TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT FAILURE IN THE CLASSROOM: IDENTIFYING PREVENTIVE PRACTICES OF FAILURE USING CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE

By

KORY G. KALAHAR, Ed.D.

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

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Department of Educational Leadership

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee Appointed to examine the dissertation of Kory G. Kalahar find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

____________________________________
Gordon S. Gates, Ph.D., Committee Chair

____________________________________
Gail C. Furman, Ph.D.

____________________________________
Gene Sharratt, Ph.D.
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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT FAILURE IN THE CLASSROOM: IDENTIFYING PREVENTIVE PRACTICES OF FAILURE USING CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE

Abstract

by Kory G. Kalahar, Ed.D.

Washington State University

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Chair: Gordon S. Gates

Student failure is a prominent issue in many comprehensive secondary schools nationwide. Researchers studying error, reliability, and performance in organizations have developed and employed a method known as critical incident technique (CIT) for investigating failure. Adopting an action research model, this study involved gathering and analyzing teacher description of critical classroom incidents relevant to ninth grade student failure at Wenatchee High School. Twelve teachers from math, English, and science participated in the semester-long study and described classroom experiences with thirty students. Teachers noted an average of seven problems per student and responded with an average of three interventions. The 199 teacher-identified student problems were categorized under the labels of affective, social, physical, veiled, symptomatic, and foundational. The 117 teacher interventions were categorized to four labels: communication, management, teaching, and systems. No relationship between the number of interventions and number of problems was observed, but an association was noted between the number of interventions and number of interventions that teachers reported working. Multiple interventions appeared to improve intervention efficacy. Study findings suggest that teacher subjectivity and discretion are prominent features and that teachers rely heavily on standard teaching and management practices to address problems. A checklist and guidelines were developed from the analysis to stimulate teachers and record responses to struggling students. While a checklist may appear on the surface to be a bit instrumental, the intent of the protocol is to remind teachers that what they do makes a difference.
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There are numerous factors associated with high school student failure rates. Home life and the challenge of transitioning from middle to high school (Heck & Mohoe, 2006; Rodrick & Camburn, 1999) are often associated with student class failure. Other factors include pupils who are not prepared for the rigor of high school, as manifested in deficiencies in content knowledge and poor study habits (Matteucci & Gosling, 2004; Vispoel & Austin, 1995). More than a few young people come to high school lacking the confidence necessary to succeed, unmotivated to learn (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007), or bored in the classroom (Fallis & Opotow, 2003). Unfortunately, such issues and subsequent experiences of failure push many toward dropping out of school. Dropping out is seen by too many students as a solution to their vexing problems.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), in 2007, the dropout rate was 3.5 of every one hundred students for U.S. public and private schools. Consequently, only seventy percent of entering ninth graders are graduating with their peers (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2010). Not only does dropping out put a student behind academically, it sets the individual up for earning less income and having many potential opportunities blocked. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a rate of unemployment at 32.9 percent for students who dropped out of school between October 2004 and October 2005, while the 2005 high school graduates not enrolled in college had a 20.6 percent unemployment rate. According to the Alliance for Excellence in Education, a high school dropout will earn on average $260,000 in his or her lifetime, which is much lower than those who graduate with a diploma.
combined income loss for the class of 2008 attributed to dropping out is projected at $319 billion.

While dropping out looks to many to be the most troubling cost of student failure, studies indicate a host of other difficulties, many of which are problems in their own right. Failure multiplies the difficulties students experience while transitioning to high school and decreases their engagement in school (Knesting, 2008). Chinien and Boutin (2002) describe how many students’ learning difficulties are compounded by feelings of rejection from failure. Chen and Kaplan (2003) conducted a longitudinal study of a large sample of thirteen-year-old students in the Houston School District. Following these individuals into their early forties, the researchers found receiving at least one failing grade and poor grades generally “set in motion a cascade of later disadvantages in the transition to adulthood, which, in turn, influence socio-economic status (SES) attainment later in life” (p. 117). School failure in this sample also predicted social deviance (e.g., drug use, theft, aggression) and poor mental health, which were then analyzed as mediating variables in terms of SES attainment. These findings are supported by other studies that examine student learning or behavioral problems (i.e., student dissatisfaction and educational risk behaviors) as associated with deviance and risky behavior later in life (Gruber & Machamer, 2000; Levy-Garboua, Loheac, & Fayolle, 2006).

Whatever the particular reason for a student not meeting standard, parents, teachers, and administrators across the country are struggling to identify and implement better responses to failing a high school course given these painful potentialities and hard realities. Educators and educational researchers are seeking better explanations of student course failure in order to develop and implement efficient and effective practices or programs as prevention in high schools. An example of such work is found in the Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2009) model of
learners. Buffum et al. differentiate the factors of failure as being academic and motivational. Through their examination of the literature they produced a dichotomous classification of students: (a) the struggling learner and (b) the intentional non-learner. The struggling learner is portrayed as not understanding the concepts and standards that are being taught, but retains a desire to succeed for the most part. These students respond positively if given the extra care and attention needed by their teachers. Intentional non-learners, by contrast, are seen as having reached the point where they no longer possess the intrinsic drive for success. These adolescents are presented as no longer caring enough to invest in their education. Intentional non-learners may have been struggling learners at one point, but somehow they did not receive the help they needed to face their learning challenges. Buffum et al. argue teachers and administrators need to respond and help both sets of students through effective systemic interventions coupled with best practices in classroom teaching.

The typology Buffum et al. (2009) offer is illustrative of a psychological explanation of failure. The labels of struggling and intentional non-learners convey or align with the perspective there is something deficient with an individual (McDermott, Raley, & Seyer-Ochi, 2009). The very labels—struggling learners and intentional non-learners—focus attention on students and place the burden of the problem at their feet by inference. Further, the categories represent and draw attention to what is commonly accepted, known, or perceived about youths who experience difficulties in navigating school prior to dropping out. To be fair, Buffum’s et al. argument includes concerns related to educator action or inaction, but there is something unsatisfactory about this too. The language appears to assign a degree of blame or scapegoat teachers as somehow negligent, ignorant, or unmotivated in working with these adolescents. Human error is identified as creating the problem of failure. The attribution of human error,
either student or educator, as explanation for failure is the dominant paradigm not only in the educational literature, but in many other discussions of failure in psychology, business, and political science (Reasons, 1990).

Recent research on human error affords a new model that forwards a number of tenets which contradict the dominant psychological view of error. Dekker (2006) explains three of the key principles behind the new philosophy of error in human behavior:

• Human error is not a cause of failure. Human error is the effect, or symptom of deeper trouble.

