the subjects was analyzed through a narrowing process specific to phenomenological research.

After a review of the literature on the topic of attendance and truancy, it was determined that very little had been written to address the individual human element contained in the phenomenon of truancy. This dissertation

researched truancy from the truant's point of view. It was an attempt to humanize the definition of what it means to be a truant.

The findings of the study suggest that an absent/truant pattern identifies potential dropouts. In addition, an absent/truant pattern suggests that students are experiencing personal life problems, school related problems, or peer pressures. Each subject of this study displayed truant symptoms directly related to personal life problems, school related problems, or peer pressures. At times, students experienced combined influences. This research suggests that school officials should closely monitor truancy patterns and identify individual problems if dropout prevention is to become a reality.

DEDICATION

For my mother and father

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CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Introduction

The 1987 Gallup Poll indicated that one concern of the American public was student attendance. Historically, student attendance in schools was a concern of 3 percent of the people polled in 1986 and increased to 6 percent of those polled in 1987. This concern was echoed in other significant research on student attendance (King, 1978; Levin, 1972; Steinberg, Blinde & Chan, 1984).

Keeping track of attendance became a highly technological process (Chase, 1985) with the increased use of microcomputers. Use of microcomputers has led to some districtwide information systems that have produced accurate printouts of a student's attendance pattern in moments (Pupil Accounting, 1987). As a result, students with poor attendance pattern were identified immediately.

Importance of the Study

This phenomenological study was not intended to produce any definitive suggestion to decrease truancy. In the case of each of the students in this study, the student's perception of truancy was being presented. The definition and perception of truancy was to be seen through the student's eyes.

Truancy or problems with attendance were identified as the major symptoms displayed by students prior to dropping out of or leaving school (Barr & Knowles, 1986; Natriello, 1986). Coastal Unified School District, the school district used in this study ranked attendance as the number one factor in leaving school. In a 1982-83 survey, student leavers were asked to rate 15 decision factors that were important in their decision to leave school. Of these factors, attendance ranked number one and ranged from 69 percent to 70 percent of the responses. The California State Department of Education has defined a dropout as:

Any student who has been enrolled in grade 10, 11, or 12 but who left school prior to graduation or the completion of a formal education or legal equivalent, and who did not within 45 school days, enter another public or private educational institution or school program, as documented by a written request for a transcript from that institution. (California Roundtable, 1986. p. 1)

Coastal Unified School District experienced a dropout rate of 10.8 percent in the 1986-87 school year, based upon 2,700 dropouts out of 24,847 enrolled in grades 10-12. Southern California High School, the four year comprehensive high school used in this study, had a dropout rate of 9.5 percent based upon 157 dropouts out of an enrollment of 1,800 students in grades 10-12. In 1985-86, 1986-87, and

the first months of the 1987-88 school year, in each documented case of exempted students, an attendance problem in the form of truancy was listed as a criterion for being exempted and leaving school.

Crain (1984) discovered that business was more interested in the attitudes and habits of potential employees than in their academic skills. The Committee for Economic Development wrote, "If schools tolerate excessive absenteeism, truancy, tardiness, or misbehavior, we cannot expect students to meet minimum performance or behavior either in school or as adults (Natriello, 1986, p. 309). Steinberg, Blinde & Chan (1984) stated,

Dropping out of school is associated with an array of individual and social costs . . . limited occupational and economic prospects, disenfranchisement from society and its institutions, and substantial loss of personal income over his or her lifetime. Premature school leaving is associated with increased expenditures for government assistance to individuals and families, higher rates of crime, and maintenance of costly programs for purposes such as employment and training.

Schools are funded by the state of California based upon reports of nonapportioned absences or average daily attendance (ADA). Nonapportioned absences are those absences that are uncleared (unexcused) or truant. Apportioned and nonapportioned absences are calculated every

four week accounting period and forwarded to the State Department of Education. Funds for school operation at a certain dollar amount per child based upon the reported apportioned (cleared) absence rate are sent to the school districts.

For example, the Coastal Unified School District Attendance Report for 1985-86 (see Appendices A and B for comparisons) reported a loss of \$5,325,269. High schools in Area A reported \$3,330,113 of that loss. Southern California High School's year end rate was responsible for \$151,538 of Area A's loss (Pupil Accounting, 1987 pp. 10).

Reports, research, and programs have calculated money loss, but these reports have not calculated the loss of human resources, loss of students (dropouts), and the loss of human potential in the work force. What is truancy? How does truancy begin? Who defines truancy? From whom does one obtain accurate data to explain truancy? How does one conduct meaningful research to define truancy?

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this dissertation was to phenomenologically collect the experience of eight students in an attempt to understand the phenomenon of truancy--to understand the phenomenon as it was experienced and interpreted by the truant student. Since dropouts first displayed a pattern of truancy, such experiences may be used

by school districts and educational organizations to address the problem of dropouts. With this purpose in mind the perceptions of students were used to phenomenologically define truancy. In conducting such a study, it was hoped that information could be gathered through semistructured interviews. The subjects were asked what it felt like to be a truant and were asked to react introspectively to such underlying questions as, A. Who am I?; B. How do I feel about being a truant?; C. How do I see myself?; D. How do others see me? Information from a variety of interviews as well as from oral and written assignments was gathered to answer the following research questions.

1. In the perceptions of these students, what occurred in their personal life to produce truancy?

2. In the perceptions of these students, what school related elements occurred during this school year to produce truancy?

3. In the perceptions of these students, what peer pressures occurred during this school year to produce truancy?

From this data, the researcher would answer the following question:

What can the perceptions of the students in this phenomenological study add to the understanding of absenteeism/truancy that has not been addressed in the

predominantly quantitative research conducted prior to this study?

This study produced some student perceptions of truancy. In using a phenomenological study of these six students, a definition of truancy was developed and some experiences and personal motives were revealed. The student sample was kept small as prescribed by phenomenological research methods. It was not the intention of the researcher to test any hypothesis for broader generalization in the field of truancy. It was not the intention to list causes of truancy. It was not the intention to list conclusions to be applied to truancy studies. The study accepted as valid data the feelings, perceptions, experiences, and motives of students who displayed a truant pattern.

Information from this study may help to provide educators with ideas for interventions in working with potential dropouts. Districts and community support groups are beginning to collect baseline data in dealing with dropouts. At present many different methods are being tried as no one method has yet proven to be successful. Insights from this study may help in counseling truants, students with absentee problems, or potential dropouts. As stated earlier, no study has investigated the perceptions of the truant. The findings of this study may prove to be a basis for further qualitative study of truants so that the problem

can be analyzed from a different perspective--a perspective that may produce individual reflection rather than external intervention.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used in this study. Coastal Unified School District and Southern California High School policies and procedures were used as sources for these definitions.

Absenteeism: A chronic pattern of unexcused absences that has developed over the school year.

Apportioned Absences: Student absences that are excused by the parent or guardian due to student's illness or personal emergency.

Attendance Record: Dates of absences and attendance as seen on a computer screen or hard copy that represents a student's attendance.

Computerized Attendance: The use of an Epson computer, hard disc, and networking system in conjunction with an attendance software package that tracks, records, and reports student attendance.

Dropout: A student who leaves school and whose school records are not requested by another educational institution within 45 days.

Student: A person, age 13-18, who is attending a comprehensive high school with grades 9-12.

Truancy: Absences that occur during the individual periods or days without the consent or knowledge of the school and/or parent/guardian.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Topics of attendance, truancy, and the problem of dropouts have been presented in this review of literature. Literature dealing with the topic of methodology and phenomenology has been presented in the chapter on methodology.

Literature on the topic of attendance or truancy was limited. As an example, only seventeen citations were found from two ERIC searches. These citations did not fit into any specific category, theme, or historical perspective. Some literature that contained references to attendance emphasized the sound educational necessity for good attendance.

Other research dealt with attendance after it had developed into a dropout problem. Although this research contained corroborating attendance information, it did not provide substantive answers to address attendance problems. Most attendance research occurred in the form of unpublished data, computations, and reports of school districts. Discussion of this data was included in this review of literature as specific, supportive information to the literature cited.

In the review of literature, two areas of research were discussed. First, a review of the major reform reports was presented. This discussion also cited what California Senate Bills 81 and 813 said about attendance. Secondly, literature published as it pertained to attendance and truancy was presented. Researchers such as Duckworth and deJung (1986) investigated reasons for truancy. Crain and Minkler (1980) addressed the sociological implications of a truant pattern. This area of research also contained references as reported by school districts. Information in school district statistical reports may not be considered literature, but these district reports provided current data essential to understanding the most recent issues of attendance and truancy.

In summary, literature about attendance and truancy was limited. Research was a result of piecing together authors, districts, or researchers who addressed an issue, a problem, or a dynamic of the attendance topic. Gaps and inconsistencies occurred in the attendance/truancy literature.

Truancy in The Major Reform Reports

The major reform reports were included to acknowledge the nation wide emphasis on good attendance. They were included as a basis to the attendance study. In a review of

sixteen major reform reports, only six made reference to attendance.

The Education Commission for the States (1983) encouraged schools to launch programs to reduce student absenteeism. The report alluded to a basic employment skill of punctuality and attendance and encouraged local and state school systems to establish firm, explicit, and demanding requirements concerning discipline, attendance, and other essentials of effective schooling. This concept of demanding requirements was supported by specific attendance literature (Crain, 1984; King, 1978; Levin, 1972; Steinberg). The Forum of Educational Organization Leaders (1982) stated that a high level of attendance determined by the local community should be required for promotion or graduation.

The California Roundtable, an organization of senior business executives, sponsored a six-month study to examine how well California students were being prepared for college and work, how secondary education could be improved, and what role business should play in that effort. The report (1982) suggested that businesses encourage the revision of state law to increase penalties for truancy, strengthen school attendance services, and mandate school-by-school reporting of attendance and dropout rates. The report recommended that each state and community establish a

broadly based community program to help solve the dropout problem.

Senate Bill 81 (1983) stated, "Districts must notify parents of a truant, explaining the parents' legal rights and programs available. . . . Districts may adopt policies that permit teachers to fail students for excessive unexcused absences." Carruthers (1980) and McClure (1977) encouraged withholding or reducing the grades of students as the same type of deterrent. The Senate Bill did not support such withholding or reduction of grades. Senate Bill 813's provisions encouraged Santa Maria Union High School district to implement reform efforts. These efforts, especially in the area of discipline policy, were used to formulate their "major discipline policy" (Santa Maria, 1983) in which attendance monitoring and truancy sweeps were included.

These reports and Senate Bills 81 and 813 were not the vanguard in stating any new understandings about attendance. The reports contained information that added perspective and substantive support to the importance of researching attendance.

Attendance and Truancy Literature

Historically, emphasis on attendance improvement centered around a financial crisis. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, federal, state, and local reactions of taxpayers and voters expressed a mandate to cut taxes. In

part, this mandate was due to the political realignment patterned by the conservative climate of the Reagan administration. In addition to other positioning moves, the passage of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 reduced categorical aid to the states, which placed funding of schools in the hands of the state budgets (Gallup & Clark, 1987). Proposition 13 and other related policies reduced funds to schools. California legislators and educators began to look for creative ways to fund education.

One source of funding for local districts "to increase financial support for the education of our students" was to "reduce student nonapportioned absences by 25 percent during the 1980-81 school year as compared to the nonapportioned absences for 1979-80" (Attendance Study, p. 1). Other states and districts began to address attendance for the same purpose (deJung & Duckworth, 1986; Duckworth & deJung, 1986; Hakanen, 1980; New York Study, 1985; Santa Maria, 1983; Sweetwater, 1982). As an illustration, the officials in Sweetwater Union High School District computed the individual loss of revenue to the district and stated that their lost revenue could fund a 2.8 percent pay raise for employees, or fund the entire athletic and extracurricular programs of the district.

Many researchers stated that attendance is vital to education and has social, and economic implications both for

the individual and for society (King, 1978; Levin, 1972; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984). Kandel (1984) stated that educational leaders should examine to what extent school absenteeism and dropout rates affect performance in other roles in the later life cycle. Crain (1984) discovered in research that "business is more interested in the attitudes and habits of potential employees than in their academic skills" (p. 309). This supported Kandel's (1984) research on roles in the later life cycle.

Researchers were constrained because quantitative analysis showed no significant decrease in attendance when a standard truancy deterrent program was applied to model programs. (Minkler, 1980; New York Study, 1986, Rodgers, 1980). Most quantitative researchers used analysis of variance, trend analysis, predictor variables and "student attitude, survey, questionnaires, and data reflected statistically" (Frankel, 1968, p. 11) to illustrate success in decreasing attendance problems (Frankel, 1968; White & Peddie, 1978).

Studies that used qualitative methods were case studies, interviews, and longitudinal studies. These dealt with follow up analysis of truant students. The qualitative study of deJung & Duckworth (1986) listed some reasons students gave for not attending school. Barr and Knowles (1986), the only other qualitative study found in the literature research, addressed the issue of attendance only

in a reflective look from the point of view of the dropout. Conclusions from the deJung and Duckworth study did not support findings of the Barr and Knowles study. DeJung and Duckworth attributed student absences to reasons such as class size, subject difficulty, teacher and grading. They stressed absence control, whereas Barr and Knowles attributed student absences to social, personal and school related influences.

The Teacher's College Record for the Spring of 1986 was entirely devoted to school dropouts. National, state, and local researchers investigated the dropout problem (Barr and Knowles, 1986; Friedman, Ibanez, & Schulman, 1984; Hefez, 1980; New York Study, 1985; Pupil Accounting, 1987; Strother, 1987).

Unpublished school district attendance reports, displayed in the form of statistical computations, were summaries of attendance figures and the calculation of dollar loss due to nonapportioned absences. These reports were used for the creation of district databases as well as for comparison figures in attendance studies.

Pertinent attendance information was found in an article by Wehlage & Rutter (Natriello, 1986). Wehlage and Rutter cited the High School and Beyond Longitudinal Study in which a multivariate discriminant analysis was run. Each independent variable used for the analysis was tested to determine its statistical significance. The dropout was

characterized as one who had low expectations, low achievement/ability, low socioeconomic status, and low grades. Once the academic function was partialled out, new variables emerged as important predictors. Truancy was not only the highest predictor of these new variables, but truancy was the one variable that separated dropouts from stay-ins across all three racial groups.

Research in the area of programs to improve attendance followed a similiar pattern. Programs suggested that school officials should intensively monitor students to observe truancy patterns (Hankanken, 1980; Minkler, 1980; New York, 1985; Slaby, 1983; White & Peddie, 1978), should contact parents in a timely manner (Hanaken, 1980; Slaby, 1983; State Task Force, 1979), notify and involve school personnel and public service agencies (Hanaken, 1980; Minkler, 1980; Santa Maria, 1983; Cohen, 1977), and use increased strictness with more ambitious interventions for chronic truancy (Duckworth & deJung, 1986; Englander, 1986; Miller, 1986; Santa Maria, 1983; State Task Force, 1979).