• Human error is not random. It is systematically connected to features of people’s tools, tasks, and operating environment.

• Human error is not the conclusion of an investigation. It is the starting point. (p. 15)

Researchers studying error, reliability, and performance in organizations have developed and employed a method known as critical incident technique (CIT) for investigating failure (Edmonson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001; Flanagan, 1954; Gawande, 2005; White & Locke 1981). Scholars in various disciplines including medicine, engineering, fire management, aviation, and retail use CIT for studying accidents and breakdowns among other concerns (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005). Wears and Nemeth (2007) contend the new philosophy and subsequent method provides the way forward for understanding, the pattern of constraints that shape opportunities and risks in practice. If we understand the actual circumstances that led to adverse events, we can gain the insights that can be used to make those constraints more evident to clinicians, which will lead to genuine and lasting improvements. (p. 208)
Genuine and lasting improvements are needed in America’s high schools, which are particularly resistant to reform (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Too many students are failing and dropping out. The costs are too high for both the students and the public. This dissertation explored teacher perceptions of high school student failure within the classroom. Specifically, the study involved gathering and analyzing descriptions of critical incidents pertaining to ninth grade student course failure at Wenatchee High School (WHS). The investigation embraced an action research stance. The dissertation continues with a discussion of action research. Next, an overview is offered including a statement of the study’s purpose, a description of the research setting, an explanation of the research methods, and statement of significance. The final section of the chapter explains the principal researcher’s positionality in conducting the study. The introductory chapter closes with a brief chapter summary and outline of the chapters to come.

Action Research

In the 40’s, Karl Lewin (1948, as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2005) began to argue that too much of the research being conducted in universities failed to address problems of practice. In particular, he viewed academics as too concerned with esoteric questions defined in literature. Indeed, he criticized research as being inattentive to matters relevant to improving conditions or addressing difficulties experienced by people. His criticism was particularly aimed at the social sciences, but extended to engineering, medicine, and other disciplines. To readdress these concerns, Lewin began to articulate a set of principles for research that culminated in what is now labeled under the methodology known as action research (Peters & Robinson, 1987). The following section discusses the key principles and philosophy of action research as discussed currently in the literature in the field of education.
Herr (2005) refers to action research as practitioner’s research or insider research. He also states action research is somewhat of the “new kid on the block,” as compared to experiments, surveys, and descriptive research. It is also relatively new in doctoral dissertations, but Ed.D. programs are adopting this approach more and more. Students find the inherent value to conducting their research using the method since, as Stringer (2007) notes, one of its major tenets is the positive change or improvement for participants who are also the investigators. Too many students experience the processes and approach to conducting research for the dissertation as disconnected from their practice given the dominant focus of achieving theoretical and substantive significance at the expense of practical significance.

Doctoral students tend not only to be attracted to the pragmatic orientation of action research; they also see value in its team approach to confronting real world problems. Action research at its foundation is built upon a collaborative investigation team. Stringer (2007) suggests action research requires involvement from all affected stakeholders and, as such, builds on their motivation and deep knowledge of problems of practice. This collaborative research process focuses on specific concerns within a workplace and pursues recommendations about how to secure improvement. Similarly, Herr and Anderson (2005) allude to the fact many researchers are excited about being both the researcher and the practitioner, being able to be a part of the process, and living with the results of the research. Many action researchers use Stringer’s (2007) model of look, think, and act (see Figure 1) and its continuous series of recycling to break up the research process into three categories. Stringer further describes action research as an inquiry model with four main characteristics: democratic process involving all people; equitably acknowledging people’s worth; liberating by providing freedom from oppressive conditions, and life enhancement by expressing human potential. One particular issue
of action research that is intriguing is the fact the research pushes the team to understand how things are happening and not just what is happening.

Figure 1

Research in Professional and Public Life

Stringer (2007) states community-based action research changes the dynamics of the process so the research enhances the lives of those who participate. The rewards are not just the achievement of the desired outcomes but enrichment for the work relationship of participants.

“Action research has a primary interest, therefore, in establishing and maintaining positive working relationships” (Stringer, p. 28). Therefore, this type of research provides an avenue for addressing important problems in a specific context, determining the steps necessary to gathering data about the problem, and analyzing collected data for the purpose of creating beneficial outcomes with increased organizational capacity.

Mills (2003) states action research is recommended as “a systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular school and/or district operate” (as cited in Grogan, Donaldson, & Simmons, 2007, p. 3). The timeline
for this type of research maybe an issue of days for small projects involving one participant, such as working with a student in a classroom to change behaviors, or it may be framed as a process that takes place over a number of years. Whatever the duration of the period of study, the cycle of action research is intended to impact the daily lives of people. Action research invites people to appreciate their passion for bringing about transformational change in schools.

In addition to transformational change in response to action research, a discussion about the validity of action research is in order. Grogan et al. (2007) stresses the importance of understanding action research does not possess internal or external validity, but is still very sound research. These scholars explain while the findings from such studies are weak in terms of these two validity criteria, it does not necessarily mean they are without implications to a wider audience. Indeed, Corey argued the validity of action research rests on the degree to which educators, as researchers, are able to achieve the desired outcomes or improvements that are embraced as part of the process (as cited in Calhoun, 1993).

The identification of these major principles of action research provided guidance and informed various research decisions involved in this study. The particulars of the study can now be discussed. In providing an overview of the investigation, the section that follows explains those features of the proposed research that express or contain the principles of action research as shared above.

**Overview of the Study**

The study for this dissertation involved an investigation of ninth grade student course failure at Wenatchee High School (WHS) in the Wenatchee School District (WSD) in Washington State. The subsequent section provides an overview of the study and is divided into four parts. First, the statement of purpose is offered. Second, a detailed description of the
research setting is tendered, which provides further justification and enlightenment on the study’s purposes in its own way. The third component of the overview is the explanation of research methods used for gathering and analyzing data. The particulars of critical incident technique as proposed for this study are made explicit.

Statement of Research Purpose

Many reasons are given for why high school students fail to pass their classes. The difficulty of addressing student failure, as viewed by many educators, occurs due to problems outside of the classroom that act as barriers to student learning. For example, teachers are quick to point out the challenges students experience given poverty, the acquisition of English as a Second Language (ESL), low motivation, poor family support, etc. And yet, it is important to note that while students who fail may be disproportionately poor, lacking ESL, unmotivated, etc., not all such students fail (Chen & Kaplan, 2003; Croninger & Lee, 2001; McDermott et al., 2009). Indeed, there are many examples of students who excel academically and come from families living with poverty, homes where English is not the native language, or families whose support of education is less than adequate (Conchas, 2001; Gayles, 2005; Morris, 2004; O’Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2008). In addition, it is not uncommon for students to be failing one class and passing all of the others. There are many white students of middle and upper socio-economic status whose native language is English who fit this pattern of failing (Voelkl, Welte, & Wieczorek, 1999). The recognition of these various issues raises many questions about the psychological model that assumes the “cause-consequence equivalence” in which bad outcomes follow from bad processes (Dekker, 2006).

Researchers who embrace the new paradigm of failure argue that in order to understand failure, the identification of an error should begin a deeper investigation into the circumstances,
vulnerabilities, assumptions, and timeline of the event rather than its conclusion. Wears and Nemeth (2007) capture and extend this insight given the new paradigm about error in their statement, “We do not learn much by asking why the way a practitioner framed a problem turned out to be wrong. We do learn when we discover why that framing seemed so reasonable at the time” (p. 207). In studying student course failure, it is essential to recognize the degree to which ambiguity and uncertainty are present in the work of teaching (Helsing, 2007). The intent of the researcher in carrying out this study was to inquire into the processes, choices, ambiguities, and pressures present in ninth grade classrooms in WHS that contribute to student failure.

Specifically, the purposes of the study were threefold. First, the investigation was conducted to describe and categorize the problems and efforts teachers make to address the obstacles that they perceive as associated with student failure. The study explored what WHS teachers noticed about their ninth grade students who were failing and how they were addressing these problems as part of their daily classroom practices and routines. Second, given this description, the researchers analyzed the interactions, routines, decisions, and conflicts to identify strengths and weaknesses for responding or assisting ninth grade students at WHS who are headed toward or are failing their classes. Finally, study findings were applied to develop a checklist and guidelines for teachers as recommendations designed to assist them in preventing student failure. Specifically, through following the critical incident technique, the purpose of the study was to develop a functional, easy-to-use tool (i.e., check list and/or rating system) to identify, guide, encourage, and improve classroom interventions of teachers. According to Hales, Terblanche, Fowler, and Sibbald (2007) a checklist is an organizational tool that outlines criteria of consideration for a particular. Hales also explains that checklists are used as cognitive aides to
guide users through accurate task completion, requiring a systematic and comprehensive approach.

The findings of this study are narrow and specific to what teachers can do. Limiting the scope of understanding failure, to what is controllable within the classroom, is necessary in order to understand how to better support teachers in their work with students to reduce the rates of failure. This is not about blaming teachers, but rather recognizing the constraints present in the way their work as it has been structured and supported. The study developed a tool rooted in the current work of teaching at WHS that may be efficiently and effectively used to stimulate the kind of changes needed, such that all students pass their courses.

Research Setting

Wenatchee High School (WHS), a 4A high school with 2049 students, identifies the campus where this study took place. WHS is located in the city of Wenatchee, which is located in the heart of the State of Washington on the eastern side of the Cascade Mountain range. WHS is one of two comprehensive high schools in the Wenatchee School District. WHS enrolls students in grades nine through twelve. Additionally, there are three alternative or non-traditional secondary schools (i.e., Valley Academy of Learning, Skill Source, and Wenatchee Valley Technical Skills Center) in the district. The three schools enroll a small number of students in grades nine through twelve. WHS has 125 certificated faculty members, sixty additional classified and support staff, three Assistant Principals, an Athletic Director, a Vocational Director, and a Principal. It is a building that offers many opportunities for students who attend, including seventeen varsity sports and over fifty clubs and activities. In the realm of academics, the administration and faculty have incorporated ten different Advanced Placement courses, five college courses, and six additional advanced courses into the curriculum.
During the course of the study, I was one of three assistant principals for Wenatchee High School. I had been a teacher at WHS for nine years prior (more information is included in the positionality section) to becoming an assistant principal. One of the roles that I was given as an administrator in addition to Assessment Coordinator and Director of Technology for the building was the Director of Academic Interventions. It was this role that led me down the path of trying to understand student failure at a deeper level and try to come up with comprehensive plan study that would create a simple and useful tool for teachers to have at their disposal to prevent student failure in the first place. The district had created an initiative to have each building address a response to intervention model that took into account the number of students that were failing and what was being done to address these concerns on a classroom, building, and systems level. I speak more to my positionality in the study later in the dissertation.

The following paragraphs provide further description of WHS. The presentation begins by providing key measures of the school, taken from the Washington State School Report Card provided by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The discussion then shifts to internal (i.e., building) and external (i.e., district) work that leads up to an intentional and concentrated focus in the school on student failure generally and at the ninth grade level specifically. The information shared conveys the priority and commitment WHS teachers and administrators are giving to addressing the problem of failure by WHS students.

Wenatchee High School enrolls roughly two thousand students per year. At the time of the study, the largest student ethnic group in the school was White (61.4 percent) with most of the remaining students being Hispanic (35.2 percent). There were thirty-eight Asian/Pacific Islander, thirty-four Asian, twenty-one American Indian/Alaskan Native and thirteen Black students. The percentage of students qualified for free and reduced price meals was 45.2 percent.
which is up from the 35.6\% who were qualified during the 2006-07 academic year.

Twenty percent of students were designated migrant. OSPI reported the most recent dropout rate for WHS at 3.1\% of students. The recent dropout rate is an improvement over the 5.4\% rate observed for the 2005-06 academic year.

In addition to the student demographics, OSPI reported there are 107 classroom teachers. The average years of teacher experience for the campus was 11.4 and 60.7\% of these teachers possessed at least a master’s degree. All teachers in the core academic areas were highly qualified as defined in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.

WHS did not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) for 2009-10 as established by Washington State and is in step five of improvement. Fifty-four percent of the criteria were met (see Appendix A for a summary of the adequate yearly performance indicators). Overall, student performance on the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE) for the tenth grade for 2009-10, as shown on Table 1 below, revealed scores for WHS were slightly better than the district and comparable to state’s overall averages. There was an achievement gap at WHS in all four subjects tested by the state. Most recently, 89.9\% of White students passed Reading as compared to 57.9\% of Hispanic Students, 53.7\% of Whites students passed Math as compared to 19.9\% of Hispanic students, and 62.4\% of White students passed Science, which is higher than the 21.1\% of Hispanic students. Writing possessed the smallest gap with 88.4\% of White students passing while 69.2\% of Hispanic students tested passed. No other student groups were large enough for the state to report performance.