In addition to these suggestions, the Attendance Study Committee (1982) referred to an NASSP study which in turn described successful attendance policies or programs as strong, broadly based in participation, clearly stated, publicized, consistently enforced, and having immediate contact with the home. Hoback (1981) argued that a successful program contains these attendance policies but

added that "the student must be given a feeling of being needed and wanted" (Hoback, 1981, p. 20). This fact was supported by research both published and unpublished (Attendance Study, 1980; Attendance Study, 1981; Englander, 1986; Miller, 1986; NASSP, 1979).

Some interesting conclusions that have been gathered from these studies were that boys were truant more often than girls (Duckworth & de Jung, 1986); potential truants were identified from primary school records (White & Peddie, 1978); truancy patterns occurred during certain times of the week and times of the year (Billington, 1978); and a therapeutic versus nontherapeutic discipline program for truancy generated a less positive attitude from students but improved attendance and provided insight into attendance problems (Miller, 1986).

Most research literature dealt with a quantitative analysis of the problem of truancy. Very little research had been attempted through a qualitative approach. This study was designed to research truancy in a qualitative manner presented from the subject's perspective on truancy.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The phenomenological approach was chosen for two reasons. First, the experts with the information were the students. As both Borg and Gall (1983) and Denzin (1978) stated, phenomenology requires the researcher to develop the perspective of the group studied to adopt the insider's viewpoint. It was the researcher's belief that students who were truant had the perspective and knowledge needed to define the symptoms of truancy. Computer printouts and counselors identified truants, but only the truants can provide information from the truant's viewpoint on why truancy occurred.

Secondly, although structured interviews, surveys, and data have been collected on the topic of truancy, absenteeism, and dropping out, very few studies have been conducted using a phenomenological approach. The review of the literature illustrated the lack of phenomenological studies in the area of education and specifically in the area of attendance and truancy.

There were two research methods available to the researcher, the quantitative approach or the qualitative approach. Some researchers and authors used language that illustrated preference for one method or another (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Some scholars emphasized the need to

perform both types of research as a means of triangulation (Jick, 1979). Mouly (1963) differentiated research into historical, survey, and experimental. He stated that not just one method should be used in education research. He was supported by Huck (1974) who described a fishnet model proposed for future research. Guba (1981) argued that one is in gross error to equate the scientific paradigm with quantitative methods and the naturalistic paradigm with qualitative methods.

Some researchers and authors found that each method had its own audience, its own arena, and its own preferred technique (Smith, 1970). These researchers claimed that qualitative methods of case study, historical study, ethnography, phenomenology, and participant observation were the preferred methods of the social sciences (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Jacob, 1987; Lawrence, 1967). As Kirk and Miller (1986) stated,

Qualitative research is a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms . . . The term "qualitative" identifies the absence or presence of something, in contrast to "quantitative" which involves measuring the degree to which something is present . . . On the other hand, quality connotes the nature, as opposed to the "quantity" or amount of a

thing. According to this equally limited consideration, qualitative research would denote any research distinguished by the absence of counting . . . qualitative research does imply commitment to field activities . . . not to innumeracy. Qualitative research is empirical, socially located phenomenon, defined by its own history, not simply a residual grab-bag comprising all things that are "not quantitative." Its diverse expressions include analytical induction, content analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, elite interviewing, . . . certain archival, computer, and statistical manipulations.

A Phenomenological Definition

The literature defined qualitative research as an array of interpretive techniques to come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of naturally occurring phenomenon (Van Maanen, 1979), through direct research (Mintzberg (1979) and a wide range of techniques (Jacob, 1987; Sanday, 1979). According to Tesch (1984),

Specifically, phenomenological research accumulates knowledge on the range of the individual, the specific, the unique. Its purpose is to probe into the richness of the human experience and to illuminate the complexity of the individual perception and action against the background of our knowledge of the general laws or regularities in human nature. (p. 26)

Tesch stated that the focus of phenomenological research was on the individual experience. Phenomenological research procedures followed two principles of phenomenological philosophy. The first principle was to explore the things in themselves. The second principle was to treat the person who had the experience as the expert in that experience.

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984):

The phenomenologist is committed to understanding social phenomenon from the actor's own perspective. He or she examines how the world is experienced

The phenomenologist seeks understanding through qualitative methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and others that yield descriptive data. In contrast to a natural science approach, the phenomenologist strives for what Max Weber (1968) called *verstehen*, understanding on a personal level the motives and beliefs behind people's actions (p. 2).

Phenomenological Methods

The Interview

The interview is the major data collection method used in phenomenology. The literature research showed support for the semistructured (Borg and Gall, 1963; Jick, 1979),

emergent (Denzin, 1978; Jacob, 1987) flexible (Denzin, 1987), evolving (Erickson, 1986), unique from subject to subject (Guba, 1979) design for the interview. Borg and Gall (1963) stated that the advantage of this method was its relatively objective nature yet thorough understanding of respondent's opinions and reasons behind them. Kirk and Miller (1979) put it more directly: "Excessive standardization," referring to the attempt to validate through standardization, "deliberately abandons the attempt to discover things more accessible to some observers than to others" (p. 53). "The semistructured interview," according to Borg and Gall (1963) "is generally most appropriate for interview studies in education" (p. 442).

In recording the interview, the most common format was running notes (Miles, 1979) or field notes (Erickson, 1986; Kirk and Miller, 1986). Kirk and Miller (1986), Taylor and Bogdan (1984), and Whyte (1978) commented at length on observational and interview technique. Each author gave specifics and designs for a suggested fieldnote format. Spradley (1979) recommended four separate "kinds of field notes": the condensed (verbatim) account; an expanded account recorded as soon as possible after each field session; a "field work journal" that contained experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arose during field work; and a provisional running record of analysis and interpretation (p.13).

Portions of Spradley's techniques were supported by Miles (1979).

Erickson (1978) concurred with Spradley (1979) but warned of the extensive amount of time involved in writing up and transcribing these notes. Erickson also supported the use of audio and/or video taping in helping to transcribe notes.

The use of recording devices helped the researcher attend to more detail in data collection during any one observation. "Audio or audiovisual records of frequent and rare events . . . provide the researcher with the opportunity to revisit events vicariously through playback at later times" (Erickson, 1978). This technique according to Erickson was a way to reduce bias of premature typification and bias toward recurrent events.

Delineation of Meaning

Many authors in the field (Borg and Gall, 1963; Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1975; Hycner, 1982; Jacob, 1987; Keen, 1975; Miles, 1979; Rodgers, 1980) supported the delineation of unit of meanings (themes). The researcher was looking for key linkages--patterns of generalization within the case at hand, rather than for a generalization from one case to another (Erickson, 1986). Some authors referred to this as reduction or analytical induction (Denzin, 1978; Erickson, 1986; Mintzberg, 1979),

categorized, organized, and summarized data (Rodgers, 1980), semifinal drafts of interpretations (Miles, 1979), and observations divided into units, predetermined coding categories (Jacob, 1987).

The phenomenological result of these delineation of units was to understand, not to agree (McCutcheon, 1981) -- to interpret events in the light of the meanings participants make of those events (McCutcheon, 1981). This interpretation included the forming of patterns involved in the creation of meaning. Turner (1974) espoused that the essence of phenomenological method was about making explicit what is implicit. Denzin (1978) and Mintzberg (1979) referred to analytical induction as necessary in phenomenological research. Analytical induction was more interesting and challenging than deduction. Analytical induction, according to Mintzberg allowed for detective work such as tracking down patterns and consistencies. It also allowed for the creative leap, generalizing beyond one's data. "Usefulness," added Mintzberg, "stems from detective work well done, followed by creative leaps in relevant directions" (p. 583).

Phenomenological Validity

Supporters of quantitative/positivist research have raised objection to phenomenological validity and

reliability. Marshall's article (1985) was written as a response to Huberman and Miles' attempt to control qualitative data.

Qualitative researchers, in attempts to measure up to the terms and criteria for trustworthiness developed by quantitative research, accept the submissive role . . . [The Huberman and Miles nine step procedure for data collection] makes the research researcher-proof . . . eliminates the human biases, controls the differences in interpretation, and ensures that there is a demonstrated chain of agreed upon evidence for the conclusions in qualitative studies. They set up . . . checks on interpretation . . . and data are kept organized and controllable by identifying and fitting them into categories. (Marshall, 1985, p. 6)

Marshall challenged researchers to "recall the rationale and value of qualitative studies to examine whether the quest for trustworthiness sacrifices something valuable" (p. 6). Marshall listed eight situations under which researchers would choose qualitative methodology. Wolcott (1975) listed eight criteria for good qualitative research. These criteria answered the positivist's demand for validity, replication and generalization. Standards for reliability were inappropriate for qualitative research.

Trustworthiness, incorporating validity, can be accomplished by what Glaser and Strauss (1967) called

exploration-for-meaning. This technique allowed for and encouraged the uniqueness of individuals, discovery modes, focus on language, focus on values, exploration of the macro level, varying subjective interpretation of things, creative intuitive insights of human researchers, multiplicity of meanings of events, and the relational characteristics of knowledge. Sennett and Cobb (1975) stated,

I am aware that both the methods . . . and the style of presentation are vulnerable to criticism from colleagues in the social sciences. The small sample, not randomly chosen makes generalizability suspect. The anecdotal presentation raises the question of representativeness in the use of the data. The only answer to these criticisms lies in the quality of the work itself--in its ability to persuade by appealing to a level of "knowing" that exists in all of us is not very often tapped . . . to generate an "aha experience" (p. 2).

Van Maanan used the following vignette to illustrate this point:

Qualitative Researcher: "Many people these days are bored with their work and are . . .

Quantitative Researcher: "What people, how many, when do they feel this way, where do they work, what do they do, are they bored, how long have they felt this way,

what are their needs, when do they feel excited, where did they come from, what parts of their work bother them most, which..."

Qualitative Researcher: "Never mind." (p. 150).

The Site Selection for Data Collection

Southern California High School, a four year comprehensive high school located in the western most portion of a Southwestern city, was used as the school site for this study. The students were selected from lower, middle and upper class families. The residential areas of these students consisted of two lower middle class areas of military housing, a low to middle income beach community, a middle to high class residential area, and the southeast portion of the city that consisted primarily of hispanic and black families.

Southern California High School enrolled 2,096 students including 592 integration students during the 1987-88 school year. These 592 integration students were bussed from the southeast portion of the city to help balance the ethnic make-up of the school population. The school's population consisted of 63 percent White, 24 percent Hispanic, 9 percent Black, and a small percentage each of Asian, Pacific Islander, Filipino, and Indochinese students.

The California Test of Basic Skills and California Assessment Program Test Scores showed Southern California

High School at or above grade level in most comparison bands within the city and the nation. The 1986-1987 school year profile issued September 8, 1987, by the Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division of Coastal Unified School Districts showed a decrease in nonapportioned absences, a decrease in the number and rate of suspensions, and a decrease in the mobility rate.

The Selection of Subject Sample

The participants in this study were chosen at random based only on an ethnic representation of truants as they became identified by the attendance staff. It was not the intention of the study to limit the definition of truancy to a specific racial or gender group. It was the intention of the study to elicit the perceptions of eight students in grades 9 through 11 who were chosen to represent a 60 percent white and 40 percent hispanic, black and oriental school population ratio. However, only six students eventually participated. Two of the eight students dropped out of school. Although they were replaced by two other students, these two additional students also dropped out of school before the study was completed. The sample consisted of three male students and three female students of which three were white, two hispanic and one black. Two students were 9th graders, three were 10th graders and one was an 11th grader. Based on records for the past three years,

this sample not only reflected the ethnicity, gender, and number of the student body but represented the ethnicity, gender, and number of student incidences of truancy. (See Tables 1, 2 and 3.)

In addition, this sample was chosen so as to investigate specifics of their sporadic yet relevant attendance and truancy pattern. The truancy pattern of each student showed a slowly building, period truancy pattern that led to full day truancy or attendance problems. Each student selected showed no improvement in his/her attendance or truancy pattern--as do other truants--following a truancy deterrent program. Although this sample had been stratified within the already identified or narrowed student population, these chosen subjects were students who were communicative, had complete cumulative records for triangulation, and were recommended by their guidance aides for study. Despite the fact that the exit rate for students with attendance problems is high, these students, as of the time of the study, remained in school. This current enrollment allowed a continuity of research.

Sid B.

In the case of Sid B., random period absences occurred throughout the first months of the school year. The first two behavior modifications or disciplines for these truanies did not dissuade Sid B. from continuing his

GENDER OF STUDENT SAMPLE

GENDER	GRADE		
	9	10	11
MALE	1 (1)	2	1 (1)
FEMALE	1	1	1

Note: () = Student selected yet dropped

ETHNICITY OF STUDENT SAMPLE

ETHNICITY	GENDER	
	MALE	FEMALE
HISPANIC	1	1
WHITE	1 (1)	2
BLACK	1 (1)	

Note: () = Student selected yet dropped.

TABLE 3

RESIDENCE OF STUDENT SAMPLE

RESIDENCE

RESIDENT	3	(1)
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INTEGRATION	3	(1)
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Note: () = Student selected yet dropped.

truancy pattern. Sid B.'s continued truancy pattern resulted in school suspension of five days pending new school placement.

Sid B. is a black, male integration student in the tenth grade. He was quiet and respectful when interviewed but had displayed smoldering defiance to teachers. Sid had the ability to lead fellow students but not in a productive, positive manner. On two occasions of truancy, Sid was returned to school by the police and had taken a different fellow student off campus with him each time.

Mrs. B., Sid's mother, has been helpfully concerned each time a parent contact was made. As the school year progressed and truancy continued, contact was made with parent. Mrs. B. was apprised of discrepancies between what Sid had shared with her concerning grades and school activities and the reality of Sid's behavior. For example, Sid told his mother that his grade card had been withheld because of an outstanding debt (a debt just large enough that the family found it difficult to pay). In actuality, Sid received his grade card but destroyed it. In yet another situation, Sid told his mother that he was staying after school to practice for the football team. In a parent contact, Mrs. B. asked about the time schedule of the late bus that brought Sid home. After a discussion with the coach, it was determined that Sid had appeared on the field only once and had never returned.

Sid's grade point average was 1.3. His highest grade was in physical education and his lowest in English. He was considered "at risk" and will be attending summer school to make up his failing (F) grades in English and history. His California Test of Basic Skills scores range from 5-7 which implied he had educational potential.