A mentioned earlier, WHS is in step five of improvement. The WSD is in step two. The faculty at WHS has been working with district and state appointed monitors as part of the improvement process. The reform efforts underway in the school have targeted improvement in
student supports, as well as building teacher capacity to initiate proactive classroom interventions. Ongoing work has also included alignment and implementation of a core curriculum and use of research-based instructional best practices. A goal of the intervention process has been to create ways for students who are not meeting standard academically to have extra time to complete schoolwork. To this end, the daily schedule has been reorganized to accommodate emergent student needs through support classes. The institution of these and related interventions began taking shape during the 2006-07 school year when an ad hoc team made of teachers, counselors, the Intervention Specialist, and the principal began working to address problems with student performance at WHS. The team was charged with coming up with ways to reduce the number of failing students in the ninth grade. The transition to high school was seen as difficult and something that could be managed better. After careful study, the team proposed to implement a core program to build a community within the school and increase teacher ownership through teacher collaboration and strengthened relationships with students. The plan was put forward to the staff, which voted against it.

Table 1

Grade 10 HSPE Results for 2009-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WHS</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>80.9%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSD</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>78.4%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2007-08, the team went to work again with the charge of creating a systemic intervention system proposal. The outcome was the Panthers Academically Working toward
Success (PAWS) Time program. During the 2008-09 school year, another team was convened to flush out the concerns of the faculty and develop a plan for its implementation. PAWS Time was instituted the following year. As part of the implementation process, plans to evaluate the program were developed and followed. Failing grades were reduced both semesters by a minimum of 25 percent and a maximum of 33 percent in the first year. Subsequent evaluation of student outcomes has found no change in rates of failure.

It is important to recognize that supporting WHS change efforts has been a state-appointed District Improvement Facilitator (DIF) who has headed efforts at this level. A variety of District Improvement Teams (DIT) have been created to address the numerous areas where student performance was found to be lacking. The Intervention Oversight Team (IOT) is one of these groups. The IOT is comprised of the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, the Director of Federal Programs, a middle school principal, an elementary principal, a special education representative, and me as the high school representative. We began meeting as a team in the spring of 2009 and created an action plan and District Intervention Model. This collaborative group met regularly during the 2009-10 school year to continue to push the district forward in regard to interventions. We have had each principal and director report to their building and they have worked with others at the campus level to develop action plans. All plans have incorporated a Pyramid of Intervention as defined by The Solution Tree and DuFour conglomerate, which is essentially a Response to Intervention (RTI) model.

The Pyramid of Intervention has been beneficial to PAWS Time. Implementation of the new proposal happened in the fall of 2010. Given this RTI model, educators have been intentionally looking at students who do not meet standard. Since WHS has collaboratively reached the point where one type of systemic academic intervention has been implemented and
modified for the 2010-11 school year, the impact of this intervention on student performance and motivation to succeed continues to be evaluated. This leads directly to the importance of the current study to examine the incidents teachers have seen over the past years and current semester where students are failing. This is vital information for the educators in the school to digest and analyze in order to improve instruction, respond more appropriately to weak signals that lead to failure, modify the existing programs that have already been implemented, and to look to the next level of implementation.

Critical Incident Technique

Critical incident technique has been used in a limited degree in the educational setting. In education, the technique has been used predominately in the post-secondary arena for identifying problems in medical schools (e.g., Silber et al., 2006), but there are those who have used it to inquire into classroom instruction (e.g., Gilbert & Priest, 1997; Myhill & Warren 2005), classroom management (Tulley & Chiu, 1995), and student engagement (Le Mare & Sobat, 2002). As a method, it has yet to be fully applied to high school student failure. Vispoel and Austin (1995) employed components of the technique, but it was modified significantly to test attribution theory since students were given forced choice and Likert scale questions about their experience of failure. Despite the limited use in education, the technique has a rich and long history in research on failure in medicine, engineering, fire management, aviation, and retail (Butterfield et al., 2005). The following section explains those aspects of the technique that were used to conduct this action research dissertation. Specifically, the discussion will explain the method in general terms and define the key principles as adopted for this study. Next, the discussion will move to procedures that were used for data collection. The details for the interview protocols and observations that were employed for gathering data about student failure
at WHS are given particular attention. Third, the general outline is offered of the inductive process that was used for data analysis. Finally, the WHS research team that was involved with the research processes including their role is described.

Gremier (2004) describes the critical incident technique (CIT) as a method that relies on a set of procedures concerned with collecting, content analyzing, and classifying observations of human behavior. Butterfield et al. (2005) conducted an extensive review of research that employed the technique and found that the method cannot be presented as a rigid set of rules, but rather a set of flexible principles that must be modified to meet the specific situation at hand. The critical incident technique is aligned with the qualitative research tradition and facilitates the investigation of significant occurrences (events, incidents, processes, or issues) identified by respondents.

In general, CIT employs a set of procedures in which researchers lead interviewees and conduct observations to describe a situation in such detail that the critical incidents leading up to the problem or failure are exposed. In this way, the method is concerned with generating a large and diverse list of incidents in order to identify patterns across a variety of critical incidents leading up to the problem of interest. Mahajan (2010) reminds researchers of the instructiveness of near misses in this process. Flannagan (1954), who is credited with formalizing the method, described incidents as any observable human activity that permits inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act.

Flannagan (1954) suggested researchers begin by defining the general aims of the activity in question. “In its simplest form, the functional description of an activity specifies precisely what is necessary to do and not do if participation in the activity is to be judged successful or effective” (p. 336). For this study, the problem was concerned with student grades—failing
grades to be precise. The class of incidents, however, included those student performances or products of learning that are evaluated or assessed by their teachers as failing. One score or the accumulation of scores may contribute to a failing grade in a particular class. Majahan (2010) adds to Flanagan’s directions by recommending gathering data “In addition to the reported incident…[t]he line of enquiry should first determine exactly what happened….how it happened…the reasons behind certain acts or omissions. The next step is to define why.” (italics in original, p. 72).

The process of data collection began with interviews of teachers of ninth grade classes at WHS in early January 2011. All eighteen iFrosh (ninth grade core program) teachers who teach math, science, and language arts were asked to participate in at least one interview. Ultimately, twelve teachers agreed to participate in the study and signed the consent form. The focus of the interview was concerned primarily with eliciting retrospective descriptions of classroom experiences from the prior semester. An open-ended and structured protocol offered in Appendix B guided teachers to reflect and describe one or more incidents in which a student in their class failed. The protocol also provided the language used to explain the interview to participants. The specifics of this part of the protocol are discussed later in the chapter in the positionality section where a discussion on ethical considerations is raised and addressed.

The first question and subsequent probes directed the teacher being interviewed to share a story about a student who failed or was failing as indicated on the protocol. The probes were provided by the researcher as needed to stimulate their memory. Teachers were encouraged to include their impressions about students, events over the semester, resources used, student reactions, expectations, and surprises in teaching students in their ninth grade classes. After this first reflection, teachers were given an opportunity to select another student to share, one either
similar to or different than the experience with the first. Again, probe questions were employed to help in the interview process. The third section of the interview protocol attempted to elicit responses from teachers about a failing student who was able to turn his or her performance around. The fourth section of the protocol concerned a struggling student the teacher was currently instructing. There were four probes that were prepared by the researcher to assist teachers. Finally, the interview concluded by inviting the teacher to respond to an open question about whatever else they would like to share with the researcher about student failure.

Later in the semester, late February to early March, follow-up questions to the original twelve interviews were conducted. This took place once the interviews had been listened to through the audio files and transcriptions had been made. Teachers were given back the unedited transcriptions for member checking. Once the member checking process had taken place and the transcribed interviews had been thoroughly read, any remaining questions or unclear responses were checked in person with the teachers to elicit the most accurate responses to the prompts. Only three teachers were questioned at this stage of that data gathering.

Brief classroom observations were conducted with the ninth grade teachers to gather additional data. The walkthrough is a standard part of WHS operations. Six informal observations were conducted during this time. Field notes were taken during the walkthrough, as well as the collection of artifacts. The focus of the observations and field notes were the teachers’ responses to student behavior. No identifying information of students was recorded. During or after the observations, teachers were asked to engage in informal questions about what was observed in their classrooms depending on what happened, as well as their availability to discuss with the observer. One of the key purposes of the walkthroughs was to observe classrooms to triangulate data from the interviews. Specifically, observations allowed the
researcher to determine what might have been missing or inconsistent in teacher responses to their interview questions about classroom interactions. All field notes were transcribed and missing details added, following recognized procedures (Emerson et al., 1995).

The data collected for this study were analyzed in a variety of ways and stages. Analyzing the data using multiple stages, as shared below, has been found to facilitate assessment of patterns in reported errors, which previous research has shown to be useful for developing resilience and prevention strategies that improve organizational reliability. The first stage of data analysis began with the first interview and continued after all data were collected and transcribed. The lead researcher analyzed data gathered via interview. The transcribed data were coded for problems, errors, lapses, challenges, failures, near misses, etc., or what can be assessed as critical incidents in teacher descriptions of student failure, which were ultimately named problems. The process of coding data included identifying synonyms. The next phase of the analysis examined patterns how the teacher reports of the incidents to create types of categories. For example, errors students were making such as turning work in late or not turning work in at all were seen as related problems. Ultimately, the specific problems identified by teachers were pooled under the following six labels: affective, social, physical, veiled, symptomatic, and foundational.

The critical incidents were analyzed per data source and cross analyzed per participant, subject taught by teacher, teacher gender, students identified in the interviews, and student gender. The procedure of coding and counting incidents in such a way is an accepted practice by researchers who have developed and employed the technique (Beech & Norman, 1995; Blatt et al., 2006; Cooper et al., 1978; Mahajan, 2010). The tabulations of various problems were reported via cumulative totals for each teacher and subject, as well as for the study as a whole.
The second stage of analysis entailed a process of coding data concerned with the interventions or solutions that teachers used to address the problems. In the second stage, the outcome of the incidents involving these applied solutions were coded according to their efficacy (i.e., worked, failed, or uncertain). Specifically, codes were identified for the subjects, issues, topics, or vulnerabilities referenced in the reported errors. Such analysis was designed to expose the ways and degree to which reported errors, for example, pertain to a lack of resources (and what kind of resource), miscommunication, insufficient training, student discipline, interventions, etc. The patterns in description and occurrence were examined across the interviews and lead to the identification of four solution or intervention types. Interventions teachers employed to address student problems were grouped as strategies or practices related to management, communication, teaching, and systems. The incidents of these interventions were tabulated by data source, participant, teacher subject, teacher gender, student, and student gender.

In the third stage of the analysis, the efficacy of the interventions was examined by their respective problems. Given the organization of the reported errors into various categories, the lead researcher dove into the transcriptions to explore patterns in the interactions, routines, decisions, and conflicts that can be seen contributing to student failure within and across the categories. The intent of this stage was to further reduce data by generating descriptions of the types of errors within and across the categories. The description of the incidents in this way exposed the constraints (i.e., processes, choices, ambiguities, and pressures) that shape opportunities, implemented interventions, and risks experienced by teachers in the classroom. The findings were then used to formulate a checklist for teachers, as well as develop guidelines for its use in the classroom.
Through following the critical incident technique, the researcher created a functional, easy-to-use tool (i.e., check list and rubric for evaluation) for teachers to notice the emerging problems and cue the most effective options for addressing them. Hewson and Burrell (2006) believe the checklist allows the human brain to deal with the many variables involved in patient care in an ICU ward. This same idea of multiple variables is true in education as the teacher works to develop a relationship with each individual student to teach them effectively and to try to find out what went wrong when the student does not learn. Many high intensity fields of work employ the use of checklists to decrease the potential for human error states Hales et al. (2007). As such, the findings contribute to building a resilient organization as the ability and willingness of the faculty to notice, discuss, and act on subtle indicators becomes part of normal operations at WHS. Of course, any checklist must be properly piloted and field-tested and the staff using the checklist trained (Hales et al., p. 28).

Each of the above components were discussed and agreed upon by a team of WHS educators that was formed for the purposes of the study. The team consisted of the building Intervention Specialist, two classroom teachers, a counselor, and myself. The collaborative team for this study was based at the building level for the planning of research and not utilizing the previously mentioned District Intervention Team (driving district level interventions) since they were so far removed from the building itself. Members of the team were key players who had been instrumental in moving WHS to the place where it is currently and have demonstrated their commitment to working together and following through. The intent of using the team was to help the lead researcher see through the processes of data collection and analysis. During the study, however, the team was unfortunately displaced through resignations and position changes
that impacted the effectiveness of the group. The lead researcher continued on with the
interviews, data collection, and analysis with the direction of the committee chair.

Positionality

The research for this study took place at Wenatchee High School (WHS) where I was the
Assistant Principal in charge of Academic Interventions, Technology, and Assessment. In regard
to my specific positionality within this research project, I operated on an insider collaborative
approach (Herr, 2005). I worked on the inside with my team and our purpose was to identify
actions, behaviors, and decisions teachers and students make within the classroom that result in
student failure. We have been fortunate as a team that, in the beginning before the team
dissolved, we have had quite a bit of autonomy within the building and district. The principal
had asked that we report or brief her as to the newest courses of action and direction in which we
head so she is informed when the district asks her about our progress.