Sid was selected as a subject for the study because he was the first student of the 1987-88 school year to be referred to the vice-principal by the attendance/guidance aide. The attendance/guidance aide interviewed Sid twice before referring him for discipline. She felt that since Sid was new to the school and respectful yet unaffected by base line discipline, he might benefit from contact with a school authority. She sensed that Sid had the potential to reverse his truant behavior.

Gabi P.

In the case of Gabi P., period absences in a particular or symbolic pattern occurred throughout the first months of the school year. The first two behavior modifications or disciplines for these truancies did not dissuade Gabi P. from continuing her truancy pattern. Gabi P.'s truancy pattern has not continued for the last two months.

Gabi P. is a large framed hispanic female integration student in the eleventh grade. She was difficult to interview because her behavior was introverted and she was

hesitant to speak or elaborate. As an eleventh grade student, Gabi transferred from another city school. She did not want to leave her previous school. Her older brother attended Southwestern High School but had been transferred due to truancy.

Mr. and Mrs. P. are concerned parents but are difficult to contact by telephone. Gabi's parents are supportive of school and school procedures concerning attendance. They are confused about the change in Gabi's relationship to school. As low income, employed parents they desire a better life for their children. Gabi's parents originally lived in a city south of the United States border, and are eager to use their new home and opportunities for a better life. Mrs. P. has not yet grasped the English language. Mr. P. speaks English fluently and is older than his wife.

Gabi's grade point average was 2.0. Her grades in all classes are accompanied by teacher comments that more effort is needed. The California Test of Basic Skills scores were average and range from 4-6. Gabi was selected as a subject because she was the first female student of the 1987-88 school year to be referred to the vice-principal by the attendance/guidance aide. The attendance/guidance aide noted Gabi's dramatic, persistent truancy.

James T.

In the case of James T., random period absences occurred during the second quarter of the school year. James was identified more quickly than the other students because the behavior modifications served to intensify his defiance. At present, James T.'s pattern of truancy has diminished due to his desire to continue his enrollment at the high school.

James T. is a white, male resident student in the ninth grade. He was angry and disrespectful when interviewed. James, a loner, has some acquaintances. James, like Sid B., has the ability to influence other students' behavior by his example. James appeared to enjoy seeing other students respond in a different manner. While sitting in the waiting room prior to one of his interviews, James counseled students on how to handle school authorities when questioned.

Mrs. T., James' mother, was normally not reachable by telephone. The person contacted in relation to James, was his grandmother. Mrs. T. although employed would not supply the school with her work phone number. There was no home phone number listed. James visited the counseling and vice principal's offices frequently. His discipline file was filled with discipline referrals from teachers, ground supervisors, and custodians.

James' grade point average was 1.0. His scholastic grades reflected his defiance in that his projects and homework assignments were incomplete, late, or not returned to the teacher. The California Test of Basic Skills scores are average and range from 3-6. James was selected as a subject because of his defiant behavior and negative attitude toward his attendance pattern and the subsequent discipline.

Molly F.

In the case of Molly F., random period absences occurred during the second quarter of the school year. The first two behavior modifications deterred truancy for a period of time, but truancy reoccurred in later months. Molly continued her truancy to the point that she has been suspended from school for two days. This step precedes a five day suspension and placement of the student at a new school.

Molly F., a female, resident student in the ninth grade, was fiery and exuberant when interviewed, yet respectful. Molly is a pretty, petite, young lady who is socially interactive and mature for her age. She dressed expensively and fashionably in hairstyle and make up. Her friends are mirror images of Molly.

Mrs. D., Molly's mother, is a single parent with two children. Molly is the oldest child. Mrs. D. was

supportive of Molly to Molly's detriment. All absences, regardless of whether she knew or approved of them were cleared by Mrs. D. through the attendance office. The first formal contact with the parent was argumentative. Molly had cut a class in the middle of the day. During the conversation with the parent, Mrs. D. expressed frustration about excusing Molly's repeated absences. She was convinced to allow the school to discipline and process the truancy through the normal procedure.

Molly's grade point average was 0.75. Her grade report contained comments from her teachers that attendance and effort could improve her grades. The California Test of Basic Skills scores were average. They range from 4-5. Molly was selected as a subject because of the questionable nature of the absences cleared by her mother. The attendance/guidance aide had become frustrated with the pattern of obvious trancies that were unquestionably cleared by the mother.

Karen T.

In the case of Karen T., random full day absences occurred during the second quarter of the school year. The first two behavior modifications deterred truancy for a period of time, but truancy reoccurred in later months. Karen T. is a social person and she recognized the school community as a social organization. Her truancy subsided

when she realized that her enrollment at the high school might be terminated.

Karen T. is a white, female student in the tenth grade. Karen had a close friend who had graduated from high school and Karen was influenced to cut school and socialize. Karen's friendship with this girl has terminated and other friendships with currently-enrolled, female friends are becoming more influential. Karen is tall and physically mature for a tenth grade student.

Mrs. T., Karen's mother, has been concerned about Karen's behavior and is supportive of the school truancy policy. As the school year progressed and continued contact with the parent was made, Mrs. T. redesigned her discipline with Karen and asked for help from school authorities. She notified the school that Karen was interviewed as an exchange student and that Karen wanted the summer assignment to Spain. Together, a plan was devised with Karen to reverse her truancy pattern and work towards her summer goal.

Karen's grade point average was 2.0. Her grades dropped from 3.5 in the ninth grade to 2.0 in the tenth grade. The drop in grades accompanied a corresponding rise in truancy. Her California Test of Basic Skills scores range from 7-9 which implied excellent, educational potential. Karen was selected as a subject for the study because of her scholastic drop from the prior year. The

attendance/guidance aide referred Karen to her counselor because of the truancy pattern. The counselor checked Karen's previous records and referred her to the vice-principal.

Omar B.

In the case of Omar B., period absences in a particular class occurred during the second quarter of the school year. The first two behavior modifications deterred truancy for a period of time, but truancy reoccurred prior to the end of the first semester in relation to taking a test in a particular class. Omar B.'s truancy has not continued. Omar has now developed a severe tardy problem.

Omar B. is a hispanic, male resident student in the tenth grade. His participation in the interviews was cooperative and respectful. Omar was a special education student who will be mainstreamed next year. Girls play an important role in Omar's life. Omar is tardy to his classes because he walks his friend to class. No amount of counseling has convinced Omar to change his pattern so as not to be tardy.

Mrs. B., Omar's mother, is a housekeeper. She is not reachable by telephone during the day as her place of employment changes daily. The B.'s do not have a home phone so the parent was difficult to contact. The researcher relied upon Omar to take a message to his mother when

contact was necessary. Mrs. B. was convinced that Omar had made some youthful indiscretions but believed he was basically a well-behaved, young man.

The researcher felt that Omar was eager to be mainstreamed. For example, it appeared that Omar intentionally aggravated his special education resource teachers so that he would be removed from that environment. Discipline referrals to the vice-principal's office contained statements that Omar would not do his work. Yet when Omar was removed from the special class and placed in the library, study hall or at a table in the office, he worked to complete his assignments.

Omar's grade point average was 0.667. His grades were lowest in academic classes. He was considered "at risk" and will be attending summer school to make up his failing (F) grades in mathematics and English. His California Test of Basic Skills scores range from 2-6, a diverse range of scores. Sid was selected as a subject for the study because his attitude appeared to be cooperative and his truancy possibly reversible. The attendance/guidance aide suggested that Omar might add diversity to the student sample. Omar was the last student to be selected for the study.

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

In addition to the print material generated by computer printouts on the individual students, notations were kept on action cards (see Appendix C). Action cards contained specifics of absences, detentions, parent contacts, and other pertinent data. Transcriptions of audio tapes of interviews were made and analyzed for content. Field notes were kept during the interviews. Interviews were conducted for 15 minutes during nonacademic classes to avoid interrupting students' time on task. Students were asked to keep journals expressing their thoughts. They were asked to respond to topics of detention, truancy, attendance, and to the discipline that followed an incident of truancy. Journals and written work were given as homework, detention assignments, or debriefing activities following interviews or oral activities. Open ended sentences were used in oral and written form to encourage expression. These written and oral experiences were assigned as an unstructured communication experience. Topics of open ended sentences were devised as a result of suggestions from counselors, detention aides, and written work assigned in previous years. Sometimes a written or oral assignment was a continuation of a thought or idea generated by the individual interview.

Oral assignments were conducted in a non-threatening place. Students were asked to choose from one of three locations, the enclosed patio area, the student conference room in the library, or a private space in the learning center where he/she would feel comfortable (see Table 4.)

Written assignments and detention learning packets (Appendices D and E) discussed truancy and then asked the student to write about school, specific classes, the incident of truancy, the justification for the truancy, the student's reputation, history of truancy, and preventions for truancy. The first assignment consisted of one page and six, open ended questions. The second assignment was designed for more in depth data gathering. It consisted of a two-page questionnaire. Questions were piloted in after-school detention before being used for the study. Some questions were redesigned and others added, based upon student response and school officials' suggestions. One question was added about being labeled a truant. A general information question was redesigned to elicit information that the subject might want the reader to know.

The oral assignment consisted of three questions from which the student could choose. The questions were:

TABLE 4

COMPARATIVE TIME FOR INTERVIEW, WRITTEN
AND ORAL COMPOSITION ACTIVITIES

STUDENT	TIME		
	INTERVIEW	WRITTEN	ORAL
SID B.	65	50	36
GABI P.	50	40	35
JAMES F.	60	42	42
MOLLY F.	62	55	30
KAREN T.	52	40	31
OMAR B.	63	41	38

Note: Time = minutes

1. What is your justification for your truancy?
2. How does it make you feel to be labelled a truant?
3. How can the school help you and/or other students so that truancy does not occur?

These questions were designed to incorporate the research questions. They were the result of an attendance committee meeting and included suggestions from counselors, attendance staff, and a vice principal. They were designed to initiate a student response from which data could be gathered. Although the students were asked to select one question, many times they included information that was a response to one or more of the other questions. The student was given quiet time in a place of his/her choice and the was given operating instructions for the cassette tape recorder. This assignment was given after the initial interview and one written assignment with follow up so that the student would feel comfortable enough to express deeply-felt thoughts.

The first interview with each student was transcribed immediately and units of meanings were recorded. The first unstructured interview contained questions relating to the most recent truancy. The interview was not combined with an evaluation of the truancy, discipline, or the assignment of detention. Following the formal portion of the interview, the researcher triangulated the data with the subject in the form of a nonjudgmental summary of what had been stated in

the interview. The interviews were tape recorded and field notes were taken. Information that the student provided about personal items, grades, and school related discipline was then triangulated by consulting school records. Student perceptions or introspections were recorded by recording device and field notes. Following the second interview, major themes were identified by units of general meanings. The researcher consulted the literature about techniques of interviewing. Two counselors observed and critiqued the researcher's interviewing techniques. The researcher has had eight years of interview experience as a teacher and administrator. It has been estimated that 900 interviews and conferences were conducted with students, staff members, and parents during that time period.

Two additional interviews with each student took place during the month following the initial interview. The second of these two interviews was a validity check with the subject. This validity check discussed the summary and themes of the interviews with the student. Additional information was gathered and clarification by the participant was provided during this check. At this point, each subject's data files were read and reread for reoccurring themes. The researcher noted references to family, personal items, peers, and school. Student journals, diaries, and observation notes were examined for references to these specific and supportive phrases. The

repetition of phrases or units of meaning was important to note as this indicated how important the particular issue was to the participant (Hycner, 1982).

In summary, Guba's thematic units, Hycner's units of meaning, and Krippendorff's (1980) content analysis was used in the phenomenological analysis of the transcripts of student interviews and written expression. This content analysis is also known as phenomenological reduction. As Hycner (1982) described,

The researcher will want to get a sense of the whole interview. This will provide a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and themes later on. In searching for the units of meaning the researcher will begin the rigorous process of going over every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and noted significant non-verbal communication (p. 8).

Hycner (1982) stated that as a result of crystallization, the researcher reduces data to the unit of general meaning.

Following the delineation of the units of general meaning, the researcher related the research questions to the units of general meaning to determine which statements were relevant to the phenomenon. This critical phase of sorting through general meanings to determine which are relevant to the research question was completed after all

interview notes, written experiences, and field notes were examined. A panel of three of the seven judges was involved in this phase to validate the researcher's units of relevant meaning. A more specific description of judges used in this study will be provided later.

Once the researcher delineated the units of meaning, she then tried to determine if relevant meanings naturally clustered together to produce some common theme or essence that united several discrete units of relevant meaning. The researcher then determined if there was an essence to these clusters and if there was a central theme. At this point three additional independent judges were asked to check the process of deducing these clusters. A detailed example of this procedure can be seen in Chapter 4 in the analysis of data for Sid B.

Final Product

The final product is what Hycner (1982) called a descriptive summary of each of the participants--a contextualization of themes. Hycner described this as a placing of these themes back into the overall context from which the themes emerged. Giorgi (1975) stated that this placing of themes back into the horizon or context was essential for understanding the phenomenon; it was one of the determiners of the meaning of the phenomenon. The delineation of relevant meaning, the cluster process, the

unique themes, and the contextualization were all discussed in relation to the subject and the phenomenon. In this summary, quotations and nonverbal communications were used to support the final conceptualization.

The final product is presented in four parts. First, the purpose of the study was restated. Second, the sample of Sid B. was used to show the method of delineation of meaning. Each step was explained as examples of Sid's interviews and written and oral narratives were discussed. Third, the remaining five student summaries were presented. Fourth, the research questions were discussed in relation to the subjects.

The Use of Independent Judges

During the first months of the research, an impartial panel of judges was selected and trained in the phenomenological method of analyzing interview notes. The panel of judges who consented to participate in this time consuming task were adroit in the analysis and consisted of two district counselors, one grade level counselor, two attendance guidance aides, and one senior-high vice principal. The persons chosen to be judges have an average of sixteen years experience with schools, students, truancy and discipline. The district counselors process exemptions and place students in alternative education situations. The guidance aides, counselor and vice principal counsel

students at various stages of truancy. To ensure the impartiality of the judges, certain cautions were taken so that, 1) the grade level counselor was not the counselor of the students in the study, 2) the attendance guidance aides had not analyzed students they had counseled, and 3) the district counselors had not counseled the students prior to the interviews.

When training the judges, each judge was asked to read and analyze two control sets of data. The control data were two pilot-tested examples of the six, open-ended questions. The two most complete examples were used. The combined group of researcher and judges analyzed the first data sample after discussing the process of thematic units, units of meaning, and content analysis. The Hycner example was used as a model. Each judge was asked to independently analyze a second example. The group then discussed the results. Two of the six judges needed additional instruction in the phenomenological method of analysis. These two judges were asked to analyze an additional set of data with emphasis on relating of themes to the resource questions. One district counselor showed great insight in the analysis of data. She displayed impartiality in judgment, clarity in expression, and sensitivity to small items that reinforced relevant meaning. This judge consented to act as liaison to the other judges. She

organized the panel of independent judges when this stage of analysis was reached.

Timetable for Completion of Research

Based upon the constraints of the academic school year, the mortality rate of truants, and the number of students in the sample, the following timetable was attempted and met. In the first month of research, the student sample of truants was identified and an initial contact made. The students selected were Gabi P., James F., Molly F., Karen T., Sid B., and Omar B. The initial contact meant a brief chat, a recorded conversation, contact with the home, or preliminary information gathered about the student. During this month, the impartial judges were trained in the phenomenological method of analyzing interview notes. Contact was made with Coastal Unified School District and permission was granted to conduct the study.

During the second month, the student sample of truants had first formal interaction with the researcher. This formal interaction produced an audio taping or written expression--something for content analysis.

By the end of the fifth month, several contacts were made with the students that produced a variety of data. Transcripts of audio tapes were completed in preparation for data analysis. At this point some adjustment needed to be made with the student sample due to the exit rate. During

this month the Human Subjects forms were submitted and clearance was granted.

By the end of the sixth month, content analysis had been completed and supportive documentation for the purpose of validity was gathered. At this point, the independent judges, knowing the topic, were used to triangulate the researcher's units of meaning. The research summary was written and incorporated into the dissertation. Final check for completeness, accuracy, and anonymity was made.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Purpose and Procedure

The purpose of this study was to phenomenologically study truancy as it was experienced and interpreted by the student. With this purpose in mind the following research questions were addressed:

1. In the perception of the student sample, what things have occurred in their personal life to produce their particular truancy situation?
2. In the perception of the student sample, what school related elements have occurred during the school year to produce their particular truancy situation?
3. In the perception of the student sample, what peer pressures have occurred during the school year to produce their particular truancy situation.
4. What can the perceptions of the student sample in this phenomenological study add to the understanding of absenteeism and truancy that has not been addressed in the predominantly quantative research done prior to this study?

During the 1987-88 school year, eight students were selected for this phenomenological study. Six of the eight students remained in the study through the 1987-88 school

year. Two students were exempted. No further contact was possible with these two students. Two additional students were added to the study but dropped out of school with no possibility of further contact. Each of the six students in the study displayed the habitual symptoms of truancy. Each of these six students had been declared truant at least two occasions and had been disciplined for their truancy. Considering this as a prescreening, the students were then selected, dependent upon race and gender. The students were interviewed upon selection. Two subsequent interviews were conducted, written assignments were given, open-ended sentences were assigned, and one oral assignment was conducted.

In the two subsequent interviews, students were asked questions about their written assignments. In all cases, the research questions that dealt with the student's personal life, school related life, and peer pressure surfaced from the written assignments. These influences were used as topics in later interviews. The second interview occurred after the additional written and oral assignments were conducted. In most cases, a portion of the second interview was used as a summary or validity check of previously gathered data.

Written assignments and detention learning packets (Appendices D and E) discussed truancy and then asked the student to write about school, specific classes, the

incident of truancy, the justification for the truancy, the student's reputation, history of truancy, and preventions for truancy. The first assignment consisted of one page and six open-ended questions. The second assignment was designed for more indepth data gathering. It consisted of two pages of questions. The oral assignment consisted of three questions from which the student could choose one.

The questions were:

1. What is your justification for your truancy?
2. How does it make you feel to be labelled a truant?
3. How can the school help you and other students so that truancy does not occur?

These questions were not designed to be research questions. They were designed to initiate a student response from which data could be gathered. Questions were phrased and asked at the request of the dropout prevention committee and were piloted by the attendance guidance aides with thirty first-time truants. Although students were asked to select one question, many times they included information that was a response to one or more of the other questions. Students were given quiet time in a place of their choice and were given operating instructions for the cassette tape recorder. This assignment was given after the initial interview and one written assignment with follow up so that the student would feel comfortable enough to express deeply-felt thoughts.

Student data was presented in two forms. In the case of Sid B., all steps in the delineation of meaning method were shown as findings. The original wording of the student data was presented. The first step was identification of the units of meaning. The second step was determining the units of meaning as they were relevant to the research questions. The third step was listing of relevant units. The fourth step was clustering of units of relevant meaning. The fifth step was determining the central theme. The sixth step was writing a summary of the interview. The seventh step was contextualizing the themes.

In the five remaining cases, some of the steps were not included in the findings. These five cases identified the units of meaning relevant to the research questions, listed the units of relevant meaning, identified the clusters of relevant meanings, and then contextualized the themes. The steps, although not included in the findings, were conducted in the research.

The Case of Sid B.

In the case of Sid B., the subject wrote the following narrative. In this sample of student writing no corrections or changes were made. It is significant to observe how the student writes as well as what the student writes. The researcher identified the general units of meaning and

numbered them for easier reference and identification in subsequent steps.

I think (1) that is very stupid. They should (2) just kick them out of school because (3) school is a privillage to have so you could (4) learn all kinds of stuff and (5) get a good job. And if your are truant just kick him out.

And in another narrative Sid wrote,

(6) It doesn't matter unless you let it. The only reason (7) schools send us in here is to try and convince us to go to class so that they can get money. The reason (8) students cut is because their not stupid. (9) The dont want to kick us out.

Why should (10) someone care about someone they dont know. Im the (11) kind of guy that doesnt like to be told what to do. If somethings not worth I wont waist my time. Im the (12) independent type. (13) People need me before I need them.

(14) I think I take it easy. (15) Everybody thinks I cool; but to myself, (16) I'm not too sure if I'm going to make it in life.

Sid volunteered this information in an oral assignment.

Are those your three reasons in the packet Man where did you get those from (17) a scared little kid who just said anything to get out of the electric chair. Look I'll be straight with you. (18) I know what's going on. (19) If you cared one half as much about education (20) I wouldn't be here. To you its just a way to try and make kids not cut again. (21) To me its just a reason to drop out. (22) If I didn't have such a loving and caring mother I would drop out. Look its like this..say I play football, win a championship but not a scholarship. (23) Where does that leave me? (24) With recognition what's that gonna do for me? That's like me scratching your back but you're not scratching mine. Look we all have our wants. We just don't want them for life.

From this student data the following units of meaning were delineated.

1. that is very stupid
 2. just kick them out of school
 3. school is a privilege
 4. learn all kinds of stuff
 5. get a good job.
 6. It doesn't matter unless you let it.
 7. schools send us in here
- to try to convince us to go to class.

8. students cut class because their not stupid
9. they don't want to kick us out
10. Why should someone care?
11. kind of guy that doesnt like to be told what to do
12. the independent type
13. people need me before I need them
14. I take it easy
15. Everybody thinks I cool.
16. I'm not sure if Im going to make it in life
17. a scared little kid
18. I know whats going on
19. If you cared
20. I wouldn't be here
21. its just a reason to drop out
22. If I didn't have such a loving and caring mother,
I would dropout
23. Where does that leave me?
24. With recognition whats that gonna do for me?

From these units of general meaning the panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following units of meaning relevant to the research questions.

4. learn all kinds of good stuff
5. get a good job.
6. It doesn't matter unless you let it
10. Why should someone care?

11. kind of guy that doesn't like to be told what to do
12. the independent type
13. people need me before I need them
14. I take it easy
15. Everybody thinks I am cool.
16. I'm not sure I am going to make it in life
17. a scared little kid
18. I know whats goin on
19. If you cared
21. its just a reason to drop out
22. If I didn't have such a loving and caring mother
23. Where does that leave me?
24. With recognition whats that gonna do for me?

The panel of judges deliberated over whether to include phrases number 1 and 8 which referred to the word "stupid." One judge felt that Sid was making a reference to his scholastic ability. After reviewing the actual tapes and written assignments, the panel agreed that the word was used as an editorial comment about the situation in general. The panel deliberated whether to include phrases number 2, 7, and 9 as they referred to school-related elements. Although this is obvious, the panel decided that the more relevant references to school were contained in other selected phrases such as phrases 4 and 5.

The panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following clusters of relevant meaning from Sid's data.

I. The Concept of Me:

Kind of guy that doesnt like to be told what to do.

The independent type.

People need me before I need them.

I know whats goin on.

I wouldn't be here.

Where does that leave me?

With recognition what that gonna do for me?

II. The Elements of Personal Life :

It doesn't matter unless you let it.

Why should someone care?

Everybody thinks I cool.

Im not sure if Im going to make it in life.

A scared little kid.

If you cared.

If I didn't have a loving and caring mother.

III. The Elements of School:

Learn good stuff.

Get a good job.

Its just a reason to drop out.

If you cared.

Im not sure I am going to make it in life.

I know whats goin on.

I wouldn't be here.

The panel included some phrases in one or more clusters. In determining these placements, the original tapes and field notes were used to determine body language, gestures, as well as tone of voice in relation to the phrase and how it was being interpreted.

It was determined that the central theme for Sid B. was "Truancy was a Personal Choice". In addition, neither peers nor school directly affected the decision to be truant. One element of significance was the overwhelming presence of the "me" concept as well as the presence of the Who Will Care, Mother Image, Scared Kid, and Not Making it in Life phrases. These references, though not directly related to the central theme, supported the theme with additional emphasis on the student's personal concerns.

In the contextualization of themes, to Sid B. the purposeful act of cutting classes was the absentee pattern which suggested truancy. The fact that Sid B. felt it was his own personal choice to cut the class determined why he would be truant. He was independent, self directed, and believed that no one cared. Sid was not impressed with the validation check done by the researcher following the second interview. As might be expected, Sid realized that the researcher had heard his statements and validated that the

researcher had heard them correctly. What was more important to Sid was what the researcher was going to do about it. This was not asked in a curious manner. Sid did not want to know what the researcher was going to do with the information but rather what the researcher was going to do about his concerns. He did not use the time to elaborate on any previous statements. Sid B. said that he might drop out of school simply because no one cared. The one person who did care, his mother, kept him in school.

The Case of Gabi P.

As in the case of Sid B., school did not directly play a role in the student's truancy. In the case of Gabi P. the classic case of being bored with school directly influenced truancy. In the case of Gabi P. the units of meaning relevant to the research question are illustrated in the following excerpts from oral and written assignments.

In one writing Gabi stated,

I also think that if a (1) person doesn't want to go to school then they shouldn't have to.

Right now I am (2) feeling really bored. I feel (3) regretful for ditching school, (4) I hate being bored. (5) I didn't feel like going so I went to lunch.

This information was presented in an oral interview.

(6) I cut the class because I was hungry and (7) I didn't feel like going to class. This (8) may not be a justification in your eyes;, but to (9) a person who has gone to the same classroom five days a week, 36 weeks a year, its justification (10) for me to miss one day of class.

My reasons are not justified because (11) everyone else has to go to the same classes just as much, but they don't take a day off, and everyone else has to wait for lunch to eat and I should have to wait too. (12) (Are you happy now?)

Southern California High School (13) does not have good teachers like South City High School. (14) South City High teachers make you want to go to school. Southern California High teachers (15) are boring they don't make learning fun. (16) The classes are to! to! to! boring. The teachers here act like the students, (17) if you come you come, if you don't, you don't.

What will (18) prevent me from cutting is that I will go back to South City next year.

(19) You should just suspend us. It would (20) save you money (21) and us boredom. I think about this detention (22) policy its stupid because that just (23) gonna make students hate school even more.

(24) My friends would not be surprised because (25) they know I do. (26) They think it is boring too.

The panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following units of meaning relevant to the research questions.

1. a person doesn't want to go to school then they shouldn't have to
2. feeling really bored.
3. regretful for ditching school
4. I hate being bored.
5. I didn't feel like going so I went to lunch.
6. I cut class because I was hungry
7. I didn't feel like going to class.
8. may not be a justification in your eyes
9. but to a person who has gone to the same classroom 5 days a week, 36 weeks a year, its justification
10. for me to miss one day of class.
11. everyone else has to go to the same classes.
12. Are you happy now?
13. does not have good teachers like South City High.
14. South City teachers make you want to go to school.
15. Southern California High School teachers are boring they don't make learning fun
16. the classes are to! to! to! boring.
17. The teachers act like the students act, if you come you come, if you don't you don't
18. prevent me from cutting is that I will go back to

South City High next year

19. You should just suspend us.
20. Save you money
21. and us boredom
22. policy its stupid
23. gonna make students hate school even more.
24. My friends would not be surprised.
25. they know I do (cut classes)
26. They think it is boring.

The panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following clusters of relevant meaning from Gabi's data.

I. Dissatisfaction with School

May not be justification in your eyes.

Are you Happy Now?

Doesn't have good teachers like South City High.

South City teachers make you want to come to school.

Southern California High School teachers are boring.

They don't make learning fun.

You should just suspend us.

Save your money/and us boredom.

Policy is stupid.

II. Bored with School

Feeling really bored.

I hate being bored.

But to a person who has goane to the same classroom 5
days a week, 36 weeks a year, its justification.

Southern California High School teachers are boring.

The classes are to! to! to! boring.

They think it is boring.

III. Personal Thoughts and Feelings

I didn't feel like going so I went to lunch.

I cut because I was hungry.

I didn't feel like going to class.

Regretful for ditching school.

For me to miss one day of school.

Everyone else has to go to the same classes.

The teachers act like the students act, if you come you
come, if you don't, you don't

Prevent me from cutting is that I will go back to

South City High School

You should just suspend us.

Save your money and us boredom.

Policy is stupid.

Gonna make students hate school even more.

They know I do (cut classes).

They think it is boring.

It was determined that the central theme for Gabi P. was "Dissatisfaction with School." In the case of Gabi P. the cutting of class was not completely the reason that school was boring. In Gabi P.'s mind there were other things pulling at her life. School in general and teachers in specific were not as good as those at her other school. Since she did not mention friends, it is probable that Gabi neither accepted her change of school nor made friends in this school setting.

Gabi P. made a personal choice to cut class. She supported her decision with the belief that cutting was justified because school was boring. To support this belief she stated that other students felt the same way. Instead of taking the blame or responsibility upon herself she shifted the blame to the school, the teachers, hunger, and any other excuse that might justify the cutting of classes. Gabi, when confronted with the summary of her statements, confirmed that the researcher had heard and understood her responses correctly. Gabi was concerned that her truancy might result in a new school placement that was not the school to which she wanted to return. She was surprised that someone would take the time to listen and not condemn. She stated that unless she could return to her previous school, she might drop out.

The Case of James T.

James T. is an angry young man. The interviews and written and oral assignments were filled with angry responses. In the case of James T., several of the written assignments included data such as the following.