I performed a variety of roles within the Wenatchee School District. As mentioned
earlier, at the time of the study I was on the District Improvement Team for Interventions. As
part this team, we helped to shape the direction the district took on a vision for a Pyramid of
Interventions, professional development for level one interventions, and charting our long-term
progress for continual growth. At the building level, I was the principal in charge of
coordinating all interventions within the building and have been charged with seeing to the
continuous growth and evaluation of academic interventions.

Specifically, I created an Intervention Committee that I facilitated year round comprised
of mostly the same people who were my collaborative team for this research. I also facilitated
and evaluated all the interventions groups on the fringe, namely the Homework Center, after-
school tutoring, Evening Study, etc. By doing this I was able to monitor activities at WHS in regard to interventions and keep the many groups tightly connected in such a big building.

Part of my positionality for this project comes from the evolution I have taken since I left the classroom. I was teaching three AP History classes and a regular junior level U.S. History, which was very enjoyable. The AP classes were a lot of preparation and grading, but the students were a dream. By the same token, the juniors were a fun age to work with in the regular education classes. After obtaining my principal’s credentials in the summer of 2006, I took the job of Student Success Facilitator to work with the students at WHS who had not met standard on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and created ways for them to meet standard. In this role, I worked as an academic advisor to create custom tailored ways for these students to get the help they needed to be successful on the WASL. I designed homework studies, morning tutoring sessions, handouts, workbooks, taught mini courses in reading and writing, and planned weekend seminars before the WASL testing. I basically did whatever I could to help those willing to add to their busy schedule to meet standard in order to graduate.

This job changed my outlook on education forever.

I worked at that job for one year before there was an administrative opening, which I accepted. While in the position, each student conversation was positive where I would ask, “how can I help you?” That year made me realize how rewarding it was to help struggling learners get the help they needed to be successful. This realization has helped me keep my focus on creating ways to not only help these students navigate through the system, but to build creative ways to not allow them to fail or make it seem harder for the students to fail than to pass. After four years as Assistant Principal, I still deal with this group of students a lot and have so many interactions with them on a daily basis. They need our commitment as educators to do what is
necessary to help them if they are willing to accept it. The final piece in my career-long
metamorphosis to working with students who have the highest needs, are most underrepresented,
and the most likely to drop out or be incarcerated, led me to my current position as the Principal
of WestSide High School. WestSide is an accredited high school that offers a variety of
programs and opportunities for the young people of the valley. Being in this position is the
capstone of the work that I love and also includes being the administrator for the Juvenile
Detention Center and the GED facility known as the SkillSource.

Another aspect of positionality comes from the work by Maehr and Midgley (1991) on
student goal theory. The interest here lies in the fact no matter what type of intervention we
research, create, and implement, it really doesn’t matter unless it helps student motivation to
succeed. In their work, Maehr and Midgley relate the two different classes of goal theory in
detail. The first goal theory class is the “ability focused” goal where the child is afraid of being
judged poorly if they do not outperform others at a particular task. The “task focused” goal
looks at learning to gain understanding and build value and meaning. Depending on which goal
a person has, it aligns them to a prescribed type of adapting to challenging tasks. The ability
goal person is likely to choose easy tasks and give up quicker than the task-focused person.
Understanding this theory helps move forward the analysis of intervention success since the
students we work with are the ones who have given up or do not even try, as described through
the goal theory.

Before concluding this section, I will discuss the ethical issues raised and addressed
within the study. Research ethics must be given consideration, particularly those that pertain to
protecting subject rights. Action research can prove problematic for a variety of reasons. Those
who participate in research should generally be informed of their rights. When beginning
research, much care and consideration must be placed on ensuring no harm will come to any participant during the course of the research (Stringer, 2007). This type of care is shown through creating a well thought out informed consent packet, ensuring the right to privacy and to decline participation, maintaining confidentiality, and obtaining permission to share information gathered from the research process. The interview protocol provided in the appendix identified and addressed the rights for participants in this study.

Informed consent allowed the participant a chance to know, understand, ask questions about the goals of the study, and to find out the purpose and process for the study. The informed consent document also allowed the opportunity for the interviewer to discuss these items and obtain written acknowledgement of the participant’s willingness to participate (Stringer, 2007). After viewing the scope and the magnitude of the study, participants were sometimes excited to join in and help for the greater good, but somewhat apprehensive to speak their mind, not sure where the details and specifics would put them in the end. In all reality, setting the participant’s mind at ease is the purpose of the informed consent form. The interviewer must also explain the level of confidentiality of the study and how documents will be stored, used, and discarded upon completion of the study. In addition, the participant will need to give the researcher permission to share and reproduce the information they will divulge. The research team assembled to conduct this study at WHS abided by the above ethical standards. No observations were conducted without prior permission.

On a more personal note, the teachers needed to fully understand the goal of the study while it was taking place, which was to uncover the incidents that led to student failure within the classroom. It was made clear that the study’s purpose was not to find or place blame in any direction. As an evaluating administrator in the building, I continually clarified the different hats
I wore during this process. Through the interview process and observations, I found incidents, lapses, and errors that led to student failure from the perspective of the student, teacher, and building and was not intending to find blame, but rather attempting to uncover better solutions.

Chapter Summary

Educators across the country are struggling to identify and implement better responses to high school student failure. The faculty at Wenatchee High School (WHS) has been particularly concerned about their ninth grade students. The above chapter presented the specifics for a study that addressed such concerns. After providing a discussion of the study’s background, the chapter explained the action research stance embraced by the researcher and that this was a study conducted by a practitioner, in his place of work, to seek after improvements. The threefold purposes of the study where explained: (a) to describe failure of ninth grade students at WHS as perceived by their teachers as well as the efforts teachers made to intervene and assist students; (b) to analyze strengths and weaknesses in teacher assistance for students who are headed toward or are failing a class; and (c) to develop a checklist and guidelines for teachers that focuses on preventing student failure in the classroom.

Next, the chapter offered greater detail about the setting, WHS, where the study was conducted. A major portion of the chapter then dealt with the research methods. Specifically, data for the study was gathered and analyzed using the critical incident technique. How interviews with ninth grade WHS teachers were conducted, as well as brief observations and artifacts collected were explained.

There will be two other chapters that form the dissertation. Chapter two, which is next, will present the review of the literature. The literature to be reviewed is broken into five topics given the headings of: highly reliable organizations and response to failure, motivation theory,
transitions to high school, systemic interventions, and dropout theory. Each topic contributes to an understanding of important aspects about the conditions, challenges, and interventions for high school students to prevent failure.