(1) What do you think this is? This (2) whole sheet is a sample of b.s. This is (3) high school not psychology lesson. (4) Is this supposed to make me repent my wrong doings and praise the system?

(5) Because right before I came in here I smoked 10 marijuana cigarettes, 5 rocks of crack, 2 PCP cigarettes, I also took 16 sheets of LSD and did 8 lines of cocaine.

I think things would have (6) been different if I would have not showed up. This fact is proven because as time is always moving, (7) one action will create an infinite number of reactions. Thierfor things would definitely have been different.

(8) It feels like s... to be labeled a truant. In fact (9) Im so down on my-self far being a truant that I think I am (10) going to end it all right NOW

In an oral interview James T. shared these thoughts.

I (11)couldn't care less about what they (friends) think. This whole thing (12) is about doing it by the

rules. (13) How many millionaires do you know that do it by the rules.

I should (14) learn to conform to the (15) bond of society? (16) Rules, rules and more rules. (17) Other people telling me how to live my life. Be here at a particular time. What is time anyways? It's a man made invention, it doesn't exist. Do you have trouble understanding this? Of course you do. (18) Because you and I think differently.

(19) I am James, not a truant. (20) I cannot be labelled anything. (21) You don't know me you have no idea who I am and what goes on inside my head. (22) Thank you very much. (23) I feel great.

The panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following units of meaning relevant to the research questions.

1. What do you think this is?
2. Whole sheet is a sample of b.s.
3. high school not psychology lesson.
4. Is this suppose to make me repent my wrong doings
5. Because right before I came here I smoked...
6. been different if I would have not shown up.
7. one action will create an infinite number of reactions
8. It feels like s... to be labeled a truant.

9. Im so down on myself for being a truant
10. going to end it all right now
11. couldn't care less about what they (friends)
think
12. is about doing it by the rules.
13. How many millionaires do you know that do it by the
rules?
14. learn to conform.
15. bond of society.
16. Rules, rules, and more rules.
17. Other people telling me how to live my life.
18. Because you and I think differently.
19. I am James, not a truant.
20. I cannot be labelled anything.
21. You don't know me; you have no idea who I am and
what goes on inside my head.
22. Thank you very much.
23. I feel great.

The panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following clusters of meaning for James' data.

I. I am James

I am James, not a truant.

I cannot be labelled anything.

You don't know me; you have no idea who I am and what

goes on inside my head
Is this suppose to make me repent.
Been different if I had not shown up.
Couldn't care less about what they (friends) think.

II. Rules, Rules, and More Rules

Learn to conform.
Other people telling me how to live my life.
Rules, rules, and more rules.
How many millionaires do you know that did it by the
book.
It is about doing it by the rules.

III. And Sarcasm to You

Because right before I came in here I smoked...
Thank you very much.
I feel great.
What do you think this is?
whole sheet of b.s.
High school not psychology lesson.
One action will create an infinite number of reactions.
It feels like s... to be labeled a truant.
Im so down on myself for being a truant.
going to end it all right NOW.

The researcher and the panel of judges found this case and this data particularly challenging to evaluate. Although the "Sarcasm" and "Concept of me" was prevalent, the researcher felt the defiance to school "Rules, rules" of any kind, had an overwhelming hold on James. In addition, the use of vulgarity and shock treatment as in the use of drugs and ending it all right now, was a cry for attention. In this case, although the panel felt the phrases were used as an attention getter, James' name was given to the proper authorities dealing for drug and substance abuse as well as Child Protective Services as is required of all Coastal Unified School District employees. James, when confronted with the summary of his statements, was impressed that the researcher had discerned the various concepts of sarcasm and shock treatment. He was disappointed that the sarcasm and shock did not evoke a concerned reaction from the researcher. He was vindicated when the social concerns counselor contacted him concerning his preoccupation with drugs. The validity check was much more confirming for James than with the two previous subjects.

The panel of judges played and replayed the audio tape of this final interview. They read and reread the field notes for non-verbal communication. The panel accepted and triangulated the researcher's analysis that James was sincere in the validity check of data with the researcher.

In the contextualization of themes, to James T. cutting class was premeditated and with purpose. James felt no remorse or regret for cutting class. Peers had no influence on him but school did. School to James was one of those rules that could, in his mind, be defied. Like Sid B., James was independent and self directed. Unlike Sid B., James was defiant, sarcastic, and unrepentant. James might drop out of school simply because school is there to defy. James might take the high school qualifying examination and leave school to make his million in an unconventional manner.

The Case of Molly F.

In the case of Molly F., truancy occurred repeatedly because of the need to be with friends and talk with friends. The first interview produced the following data.

It was (1) important that I talk to my friend. (2) I had things to ask. (3) I might think it was important to cut class just to talk, (4) but now I know that class is more important. (5) There is a time for school and (6) a time for personal life. (7) School is just one of those things that just won't fit your schedule.

(8) You see my boyfriend and I were in a big fight. (9) I wanted to be by myself that day. (10) Being responsible is not always easy.

In an oral assignment, Molly F. shared these thoughts.

(11) I shouldn't have cut class because my (12) parents don't believe me either and (13) now they're worried about all sorts of things that don't even apply to me. (14) I have a referral on my record that (15) I don't deserve. (16) Haven't you ever made a mistake or made yourself look dumb for a (17) certain reason that you're really gonna gain from instead of lose?

(18) I am not the kind of person that would do that (truant) but just (19) don't know what came over me. I (20) don't feel any different because now I know not to do it again. I (21) don't think there is a way from preventing cutting class it is a (22) spontaneous decision. I cut class because (23) I was emotionally unable to go to class.

Other interviews with Molly produced the following data.

It is (24) not a habit for me; I know that (25) cutting class is bad. I cut class because I had a fight with my boyfriend. (26) That day it was best for me to cut class because (27) I knew if I went to class I wouldn't do my work and end up getting an failing (F) grade. I also (28) wanted to be by myself and think about me and my boyfriend. (29) I didn't feel like going to class. (30) I guess I was too depressed. I (31) had all these things on my mind. (32) When I feel like this I don't like to be bothered; (33) I

just want to be left alone. (34) Instead of being with my friends, I am here in detention.

(35) I am not a truant, (36) I wasn't having fun. (37) I had to talk to Cadence about things. (38) I am angry at the staff as (39) they would not sympathize with my actions. Those days weren't easy for me. I could have ended the conversation but I don't think things would have worked out so well. I think it (41) should be taken more lightly and (42) feelings should be considered.

The panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following units of meaning relevant to the research questions.

1. important that I talk with my friend.
2. I had things to ask.
3. I might think it was important to cut class to talk
4. Now I know that class is more important.
5. There is a time for school
6. a time for personal life.
7. School is just one of those things that just won't fit your schedule
8. You see my boyfriend and I were in a big fight.
9. I wanted to be by myself that day.
10. Being responsible is not always easy.
11. I shouldn't have cut class

12. my parents don't believe me
13. Now they're worried about all sorts of things that don't even apply to me.
14. I have referral on my record.
15. I don't deserve.
16. Haven't you ever made a mistake or made yourself look dumb.
17. certain reason that your really gonna gain from than looses.
18. I am not the kind of person that would do that (truant).
19. don't know what came over me.
20. don't feel any different because now I know not to do it again.
21. don't think there is a way from preventing cutting class.
22. spontaneous decision.
23. I was emotionally unable to go to class.
24. not a habit for me
25. cutting class is bad.
26. That day it was best for me to cut class
27. I knew if I went to class I wouldn't be able to do my work.
28. wanted to be by myself and think about me and my boyfriend.
29. I didn't feel like going to class.

30. I was too depressed.
31. all these things on my mind.
32. When I feel like this I don't want to be bothered.
33. I just wanted to be left alone.
34. Instead of being with my friends I am here in detention.
35. I am not a truant.
36. I wasn't having fun.
37. I had to talk to Cadence about things
38. I am angry at the staff.
39. they would not sympathize with my actions.
40. days aren't easy for me
41. should be taken more lightly.
42. feelings should be considered

The judges triangulated the following clusters of meaning for Molly's data.

I. The Sociable Molly

Important that I talk with my friends.

I had things to ask.

There is a time for personal life.

School is just one of those things that don't fit in your schedule.

You see my boyfriend and I were in a big fight.

I wanted to be by myself.

Wanted to be by myself and think about me and my

—

boyfriend

I had to talk to Cadence.

II. Molly Needs Understanding

I think it was important to cut class to talk.

Now I know that class is more important.

There is a time for school.

Being responsible is not always easy.

I shouldn't have cut class.

My parents don't believe me.

Now they are worried about all sorts of things that
don't even apply to me

I have a referral on my record.

I don't deserve.

Haven't you ever made mistake?

I am not that kind of person that would do that
(truant).

Don't know what came over me.

I am not a truant.

I wasn't having fun.

I was angry at the staff.

They would not sympathize with me.

Feelings should be considered.

Should be taken more lightly.

III. The Recluse in Molly

Spontaneous decision.

Not a habit for me.

That day it was best to cut class.

I was emotionally unable to go to class.

I knew if I went to class I would be unable to work.

Wanted to be by myself to think.

I didn't feel like going to class.

I was depressed.

All these things on my mind.

When I feel like this I don't want to be bothered

I just wanted to be left alone.

Days aren't easy for me.

It was determined that the central theme for Molly F. was "The Sociable Molly." In this case peers directly affected Molly's decision to be truant repeatedly. One element of significance was the need for understanding as exemplified in the phrases clustered in section two. Molly's data requested understanding of her actions and her feelings. In reflection, Molly did not approve of her action and is concerned with how the truancy will affect her relationship with her parents.

In the contextualization of themes, to Molly F. the act of cutting classes was the absentee pattern which suggested truancy. Molly F. felt justified in cutting as she would

not be able to concentrate on school work if she did attend classes. Molly stated that she needed time to work out problems. In each case of truancy, time was missed from school for social reasons i.e., she needed to talk to a friend or she needed to work out a problem about a boyfriend. Molly, when confronted with the summary of her statements, was concerned that her parents would be contacted about her behavior. She was not happy that her friends knew she was being disciplined for her truancy. Detentions concerned her as they were infringements upon her time. She could not be consoled that the summaries of her responses were a validation process for the researcher. Validation only occurred when Molly responded that she did not feel it was fair to consider her absences truancies as during those times of truancy she needed to talk to those friends.

Most of Molly's data showed concern with this pattern. Some data that did cause concern with the researcher was the statement that school did not fit into her life's schedule.

The Case of Karen T.

The case of Karen T. produced data that was quite different from all the previous cases in that Karen looked at truancy as a responsibility for which she needed to be accountable.

An interview produced the following data.

(1) It should be a joint effort. I (2) should have learned what was being taught that day. I was (3) absent from school and (4) neglected to tell my mother I was going to be. (5) I neglected to explain my absence. (6) I should have given my mother warning and an explanation for my absence. Had I done so, (7) I could have saved myself so much time and trouble.

(8) Discipline might hinder and not help.

Some open ended questions provided this data on Karen.

(9) It is too late to think of how things could have been different. That is (10) what I always say when wrong things already happen. (11) I am a nice person who can get along with anybody. I know that sometimes I get restless. But I am young. (12) I am bored and I (13) regret what I did. (14) It doesn't bother me that I am a truant but (15) inside you are saying truant and (15) that's on your record.

(16) I know I made a mistake but (17) nobody is perfect. (18) I am feeling repentful and ashamed. (19) It might have been different (20) if I had followed the advice of my teacher. (21) I am sure my friends are shocked with my behavior but (22) it is no big deal. (23) I don't know maybe I was feeling a bit rebellious.

An oral interview provided the researcher with the following data.

There is (24) no good justification for me missing class. (25) I should not have cut the classes. (26) It was wrong, I missed out on my class presentations. (27) What is the point if you don't go to school, (28) if you don't go to class, you might as well do your work and achieve something while you are here. (29) I have good grades and I am passing. (30) If I didn't feel I could afford it, I would not have ditched.

(31) If you play you pay. (32) I am not a bad person. (33) I am shy but fun to be around. (34) I am a hard working person and (35) being truant doesn't mean you are a bad person.

The panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following units of meaning relevant to the research questions from Karen's data.

1. It should be a joint effort.
2. Should have learned what was being taught that day
3. absent from school
4. neglected to tell my mother
5. neglected to explain my absence
6. should have given my mother warning and an explanation
7. I could have saved myself so much time and trouble
8. Discipline might hinder and not help.

9. It is too late to think of how things could have been different
10. what I always say when wrong things already happen
11. I am a nice person who can get along with anybody.
12. I am bored
13. I regret what I did.
14. It doesn't bother me that I am a truant
15. inside you are saying truant
16. know I made a mistake.
17. nobody is perfect.
18. feeling repentful and ashamed.
19. might have been different
20. if I had followed the advice of my teacher.
21. I am sure my friends are shocked with my behavior
22. It is no big deal.
23. I don't know; maybe I was feeling a bit rebellious.
24. no good justification for me missing class.
25. I should not have cut the classes.
26. It was wrong; I missed out on presentations.
27. What is the point if you don't go to school.
28. if you don't go to class, you might as well do your work and achieve something while you are here

- 29. I have good grades and I am passing.
- 30. If I didn't feel I could afford it, I would not have.
- 31. If you play you pay.
- 32. I am not a bad person
- 33. I am shy but fun to be around.
- 34. I am a hard working person
- 35. being truant doesn't mean you are a bad person.

The panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following units of meaning relevant to the research questions.

I. The Concept of School

It should be a joint effort.

Should have learned what was being taught that day.

Discipline might hinder and not help.

Inside you are saying truant.

No good justification for me missing classes.

I should not have cut the classes.

What is the point if you don't go to school.

If you don't go to class, you might as well do your work

and achieve something while you are here

If I didn't feel I could afford it I would not have.

I have good grades and am passing.

II. Introspection

Absent from school.
Neglected to tell my mother.
Should have given my mother warning and an explanation.
It is too late to think of how things could have been
different
I regret what I did.
It doesn't bother me that I am a truant.
Know I made a mistake.
Feeling repentful and ashamed.
Might have been different.
I am sure my friends are shocked with my behavior.
It is no big deal.
If you play you pay.
I am shy but fun to be around.
I have good grades and am passing.
I am a hard working person.

III. Not a Bad Person

I am a nice person who can get along with anybody.
I am bored.
Nobody is perfect.
If I had followed the advice of my teacher

I don't know, maybe I was feeling rebellious

I have good grades and am passing.

I am a hard working person.

Being truant doesn't mean you are a bad person.