Chapter three is the last chapter in the dissertation. It will provide the results of the study. Chapter three will entail six major sections. The first provides a description of the twelve teachers who participated in the study at WHS. Included in this section is a description and analysis of the students identified in the interviews by teacher and subject, among other variables, as preparation for interpreting the study’s findings. The second section examines patterns in coded teacher interviews about their daily experiences with the kinds of problems they noticed with their ninth grade students that contributed to failure. The third section explores the various teacher practices, routines, and strategies that they employed to address the problematic student behaviors, attitudes, and predicaments. The fourth section gives an analysis of intersection of student problems and teacher solutions to identify strengths and weaknesses in teacher responses. The fifth section offers the interpretation of the previous analyses and explains the developed checklist and guidelines for teachers designed to assist teachers to more effectively intervene with their students to prevent failure. The final section of the chapter provides the conclusion that contains the significance and limitations for the study as well as next steps in instituting the student failure protocols and possible future research.
CHAPTER TWO
THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature offered in this chapter covers a diverse body of scholarship. Specifically, the chapter reviews research that draws on following topics: highly reliable organizations and response to failure, motivation theory, ninth grade transition programs, systemic interventions, and dropout theory. As mentioned previously in the purpose section of chapter one, to understand student failure there has to be some understanding of the error that is occurring. The conundrum, though, is not placing blame undeservedly on either the student or the teacher, but more upon the position in which these two find themselves in the classroom. An understanding of how effective businesses respond to failure helps identify the many flaws in public education and gives us a picture of what it might take to straighten a few things out and put things in perspective. Motivation theory gives the research team clarity on what we are up against in education as we try to understand why students do not do their work or perform in the classroom. In looking at the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade, the research team gains a clearer picture of the psychological challenges of changing schools and the importance of relationships. Systemic interventions inform us that students need a structured support system that responds to their needs quickly, during the school day, and in a mandatory fashion. Dropout theory explains how students reach the point of no hope and their only perceived solution is to leave the public education world for good. All of these robust topics informed the research team of the great number of variables that go into student failure externally and internally. The question that now remains in knowing what the current research tells us is what is happening due
to these external and internal factors that make students fail and what can be created from this information to thwart it completely.

Highly Reliability and Education

Comparing education to highly reliable organizations (HROs) is a farce since the catastrophic consequences of a failure in education is the lack of student learning and not a situation where anyone is going to lose their life. However, failure in high school can lead to catastrophic consequences in an indirect way, and conceptually, there are many similarities that are prevalent in analyzing HROs and schools in their respective response to failure. All organizations make mistakes. According to Reasons (2000), failures can arise from individual lapses to weakness in procedures, technologies, and management systems, or as Weick (as cited in Bellamy, 2005) states, could be from a lack of adaptation from normal procedures. The study of these mistakes and how organizations respond sparks some researchers to relate these organizations to education. Bellamy (2005) states that applying ideas from other organizations and relating it to the unique world of education is risky, but knowledge can be gained from highly reliable organizations and used to improve student learning if the link between the organization and education is viewed as a metaphor. Adler et al. (1999) suggests through their study of contingency theory (citing Burns and Stalker, 1961), in relation to flexibility versus efficiency, that some organizations adopt a mechanistic approach if their task is simple and stable. Others (education) need an organic approach if the task is complex and changing and the goal is flexibility. If the research shows that organizations are more efficient when they focus on a narrower range of product, then education has a bit of reform ahead of it since there is quite a disparity in the range of public education. Adler (1999) also makes note that the cost of output
flexibility can be reduced if internal processes can be made more routine. Making education more routine has so many variables involved that it is almost impossible to achieve.

Blatt et al. (2006) describes two approaches for HROs to achieve reliability that relates to education and how it handles error: prevention and resilience. Some educational voices have repeatedly said that prevention is the best intervention. The preventative concept is one that relates to small class size, smaller learning communities, and ninth grade core programs to build community, whereas the resiliency model looks to level one interventions in the classroom, where the practitioner executes the intervention based on their skill and knowledge. It also looks at the way in which the lapses in reliability occurred in this study related to education. There are many times when educators feel they were unaware that a student did not understand as suggested in category one. If they did realize a lack of understanding was happening, it was too late, or the lack of understands happened in an earlier grade, or they were not clear why the lack of understanding occurred as suggested in category two. Finally, the educator knew a lack of understanding was happening and they either chose not do anything or they did do something.

Taking the results of this study to the context of education and using the same concept of a lapse in reliability shows the similarities of people in dissimilar situations.

Human error can be viewed with two lenses according to Reason (2000). One way of viewing error is through a person approach (education) focusing on the individual and things like forgetfulness, inattention, or moral weakness. Another way of viewing human error is through the systems approach (HROs) focusing on the working condition and the defenses built to avoid error. Reasons (2000) concludes that error management also has two components: limiting the incidence of dangerous error and creating systems better able to tolerate error. The analysis of HROs through the lens of education shows many similarities even though schools cannot be
viewed as HROs. Highly reliable organizations tend to use the systems approach whereas education often views the individual as the problem: “it’s that one classroom teacher and not the system that is broken,” for example. According to Frederickson and LaPorte (2002), HROs are a complex, fragmented array of horizontal, vertical, and lateral linkages between multiple jurisdictions. This describes an issue with education as schools work to satisfy the district, state, and federal government guidelines. Education appears to be one of the error-tolerant types of organization that are working to do somewhat impossible jobs the way the system is currently being managed. According to March and Olson (as cited in Frederickson and LaPorte, 2002), error-tolerant organizations are working with limited funding, have difficult purpose, and a tolerance for failure. Education tolerates failure to some degree: grades, dropouts, assessments, instruction, etc. Sometimes this tolerance lies with the individual teacher as they allow passive failure, move on to new curriculum without understanding by all, or do not assess well enough to gauge competency. But in other cases, the tolerance is through an archaic system of education that does not take into consideration the generation they are trying to educate. HROs do not deal with issues such as low wages, minimal qualifications, and high turnover due to the fact that the risk and the consequences of failure are too high (Frederickson & LaPorte, 2002), but it is allowable in education. Why? The concept of redundancy (as described in Frederickson and LaPorte, 2002) in HROs has individual tasks broken down into independent parts to reduce failure, as education does so through instructional best practices about teaching concepts, skills, and then assessing them (formative assessment). When this process is not done correctly, there is failure in the system. Error-intolerant fields such as air traffic controlling and nuclear power generation insist on extraordinary levels of competence and high technical performance (Frederickson & LaPorte, 2002). What are the expectations and levels of competency for highly
Does merely a four-year degree and teaching certificate constitute qualification? Better yet, what can be done once these competencies disappear? Because of the catastrophic consequences associate with HROs, the public is generally comfortable to put up with negative personal setbacks like arriving to the airport early, standing in lines, virtually disrobing at security checkpoints. What personal setbacks are people willing to live with in education based on the disparity of socio-economic realities, language barriers, and learning gaps? Should it matter what the consequences are from our students’ perspectives? Is it really more important to know how to evacuate Long Island (Clarke & Perrow, 1996) or educate our children? That may be an unfair question, but failure and an organizational response to it should exist no matter what the organization or the consequence.