It was determined that the central theme for Karen T. was "Introspective." One element of significance was that Karen, like most of the other students, did not see herself as being bad because of her truancy. Karen felt she could afford to skip a day of class. She made that determination based upon the fact that she had good grades and was a good person. At only one time does she state that she felt rebellious.

In the contextualization of themes, to Karen T. the act of cutting class was intentional. She did not follow any peer pressure to cut class. Karen had good self esteem and did not consider herself a bad person for cutting class. Karen, when confronted with the summary of her statements, was mature in her discussion. She validated that what the researcher and judges contextualized was what she said. She did not feel threatened with the fact that someone was privy to her thoughts. She was interested in the process. Although she was analytical as to why she cut class she appeared to have no real justification or remorse other than a curt "If you play, you pay."

The Case of Omar B.

The following data came from an interview with Omar B.

I shouldn't have cut class because (1) I missed an English test and (2) I hurt my grade. (3) I lied to my aunt and (4) broke a promise. (5) When someone misses school they aren't going to school for a reason. (6) They ought to find out the reason and fix it.

(7) It requires a proper attitude to learn from your mistakes. (8) People will think you are lazy if you don't. (9) The consequence is that you are labelled (truant). By ditching (10) you only hurt yourself, myself, not the school.

(11) Parents are a big part of kids coming to school. When parents find out about school they should (12) put their kids on restriction and the kids can't do what they want. I think the (13) parents should be a part of the truancy system (14) because they care. (15) Education comes from our houses too. (16) As parents they have obligations too. They (17) can't watch their kids all the time but if they (18) talk to them and (19) punish them (not hit them) they will not be truant that much.

The following data came from an oral assignment from Omar B.

(20) I studied for the test and I thought I was prepared. (21) I talked to a girl who have the class and she told me what was on the test. (22) There were a lot of parts I didn't study for. (23) I couldn't afford to do poorly so I cut the class. (24) I should have gone and tried. (25) This way with the truant, I will get an F. If (26) I would have gone, I would have at least gotten some points.

(27) My reputation as a truant is not a reputation. I do not have a reputation. (28) I am comfortable with it because I (29) only ditched twice and I don't intend to do it again. (30) I don't like detention and (31) school will be over soon.

(32) I would go over in my mind what went wrong. Then I would (33) keep from doing what was the wrong thing. I would (34) consider what would happen if I did the wrong thing.

The panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following units of meaning relevant to the research questions from Omar's data.

1. I missed an English test
2. I hurt my grade.
3. I lied to my aunt
4. broke a promise
5. When someone misses school they aren't going to

school for a reason.

6. They ought to find out the reason and fix it.
7. It requires a proper attitude to learn for your mistakes.
8. People will think you are lazy if you don't
9. The consequence is that you are labelled (truant).
10. you only hurt yourself, myself, not the school.
11. Parents are a big part of the kids coming to school
12. put their kids on restriction
13. parents should be a part of the truancy system
14. because they care.
15. Education comes from our houses too
16. As parents they have obligations too
17. can't watch their kids all the time
18. talk to them
19. punish them (not hit them).
20. I studied for the test I thought I was prepared.
21. I talked to a girl who had the class and she told me what was on the test
22. There were a lot of parts that I did not study for
23. I couldn't afford to do poorly so I cut the class.
24. I should have gone.
25. This way, with the truant, I will get an F
26. have gone I would have tried and got points
27. My reputation as a truant is not a reputation

- 28. I am comfortable with it
- 29. only ditched twice and I won't do it again
- 30. I don't like detention
- 31. school will be over soon.
- 32. I would go over in my mind what went wrong
- 33. keep from doing what was the wrong thing.
- 34. consider what would happen if I did the wrong thing.

The panel of judges triangulated the selection of the following clusters of relevant meaning.

I. The Responsible Omar B.

They ought to find out the reason and fix it
 Broke a promise
 It requires a proper attitude to learn from mistakes
 People will think you are lazy if you don't
 The consequence is that you are labelled a truant
 You only hurt yourself, myself, not the school
 I should have gone
 This way I will be a truant and get an F
 Have gone I would have tried and got points
 I am comfortable with it
 Have ditched twice and I won't do it again

My reputation is not a reputation
I would go over in my mind what went wrong
Keep from doing what was the wrong thing
Consider what would happen if I did the wrong thing

II. Parents

I lied to my aunt
Broke a promise
Parents are a big part of kids coming to school
Put their kids on restriction
Parents should be a part of the truancy system
Because they care
Education comes from our houses too
As parents they have obligations too
Can't watch their kids all the time
Talk to them
Punish them (not hit them)

III. School and Grades

I missed an English test
I hurt my grade
They ought to find out the reason and fix it
When someone misses school they aren't going to school
for a reason
I studied for the test
I talked to a girl who had the test and she told me
what was on the test

There were lots of parts I hadn't studied for
I couldn't afford to do poorly
I don't like detention
School will be over soon

It was determined that the central theme for Omar B. was "Responsibility". In addition, school directly affected Omar's decision to be truant. Although the information from the friend supported his decision, this was not the normal peer pressure that students respond to when being truant. One prominent observation in Omar's case was the logical and mature manner in which he addressed learning from his mistake. His analysis was to examine what went wrong, what he could do to keep from making the mistake again, and what the consequence might be. No other student in the study stated this as well as Omar. No other student realized this as well as Omar. In only one other case did the student respect the obligation of the parent. Omar was sincerely penitent over the broken promise to parents and the lie to his aunt.

In the contextualization of themes, to Omar B., the act of cutting class was the absentee pattern which suggested truancy. The fact that Omar B. felt good about himself and regretted cutting class exhibits some responsibility for himself. The sincerity of data given was apparent. Omar, when confronted with the summary of his statements, was

pleased that someone had listened to the subject and valued what he had to say. Omar was interested in the mechanics of the tape recording and transcriptions. He was pleased to see his oral responses written out in a report form. The panel felt that Omar B. would not be a drop out. His responses emoted good self esteem. Historically, Omar had been mature in decision making since early school years.

Each set of student data was collected and analyzed in the same manner. Each student was interviewed twice. Each student responded in writing and orally. Each student received approximately the same amount of time for interview, written and oral activities. In the case of Sid B., more interview time was given because he was the first subject in the study. The researcher was also able to contact Sid with greater frequency than the other students. Sid was sent to the office for truancy and behavior discipline with more frequency than the other students. In the case of Molly F., less time was given as she was the most difficult subject to contact.

The attendance/truancy study conducted phenomenologically revealed interesting, personal information about students who were truant. When dealing with students in a disciplinary manner, one does not realize how the student defines and justifies truancy. The interview, and written and oral activities enabled the researcher to determine what influenced the student's

truancy. Although the researcher might have surmised that truancy was caused by personal, school, and peer influences, the student data reaffirmed that these influences could be categorized as causes.

The researcher approached the study with no preconceived definition of truancy. It was the purpose of the study to collect this definition from the students. The six subjects differed in race, gender, ethnicity, and academic ability yet the reasons and justifications for truancy were similar. Although each student was truant for a reason different from other students, the subjects were generally truant for one of the three, previously mentioned reasons. After interviewing students about attendance and truancy problems over the last three years, the researcher compiled statistics, calculations concerning disciplines, student information files, and student discipline files. This type of information did not provide the researcher, the counselors, or the school district with the information needed to effect a change in student attendance patterns.

The students approached the activities in a positive manner. This implied that the subjects were concerned with their attendance problem. Students felt comfortable in discussing personal matters in relation to school and friends. Even in cases of defiance such as James T., the subject participated and did not refuse to cooperate. Students who have attendance problems are in need of help

and these students want help. When some students were confronted with summaries of their responses, they were interested in what could be done to correct the problems.

The attendance/truancy study of these six students reaffirmed that truancy is a preliminary step to dropping out. These students will become dropouts if some intervention is not administered. These students are at the onset of what Barr and Knowles call the Educational Empowerment Model. Simply stated, this means that students develop a negative feeling towards school based upon certain influences. These students will remain in school until a feasible attractive option presents itself. It will be at that point that the student will drop out.

It is not an oversimplification to state that a student truancy problem is indicative of a greater student problem. In this study, school discipline and cumulative files were used to verify student information. The discipline and cumulative records for the years the students were enrolled at the current school are kept in the active files. Discipline files for previous schools are stored in the cumulative stored records. The discipline files contained warnings of unsatisfactory progress, discipline referrals to the office, copies of suspensions, and conference notes written by the disciplinarian.

Each student referred to the researcher for the study had a current discipline record on file. In each case,

discipline files contained warnings of unsatisfactory progress. These warnings stated that the academic grade was low because of lack of effort, absences, or tardies. Each of these comments implies an avoidance. In the case of Sid B., James T., and Gabi P., unsatisfactory warnings also contained comments about disruption of class and defiance of the teacher. Test scores confirm that James T. and Gabi P. were being challenged at their academic level. The practical skills of these students were not enough to produce academic success.

In the case of Sid B., Karen T., and Omar B., unsatisfactory warnings also contained comments that identified student potential to perform at a higher academic level. Sid's discipline file presented some conflicting information. Sid's test scores implied potential yet his behavior was similar to that of students who did not have the scores that implied potential. In other words, Sid, Karen, and Omar were performing lower than their academic potential.

The cumulative record files were complete for all subjects. This provided the researcher a uniform investigation of attendance, performance, health, discipline, and family history for all the subjects. Some files recorded geographical moves for students. This meant that the student changed their school enrollment. The changes in school environment were not frequent nor did the

moves consist of major geographical changes. Except in the case of Gabi P., a change of school did not produce obvious influences on the other students.

Attendance in previous grades for most subjects did not support current research that truancy begins in the lower grades. The cumulative files for all subjects of the study did not display an attendance problem. Most notations were positive and encouraging. In the case of Sid B. and Omar B. primary grade teachers noted that more effort was needed.

School records were used by the researcher and judges to verify information produced by the interview, and written, and oral activities. In addition, school records were used to verify or refute current thought about attendance and truancy. As a subject's life unravelled itself to the researcher, items of interest were researched or confirmed by consulting student records.

Limitations

The discussion of limitations of this study will include the researcher's role as administrator in the site of the study, the amount of time spent interviewing the subjects, the use of the academic school year as the time frame of the study, and the geographically isolated location of the school.

The researcher of this study is a site administrator at the site of the study. One responsibility of the site

administrator is that of disciplinarian. Students are normally interviewed and counseled by the site administrator for behavior and attendance infractions. Sometimes the counseling included the assignment of detention or other punishment. The students interviewed for the study knew the role of the site administrator as researcher.

The researcher attempted to redesign the image of administrator with the students by doing one or more of the following. When the student was interviewed, the interviewer created a conversation circle with the student. The interviewer was not sitting behind a desk. The tone of voice, the listening attitude, and the questions, were not the same as those used in a disciplinary interview.

The locale for the second interview was changed. The interviews took place in a patio area within the central office area. The patio contained plants and trees, a picnic bench, and a sky light. It was designed for privacy. This area was offered as a choice for the student during his/her oral composition. Each of the students felt comfortable enough to use the patio for their oral composition.

When the researcher and the student met outside of the interview situation the interviewer spoke to the student in a nonthreatening manner. This would occur only if the student were alone. If the student was with a group the interviewer would make eye contact and wait for the student to acknowledge the researcher. If the researcher

encountered the student because of a disciplinary action, no reference would be made to the information or subject of the interview. The researcher attempted to separate the role of disciplinarian from that of the interviewer.

During the study only one limitation was placed on the researcher by the school district. The site principal asked that the students' academic classes not be disturbed. Students were requested to come to the office during a nonacademic class, if the teacher permitted. Students were interviewed for 15 to 20 minutes. This allowed the students to be in class for more than one half of the class period in addition to interview and travel time to and from the office. This time seemed adequate based upon student interviews conducted prior to the study. The students had little to add in an interview situation after a 15 to 20 minute time period. The students appeared to have completed their responses within that timeframe.

At the beginning of the second interview, the first interview was summarized and the student was asked if there was anything to add. The second interview was longer in duration. In addition to information gathering, the validity check with the student was conducted at that time.

The timeframe for the study was limited to six months of the 1987-88 school year. Students did not display habitual, truant attendance until the month of October, the second month of the academic school year. Neither

interview, written, or oral activities were conducted during the quarter or semester's end to avoid interference with testing schedules. Certain state test were given during the month of February. The months of December and March contained one- to two- week vacations. Interview, written and oral activities were scheduled between October and April.

The study ended in April for two reasons. First, the researcher did not want to interfere with end-of-the-year student and school activities. Second, the researcher wanted to complete the research so it would not continue into the next school year. The mortality rate, as mentioned earlier in the study, is high and it may not have been possible to continue the study with the same subjects. It might possibly have been necessary to select and interview a different set of subjects had the study been continued into another school year.

Southern California High School is located in a geographically isolated part of the city. Students come from different economic levels and geographic locations. Residential areas consisted of two lower middle class areas of military housing, a low to middle class beach community, a middle to high residential area, and the southeastern part of the city that consists primarily of hispanic and black families. Three of the subjects were resident students; three of the subjects were integration students. Students

were selected from each of the economic levels and geographic locations. Despite the limitations, the dropout prevention committee, the attendance/truancy committee, and the independent judges felt the selection was representative of Southwestern High School.

CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A nationwide problem facing local schools as reflected by the Gallup Poll (1987) on education, is student attendance. Not only does the school district lose state funding but poor attendance indicates a potential dropout problem. In the age of electronic record keeping by microcomputers, student absences are identified within hours of their occurrence. This rapid identification allows school personnel to question students, parents, and staff about the attendance behavior of truants and potential dropouts.

Most quantitative research in the area of attendance, truancy, and dropouts has provided researchers with statistical data that is conflicting in nature and nonspecific in fact. Literature in the area of attendance, truancy, or dropouts has not taken a thorough qualitative look at truants. The purpose of this study was to select a comprehensive high school, select truant students that reflected the school community by race and gender, and conduct phenomenological research to elicit a definition of truancy from the experts--the truant students themselves.

The ultimate objective of the research was to define the concept of truancy as it was experienced and interpreted by the truant students. With this purpose in mind the

research questions were proposed. Information from interviews, oral presentations, and written expressions was gathered and phenomenologically interpreted by means of phenomenological analysis. In this method, written assignments and transcriptions of oral expressions were analyzed for units of meaning relevant to four of the research questions. The researcher listened to the interview and read the transcripts for a sense of the whole. This provided the researcher a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and themes later on. The researcher then conducted several steps in the delineation of the units of general meaning and units of relevant meaning, the clustering of units of relevant meaning, the determining of themes, and the final contextualizing of themes.

At each step of delineation, a panel of judges was used to triangulate the researcher's analysis. The panel of judges remained consistent throughout the study. Certain judges were used for the first steps and other judges were used in later clustering and conceptualization steps. In this manner, not only was the research triangulated but one panel's decision was often triangulated by another panel of judges.

The research questions asked were as follows:

1. In the perception of the student, what things have occurred in their personal life to produce their particular truancy situation?
2. In the perception of the student, what school related elements have occurred during the school year to produce their particular truancy situation?
3. In the perception of the student, what peer pressures have occurred during this school year to produce their particular truancy situation?
4. What can the perceptions of the student sample in this phenomenological study add to the understanding of absenteeism/truancy that has not been addressed in the predominately quantitative research done prior to this study?

Summary

The following is a summary of the major findings as they relate to the four research questions and as interpreted by the six students in the research. First, the question would be stated. Next the six interpretations were listed as they respond to the research question. Then a summary statement was made to summarize the six responses.

The last research questions will be answered based on conclusions generated from student summaries. Six individual responses were not used to answer the question,

but rather student data was used as supportive research to answer the question.

The following absentee-pattern information, though descriptive of the student, did not come directly from student data. Each student's computer printout showed period or all-day uncleared absences. These absences were not cleared by teacher or parent.

Sid B.

In the case of Sid. B. random period absences occurred throughout the first months of the school year. The first two behavior modifications or disciplines for these truancies did not dissuade Sid B. from continuing his truant pattern. Sid. B.'s continued truancy pattern has resulted in school suspension of five days pending new school placement.

Gabi P.

In the case of Gabi P. period absences in a particular or systematic pattern occurred throughout the first months of the school year. The first two behavior modifications or disciplines for these truancies did not dissuade Gabi P. from continuing her truant pattern. Gabi P.'s truancy pattern has not continued for the last two months.

James T.

In the case of James T. random period absences occurred during the second quarter of the school year. James was identified more quickly than the other students because the behavior modifications served to intensify his defiance. At present James T.'s pattern of truancy has subsided due to his desire to continue his enrollment at the high school.

Molly F.

In the case of Molly F., random period absences occurred during the second quarter of the school year. The first two behavior modifications deterred truancy for a period of time, but truancy reoccurred in later months. Molly has continued her truancy to the point that she has been suspended from school for two days. This step precedes a five day suspension and placement of the student at a new school.

Karen T.

In the case of Karen T., random full day absences occurred during the second quarter of the school year. The first two behavior modifications deterred truancy for a period of time, but truancy reoccurred in later months. Karen T., a social person, recognized the school community as a social organization. Her truancy has subsided

following the realization that her enrollment at the high school might be terminated.

Omar B.

In the case of Omar B., period absences in a particular class occurred during the second quarter of the school year. The first two behavior modifications deterred truancy for a period of time, but truancy reoccurred prior to the end of the first semester in relation to taking a test in a particular class. Omar B.'s truancy has not continued. Omar has now developed a severe tardy problem.

Each student in this study displayed symptoms of a habitual truancy pattern. Some of the students began their truancy early in the school year and others developed the pattern during the second semester. In all cases, the first two behavior modifications did not dissuade the students from their truancy patterns.

In the perception of the student, what things have occurred in his/her personal life to produce their particular truancy situation?

Sid B.

In the case of Sid B., Sid's personal choice affected his attendance. This was not nearly as evident in any of

the other student subjects. This can be observed in the cluster of meanings based on Sid B.'s data. In each case of truancy, neither the school nor Sid's peers directly affected his decision to be truant. This can be observed in the units of relevant meaning in which Sid referred to the "me" concept, his relationship to his mother, and to his concerns of making it though life.

Gabi P.

Gabi P.'s personal choice to cut class was supported by other influences. Although her defiance, through choice, was not as strong as Sid B.'s choice, personal life affected Gabi's truancy pattern. It was Gabi's belief that a return to her previous school would make her personal life and, therefore, her school life more acceptable.

James T.

James T.'s personal choice to cut class was based upon rebellion. Although his rebellion was against school imposed rules, this rebellion was against rules in general and not specifically school rules. As with Sid B., the overwhelming "me" concept was indicative of the element of personal life and beliefs affecting the student's attendance.

Molly F.

Molly F.'s truancy pattern was directly related to personal life as it relate to socialization. This was difficult to attribute to personal life choice. It could be more accurately attributed to school or peer-related pressures that influenced Molly's sociable nature.

Karen T.

Karen T.'s truancy pattern was directly related to her personal life. In Karen's evaluation, she felt she could afford to miss her class(es) and her cutting of classes was intentional. There were no references to school or peers.

Omar B.

Omar B.'s truancy pattern was not directly related to a personal choice but to other influences. His solution to the problem was directly related to his personal life. His analysis of the problem resulted in problem solving of the truancy which was reflected in his desire to correct his mistake.

Personal life influences were not the cause of all subject's truancy pattern. In some cases the influence was obvious. In other cases personal life influences were secondary.

In the perception of the student, what school-related elements have occurred during this school year to produce his/her particular truancy situation?

Sid B.

Sid asked "Where does it (school) get me?" Instead of seeing the long range goal, Sid asked, "what's in it for me?" He was not an outstanding scholar nor was an athlete. He saw that recognition went to those who excelled. Sid B. did not excel. As evidenced in the data, Sid lacked even the basic skills of writing and spelling. Although he spoke highly of himself, he did not think highly of himself. Sid B's attitude toward school affected his attendance.

Gabi P.

Gabi P. was dissatisfied with school and this dissatisfaction related directly to the truancy. Her feeling about the school and the teachers can be seen in her interview data. She was unhappy that she was moved from her previous school to her present school. She was critical of her present school and felt that previous school had superior teachers, subject matter, and teaching methods. Gabi P.'s attitude toward school caused her truancy and other school related problems.

James T.

James T. would not be happy in school or out of school and he would benefit from a less restrictive environment. His preferred environment would be one without rules. James considered school just another set of rules he could defy. He will most likely be exempted or drop out of school. James T.'s attitude toward school rules caused his school-related problems and truancy.

Molly F.

School was the environment that allowed Molly F. to thrive. School was a social place and Molly was sociable. The interview data supported the finding that school provided the social life but school, however, did not fit into her schedule. Molly F.'s attitude toward school directly affected her attendance problem.

Karen T.

Karen T. was good at school. She cut her classes because she felt she could afford to miss a class. Her rebelliousness was not as severe as James T.'s, but was apparent nonetheless. Karen would most likely not be exempted or drop out. She has good skills and good self esteem. She responded positively to truancy discipline. Karen T.'s truancy did not directly relate to school.

Omar B.

School was directly related to Omar B.'s attendance problems. Omar was an average student but lacked self confidence. He cut a class because he felt he would not do well on a test. His interview data showed that he was a thoughtful, analytical person. Historical records show that he has always needed praise and reassurance that he was doing well in school.

School related influences did not affect all students in the study. In some cases the school influences were obvious. When school was an influence, it was a substantial influence.

In the perception of the student, what peer pressures have occurred during this school year to produce his/her particular truancy situation?

Sid B.

Peers did not predominately affect Sid B.'s behavior. Sid was self directed or at least he wanted people to think he was self directed. The "me" concept predominant in his data is indicative of a male ego or peacock trait. This attitude was a strut to show off to others. Sid alluded to this when he stated that "no one cared". In other words, he is searching for evidence that others cared.

Gabi P.

Peers did not directly affect Gabi P.'s behavior to cut class. Gabi had acquaintances at her new school but these acquaintances did not exert pressure on her to cut class.

James T.

In the case of James T., peers were never mentioned in the data. James was a loner, a maverick. It was felt that he would defy even the unwritten rules of commitment, dedication, and loyalty to a friend. James had acquaintances that were somewhat similar in nature and temperament.

Molly F.

Peer pressure directly influenced Molly F.'s truancy. Molly cut class in response to peer pressure. She needed to talk to a friend; she needed to think about a boyfriend problem. Molly was affected by peers and would cut class as a result of peer pressure.

Karen T.

Peer pressure did have a direct relationship to Karen T.'s truancy. As stated earlier, Karen has good self esteem. She did not require support of her peers nor did she respond to pressure by her friends. Karen has friends

at school but felt that she could make the decision on her own.

Omar B.

Peer pressure did not directly affect Omar B.'s truancy. Omar responded to information from a friend regarding subject matter of a test. Although the peer did not encourage or discourage Omar's decision to cut class, Omar did, nevertheless, respond to the peer information.

Peer pressure or peer influences were not the major influences on truancy for all subjects of the study. As evidenced in the data, peer pressure ranked third behind personal life and school-related influences. As with school-related influences, when peer influence was the major influence it was obvious and powerful.

In summary of the student cases, three of the six students displayed truant symptoms directly related to personal life influences. Two of the six students displayed truant symptoms directly related to school influences. One of the six students displayed truant symptoms directly related to peer pressure or influence. In the case of Omar B. both school and peer pressures influenced his attendance. Several of the students symptomatically combined two pressures i.e., Omar B responded to peer and school pressures and Gabi P. responded to personal life and school

pressures. To reiterate, each student in this study displayed symptoms of a habitual truancy pattern. Some of the students began their truancy early in the school year and others developed the pattern during the second semester. In all cases, the first two behavior modifications did not dissuade the students from their truancy patterns.

Personal life influences were not the cause of all subjects' truancy patterns. In some cases, the influence was obvious. In other cases personal life influences were secondary.

School-related influences did not affect all students in the study. In some cases the school influences were obvious. When school was an influence, it was substantial.

Peer pressure or peer influences were not the major influence on truancy for all subjects of the study. As evidenced in the data, of the three influences it ranked third in this study compared to personal life and school-related influences. As with school related influences, when this influence was the major influence, it was obvious and powerful.

Discussion

As far as the researcher could determine, the only study that could be considered phenomenological was Barr and Knowles (1986). Barr and Knowles surveyed students who were officially exempted and dropped from school. These

students, called leavers of the 1984-85 school year, provided data by means of a questionnaire. They were not interviewed nor did they provide data by means of written or oral activities. Despite the fact that some of the students surveyed had been out of school for as long as three years, the retrospective student data produced findings that supported the researcher's hypothesis.

The six students studied stated that their truancy situations were influenced by personal life situations, school related problems, and peer pressure. Five of the six students in the researcher's study could be described as having poor academic performance. Their grade point averages range from 0.67 to 2.0 despite the fact that their basic skills scores ranged from 3-9. The sixth student felt confident in her academic performance. Even though her grade point average was low, Karen felt confident that she could complete the work and pass the tests to successfully pass her classes and raise her grade point average. Although four of the students did not directly mention poor academic performance, all of the students were truant from classes in which they performed poorly. Omar B. was the only student who specifically stated that he was truant from class because he was not prepared for the examination he was about to take.

Other students stated repeatedly that they were bored.

Bored with school, bored with classes, or just bored. Poor performance leads to boredom, lack of interest and dislike for certain courses, which in turn leads to attendance and discipline problems which leads back to poor performance. Following are some student comments that relate to boredom or lack of interest.

feeling really bored

I hate being bored

I didn't feel like going to class so I went to lunch but to a person who has gone to the same classroom 5 days a week, 36 weeks a year, its justification (to cut class).

they don't make learning fun

the classes are too, too, too boring

save us from boredom

couldn't care less

It was more important that I talk with my friend

School is just one of those things that just won't fit your schedule.

That day it was best that I cut class

I was feeling a bit rebellious

school will be over soon

Boredom and lack of interest are a result of a low self-image, an inability to perform well, a failure to see a purpose or value in school, or lack of an adequate,

meaningful challenge. Low self-image is a result of a downward spiral of unsuccessful experiences. It begins with poor academic performance. Teachers and school officials begin to consider these students "at risk" and mentally label them as non-achievers. Non-achievers state that teachers would rather get rid of them than give them attention and support. Since the student is not able to succeed and not able to comprehend what is being covered in class, distractions, boredom, and lack of interest result. The lack of interest is manifested in avoidance characteristics. In this study, avoidance was first demonstrated in disruption and defiance and later in lack of attendance and truancy.

The attitudes of the subjects in the study were negative towards school. Sid felt that no one cared. Gabi felt that this school was not as good as her previous school. James was angry at the world. Molly felt that school did not fit into her life's schedule. These attitudes are characteristic of their self-image. Cumulative records of each student reflected a successful academic record in elementary school. As the upper grades became more academically challenging to the subjects and difficulty in certain classes began to surface, disillusionment with school occurred.

As attitudes of disillusionment are complicated by lowered teacher expectations, an increased number of

unsuccessful experiences, and further poor performances the subject's belief in himself declines. This lowered self-image allows for an increasing dissatisfaction with school, negative experiences with all aspects of school-related activities, frustration, and discipline problems. This failure, inadequacy, and frustration creates a desire for the students to rid themselves of these feelings and pressures.

Student ability as measured by standardized test and I.Q. does not predict a drop out. Test scores for the six Southern California High School students demonstrate ability or capability yet their grades do not reflect their ability level. Most dropouts have the same ability levels as those of high school graduates. Basic skills test and competencies which are directly related to proficiencies and course examinations do predict dropouts.

Teachers, counselors, and parents should be aware that truancy is a symptom of a potential dropout. It may not be the cause but it is an obvious warning signal. School officials should be aware of a large number of symptoms. Based on this study the researcher suggests that school officials be aware of the following symptoms.

1. A developing truancy or unexcused absence pattern.
2. A slowly decreasing grade point average.
3. Notes or referrals from student oriented teachers that the student is losing interest.
4. Comments from students with ability that school is boring.
5. Lack of or decrease in school involvement.
6. Student preoccupation with peer influence.
7. Student preoccupation with eminent job, family, or personal situation.
8. Lack of parental involvement or support.
9. Unexplicable anger, aggression or agitation.

School officials should include these intervention techniques when counseling truant students.

1. Review attendance printouts with student.
A visual image of how the truancy looks on paper can impress the student with both the frequency level and the pattern that is developing.

2. Actively listen to what the student is saying and not saying.

A student who has educational potential but who comments that a dynamic class and teacher is boring is offering much more than a critique of the class.

3. Involve the parents in a group effort to raise the child's self esteem.

After the first notifications to the parent that truancies are occuring and grades are dropping, suggest a group effort to communicate regularly and in a positive, supportive manner.

4. Begin group and peer counseling for students with dropout symptoms.

Students who value peer influences can benefit from listening to other truants or students-at-risk in a nonthreatening atmosphere. Sometimes the ability to communicate or share is enough of an escape valve for students with preliminary dropout symptoms.

5. Examine alternative educational plans with students.

Students might need a less constrictive environment. These alternatives might include being exempted for the remainder of a semester, being dropped from a class, or creation of a four

period day. More drastic measures might include enrollment in a high school diploma program, taking the high school equivalency examination, enrollment in a Regional Opportunity Program coupled with three classes in a comprehensive program, exemption for the school year, enrollment in a work-study program, or transfer to a new school. Each of these alternatives provides the student with varying degrees of breathing room away from a confining situation.

Because school related elements are prevalent in dropout description and prediction it becomes the school's challenge to construct an integrated, dropout prevention program to reduce dropout rates. However, the challenge is not just to construct but to also implement a competency based, individualized, intensive program for instruction, personal counseling for high level "at risk" students, vocational and work experience programs, to be taught by caring teachers who respect the individuality of student learning styles. This type of student oriented school program should first work to improve student self-image to help create positive and repeatedly-successful experiences to reverse the downward spiral.

In this study the same information is reflected in the interviews of currently enrolled students. It appears that

the attendance pattern of a truant can help identify a potential dropout. This information in itself is valuable in the identification and early intervention of potential dropouts.

As the researcher and panel of judges reviewed the student data concerning early intervention, the following student comments were examined.

get a good job

Why should someone care?

kind of guy that doesn't like to be told what to do

the independent type

I'm not sure I am going to make it in life

I know what is going on

Teachers don't make learning fun

Teachers act like students act, if you come you come,

if you don't, you don't

Other people telling me how to run my life

Haven't you ever made a mistake

I had all these things on my mind

Feelings should be considered

It should be a joint effort

They ought to find out the reason and fix it

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These statements seem to demand a caring staff, a job or future oriented curriculum, an independent teaching/learning style, and a joint planning of curriculum and learning and studying procedures. As a direct result educators should look at what students perceive as the answer to an attendance problem. Schools should not only look at the truancy problem but rather examine the relationship of schools and students.

Early intervention can deter truancy and possible dropouts. The data from this phenomenological study has suggested that this early intervention needs to address the elements of personal life, school related problems, and peer pressures. The study suggested that counselors and professionals should be aware of students who display attendance problems and that these students are potential dropouts.

The research predicts that truant behavior, if not corrected, will lead to dropping out due to school-related problems and the perception that school is boring, personal problems and the lack of a life goal, peer pressures, lack of positive support, poor academic performance, and low self esteem.

Future research might expand the study on one site, expand the study to two sites, or expand the study to a

cross-cultural orientation. Using one school site, a larger number of subjects might be selected. Although the data gathering method produced a large amount of data, additional interviews, interview time, and written and oral assignments might elicit more in-depth student data. Group discussions would allow for student interaction and the building of peer group association for support.

If this further study is triangulated by the larger sample size on one school site, additional school sites might be used to incorporate a variety of populations. In this type of study a researcher would need two site liaisons to organize the subject and judge selection, facility logistics and time management.

Additional research might longitudinally follow currently enrolled students with attendance and truancy symptoms through their dropout phase, and alternative educational planning and employment.

For example, the researcher might follow any or all of the six subjects of the study through their remaining years at Southern California High School, through their dropout stages, into any alternative educational situation, and into an employment phase one to two years following their dropout status. In the case of the six subjects of the study, their residence pattern has been constant and follow up to this degree might be possible.

Statistics of the High School and Beyond Longitudinal Study (HSB) has provided many researchers with an in depth analysis of student of different cultures to determine who drops out of school. Although thousands of students were involved in the HSB study, following are some aspects of cross cultural analysis that has not been studied.

1. A phenomenological study of one culture i.e., Hispanic, black, Asian or white students on one school site.

Although the HSB study provides a great deal of information, it is still quantitative in nature and does not interpret the responses of students in a qualitative manner. Statistics, such as the number of students involved in the study, means of ages, average grade point averages, and standardized regression charts of behavior in a grade level, cannot provide researchers with data that illicit information as that gathered in this study.

2. A phenomenological study of integration students at one site.

This study could use integration students or those students bussed across the city for integration purposes for subjects.

3. A phenomenological study of one culture on several sites.

This study could use urban and suburban schools for the study. It could isolate inner city students to determine if certain influences affect inner city students that may not affect suburban students.

4. A phenomenological study of students in an "at-risk" status.

This study could use students who have been determined academically "at risk" as defined by the Coastal Unified School District. An "at risk" status is calculated at the end of the third semester. When a student is "at risk" a parent, student, counselor conference is required and a plan for the next school year is agreed upon by three people involved in the conference.

5. A phenomenological study of students from dysfunctional families.

This study could use students of one parent families, families that exhibit symptoms of abuse, families that are highly mobile, families that have problems with drugs or alcohol, families that are unemployed, families that are welfare recipients, and/or those that have other dysfunctional arrangements.

6. A phenomenological study of students of high ability.

This study could use students with high I.Q.'s and whose scores range from 8 - 9 on the California Test of Basic Skills. As stated earlier in this dissertation in the case of Karen T., truancy and potential drops can occur in the subgroup of highly-gifted students who are not being challenged.

7. A phenomenological study of students in different parts of the state.

These students could be members of any of the above cultural or academic subgroups. The study could take into consideration industrial, commercial, agricultural, impoverished, and affluent counties of the state.

Many of these studies can be conducted at one site. At a later time, several sites could be used for a broader study. It is suggested that a site coordinator be used by the researcher to organize student processing, select interview places, handle field notes, tapes, transcriptions, written and oral data. It is suggested that two panels of independent judges be used. The panel of judges for this study could have interpreted four or five more subjects but could not have satisfactorily interpreted more than that number. If the number of subjects is increased to include

subjects from several sites, the researcher should be prepared to hire a professional transcriber of field notes.

Further study in the area of truancy as a predictor of dropouts should continue. The numbers have been gathered. The statistics have been interpreted. But further study should be conducted in a phenomenological method for continued definition of truancy.

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APPENDIX A

PUPIL ACCOUNTING
REPORT OF ABSENCES
JUNE 30, 1986

**PUPIL ACCOUNTING
REPORT OF ABSENCES
JUNE 30, 1986**

									ADJUSTMENTS REFLECTED IN CUMULATIVE
SCHOOL OPERATIONS AREA I		MONTH 10			MONTHS 1 - 10			CUMULATIVE DOLLAR LOSS DUE TO NON- APP. ABS.	NON APPORTIONED REDUCTION TO NON APPORTIONED ABSENCES
SECONDARY	10-4-85 ACTIVE ENROLLMENT	TOTAL ABS.	TOTAL NON-APP	% OF NON- APP. ABS.	CUMULATIVE TOTAL ABS.	CUMULATIVE NON-APP.	% OF NON- APP. ABS.		

SENIOR HIGH									

LA JOLLA	1334	819	171	20.88	14877	3783	25.43	69,834	
MISSION BAY	1794	880	425	48.30	22809	8188	35.56	149,674	-5
POINT LOMA	2248	1173	675	57.54	23970	8209	34.25	151,538	-247
SAN DIEGO	1406	545	328	60.18	15337	7120	46.36	131,435	

TOTAL	6884	3417	1599	46.80	77084	27220	35.35	502,481	(247)

AREA II									

SENIOR HIGH									

CRANFORD	1342	932	379	40.67	18845	4244	22.52	78,344	
GOMPERS	1452	947	474	50.05	16641	7127	42.83	131,564	-39
HENRY	2571	1251	562	44.92	27802	7562	27.20	139,595	-5
LINCOLN	759	1004	289	28.82	15105	3446	24.14	67,305	
UNIVERSITY CITY	1329	957	547	57.16	15126	5103	33.74	94,281	-4

TOTAL	7453	5091	2171	42.64	92719	27682	29.86	511,010	(58)

AREA III									

SENIOR HIGH									

MADISON	2242	1066	346	32.46	29357	6839	24.59	111,480	-8
MORSE	2171	766	384	39.69	22124	8847	39.99	163,316	4
SERRA	2466	1571	826	52.58	38326	9743	32.13	179,856	-1

TOTAL	6879	3403	1476	43.37	77887	24629	31.90	454,651	(5)

AREA IV									

SENIOR HIGH									

CLAIREMONT	1258	1090	453	41.36	18209	5741	31.53	185,979	
HOOVER	1886	1436	858	59.75	22468	9821	43.71	181,296	
KEARNY	1410	531	236	44.44	14239	4523	31.76	83,495	-33
MIRA MESA	3412	1602	471	29.40	32380	3597	17.33	183,321	3

TOTAL	7966	4659	2018	43.31	87216	25682	29.45	474,090	(38)

APPENDIX B

PUPIL ACCOUNTING
REPORT OF ABSENCES
JUNE 30, 1987

PUPIL ACCOUNTING
REPORT OF ABSENCES
JUNE 30, 1987

FINAL 1986-87

AREA I	10-3-86 ACTIVE ENROLLMENT	MONTH 10			MONTHS 1 - 10			MOS. 1 - 7 1986 - 87 DOLLAR LOSS DUE TO NON APPR ABS
		TOTAL ABS.	TOTAL NON APPOR	% OF NON- APPOR ABS	CUMULATIVE TOTAL ABS	CUMULATIV. NON APPOR	% OF NON APPOR ABS	
SECONDARY								
SENIOR HIGH								
LA JOLLA 10-12	1362	531	124	23.35	14066	2845	20.23	38693
MISSION BAY 9-12	1709	902	403	44.68	20903	6347	30.36	85853
POINT LOMA 9-12	2141	1046	242	23.14	23982	4645	19.37	60852
SAN DIEGO 10-12	1380	924	376	40.69	22495	6729	29.91	97104
TOTAL	6592	3403	1145	33.65	81446	20566	25.25	282,502
AREA II								
SECONDARY								
SENIOR HIGH								
CRAWFORD 9-12	1799	1322	639	48.34	25347	6857	27.05	92146
GOMPERS 7-12	1615	953	326	34.21	19406	6709	34.57	100098
HENRY 10-12	2330	1055	477	45.21	23900	5600	23.43	73915
LINCOLN 9-12	824	955	187	19.58	17845	4100	22.98	62550
U. S. TV. 10-12	1428	918	387	42.16	16699	4614	27.63	59556
TOTAL	7996	5203	2016	38.75	103197	27880	27.02	368,265
AREA III								
SENIOR HIGH								
MADISON 9-12	2186	931	204	21.91	25244	5936	23.51	88771
MORSE 9-12	2124	1120	557	49.73	22529	8111	36.00	104904
SERRA 9-12	1988	1102	560	50.82	22795	7038	30.88	95426
TOTAL	6298	3153	1321	41.90	70568	21085	29.88	289,101
AREA IV								
SENIOR HIGH								
CLAIREMONT 9-12	1215	756	253	33.47	16888	5854	34.66	87188
HOOVER 9-12	1967	1285	582	45.29	24693	7751	31.39	107402
KEARNY 10-12	1358	527	108	20.49	12066	2731	22.63	43880
MIRA MESA 9-12	3513	1578	299	18.95	34282	6187	18.05	92928
TOTAL	8053	4146	1242	29.96	87929	22523	25.61	331,398

APPENDIX C

STUDENT ACTION CARD

STUDENT ACTION CARD

Name _____ grade _____ phone w: _____
 h: _____
 Parent/Guardian Name _____
 Truancy letter #1 _____ date _____ #2 _____ date _____ Counselor _____

Office
 use:
 d _____
 dd _____
 ADP _____
 S/S _____
 S _____

Date	A/C	C	VP	DC	Parent/Guardian	Action Taken

Code: A/C= attendance coordinator, C=counselor, VP=vice principal,
 DC=district counselor

APPENDIX D

TRUANCY ADP FORM
OPPORTUNITY CENTER

SAN DIEGO CITY SCHOOLS
POINT LOMA HIGH SCHOOL

ALTERNATIVE DAY PROGRAM (ADP)
OPPORTUNITY CENTER

Student Name _____ Grade _____ Date _____

I. I was sent here because _____

II. Right now I am feeling _____

III. I think things would have been different if I _____

IV. What does it feel like to be a truant; to be labeled a truant _____

V. I want people to know these things about me _____

VI. In regard to my own self-esteem feelings, I _____

San Diego City Schools
POINT LOMA HIGH SCHOOL

ALTERNATIVE DAY PROGRAM (ADP)

Rules and Instructions:

1. Silence will be maintained.
2. Desks will remain clean.
3. No food/drinks will be allowed.
4. No personal grooming will be allowed (this includes doing nails or combing hair).
5. Students will remain awake and working on school related assignments.
6. Students will remain seated unless given permission to do otherwise.
7. To communicate with the supervisor, silently raise your hand and wait to be recognized.
8. Restroom or locker passes will be with escort only.
9. Stretch breaks and lunch breaks will be taken separately from the school schedule and will occur with supervision.
10. Students will bring a sack lunch or bring money to purchase lunch, (with restrictions) unless they prefer not to eat.

I have read the above rules and understand them. I have asked questions about any that are not perfectly clear. I will abide by the rules and realize that failure to do so will result in immediate expulsion from the OPPORTUNITY CENTER.

Signature _____

Date _____

CK:nc
9/85

APPENDIX E

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET

CUT CLASS

NAME _____

DATE _____

GRADE ____ HOMEROOM _____

INTRODUCTION

These pages are designed to help you apply some of the information in the learning packet to your own discipline situation. The purpose of the response form is to check your understanding of why you cut class, the consequences of your actions, how you react to being punished, and how further problems of a similar nature can be avoided through goal setting.

QUESTIONS

Answer each in the space provided. If more room is needed you may use the back of the page. Make certain your answers are in complete sentences. Proper grammar and correct spelling are expected. When you finish turn in the packet to the detention supervisor and return to your desk to await dismissal.

1. What class or classes did you cut?
2. What was supposed to have happened in each class you cut?
3. What do you think your current grade is in the class or classes you cut?

4. List each of your classes (do not include lunch) and estimate your current grade in each:

<u>Class</u>	<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Grade</u>
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

5. When was the last time you cut a class?

What class?

What teacher?

6. Why did you cut class this time (be specific)?

7. Is your reason in number six above similar to any of the three listed in the introduction of the learning packet?

A. If yes, then which one?

B. Write a brief essay (at least 100 words) justifying why you cut this class. Explain the circumstances that made you do it.

- C. Write a brief essay (at least 100 words) explaining why you should not have cut the class. This should be an argument against the justifications you had in 7B above.

8. If the local newspaper published a list of students who have received a detention and what they did to get that detention it might help employers and other community members to better know the students.

A. Do you think this would be a good idea? Why or why not?

B. Do you think fewer students would cut classes if their names were published in the paper? Why or Why not?

9. By cutting a class and getting a detention you are telling others something about yourself. List below three things that others (students and/or teachers) might think about most students who cut classes:

1.

2.

3.

10. Write a paragraph summarizing what you feel is your current academic reputation with most of your teachers? (use the back of this page)

11. A. How you would like this reputation changed?

B. List three things you could do to change it:

1.

2.

3.