No organization wants to fail. Clarke and Perrow (1996) describe this concept as the “fantasy” that everything works out right the first time and every contingency is known and planned. Stringfield and Datnow (as cited in Bellamy, 2005) believe HROs and education share an emphasis on training, frontline staff to solve problems use of data, and best practices. Roberts (1994) relates much of the literature on HROs describe how organizations operate when the failure is too significant to tolerate. It seems in education, this is the only time in which a reaction takes place, when the problem is too significant to ignore. Determining the root cause of the problem and how to solve the problem as quickly and effectively as possible is the next issue. Multiple and catastrophic failures occur when companies create “fantasy documents” to make it look as though the problem is being addressed (Clarke & Perrow, 1996). Roberts, Stout, and Halpern (1994) found the decision making process of these highly reliable organizations, which are usually high technology, would emulate the reliable examples set forth from the research data. In relationship to education, the construct of accountability from Robert’s
research is placed on numerous people in the building, and in education it would place accountability on many people from administrators, to Department Heads, to team leaders, and to mentor teachers. Using the model of all people making decisions from the spotter or teacher to upper-level hierarchy, tenured staff to the administration for accountability is common. Similarly, Clarke and Perrow (1996) found some companies believe their current path and plan will work while they ignore and disregard their own experiences. This idea of “representation” aligns to education as well. We often think by doing the same thing over and over again (albeit better planning or more background research) that we will somehow end up with a different result, which clearly isn’t the case unless we drastically restructure with second order chance. Decisions that impact student learning in comparison to decisions that impact lives in the line of duty seems a bit of a stretch, but there is a correlation. Lives are affected by education each and every day, but the results are not quite as instantaneous as on an aircraft carrier sinking or a nuclear explosion.

Weick (1996) believes that by better understanding the conditions of firefighting and educational administration we can better know if administrators can contain or lose control over fires. He offers five propositions that help explain and support his ideas and added, in parenthesis, how this could be put into daily practice in educational administration and teaching.

1. Small events need handling quickly with on-the-spot decisions and not waiting or putting resources elsewhere first (Students not meeting standard need help before it gets worse or becomes too late and they develop the tendencies of an intentional non-learner).
2. Knowing failure is eminent and trusting past experience is quite helpful (What is systemic about how we respond to failure because it’s going to happen? Past practices and the data is helpful to decide what course of action to take.).
3. Administrators need a fire triangle – removing one or more causal events: heat, fuel, or oxygen (Response to Intervention or Pyramid of Intervention plan).

4. Manage issues instead of solve problems (Student failure is an issue that cannot be completely solved, but a plan and ownership from staff can help.).

5. Improvise based on structures: core values, rules of engagement, or operational routines.

   LCES—Lookouts, communication, escape routes, and safety zones (Response to Intervention or Pyramid of Intervention Plan).

   According to Black (2008), schools are named successful if they catch things early on and do not let discipline problems grow into bigger issues. He continues by saying rules are monitored and normalized as part of the school culture and then the students self-regulate internally since “[t]hese organizational systems favor stability and consistency over contingency and openness” (p. 8). Edmonson (2004) relates an important part of learning from failure for complex organizations is attention to small, everyday process failures. He also states an organization’s ability to learn from failure is measured by how it deals with both large and small failures. According to Roberts, Stout, and Halpern (1994), the cost of errors is not as great as the value of the information gained from experiential learning. How can this relate to education?

Motivation Theory

Anaganostopoulos and Rutledge (2007) found the majority of educators believe many students suffer a lack of motivation due to apathy, disruptive behavior, and lack of commitment to the school norms and expectations. Other times, the beliefs about a particular student can have a huge impact on how well the students succeed or fail (Leroy & Symes, 2001). According to Anaganostopoulos and Rutledge (2007), many families have long histories of school failure and are incapable of providing academic support for their children, bringing about a cultural
context of failure. Some of this cultural context comes from the linguistic barriers that exist in many schools and students not being able to fully recover from the educational setbacks caused by the barrier.

Anaganostopoulou and Rutledge (2007) report very few teachers actually refer to academic ability or instruction as the source of student failure alone. Often, these teachers believe it is the fault of the district for not providing better interventions in earlier years, or the type of learner the student has become. Ellis, Hart, and Small-McGinley (as cited in Leroy and Symes, 2001) report many youths at risk have reported distinct memories of feeling their particular needs were unacknowledged and unaddressed when they were in elementary school. Teachers have an impact in a variety of ways on their students. Even the smallest criticism or negativity to a young person of fourteen or fifteen can be devastating. Pickens and Eick (2009), in their study of motivation in science classes, found that students in AP classes are told of the high expectations and fast paced curriculum, whereas students in the regular science curriculum are told it will have lower expectations and taught by less experienced teachers. This begs the question of the self-fulfilling prophesy of the student rising or falling to the level of expectation set forth by the teacher. Pickens and Eick (2009) also relate that students respond best when the teacher is enthusiastic, positive, the students have a voice, the lesson is inquiry based, and the topics relate to their lives.

While many researchers focus their studies on the reasons why students are not motivated, Vansteenkiste et al. (2009) based their research on why students are motivated to do their work. According to their self-determination theory, higher levels of motivation do not yield a more desirable outcome if the motivation is of poor quality. This theory has students engaging through intrinsic motivation or autonomous motivation; the optimum way of learning is through
curiosity, enjoyment, and personal importance. Unfortunately, students can also be motivated through somewhat negative forces: external and interjected. External motivation usually results from engaging in learning as an avoidance of a negative consequence, earning a reward, or some other external expectations. Interjected motivation comes from an internal motivation to ward off negative feelings of guilt, shame, or anxiety associated with not learning. The research concludes teachers could create supportive and autonomous classroom to help foster good, quality motivation.

Martin (2009) spent a significant amount of time and energy digging deeper in the psyche of students with his Motivation and Engagement Wheel (see Figure 1) and his quantitative study of the results of the Motivation and Engagement Scale (MES). The Motivation and Engagement Wheel (MEW) has four quadrants: two positive areas located on the top right and left and two negative areas located on the lower right and left. On the top right is the adaptive cognitive section describing students’ self-efficacy, mastery orientation, and valuing. Opposite this, on the left hand side, it has the adaptive behavior section outlining the persistence of students, planning, and task management. Below, on the lower right, is the impeding/maladaptive quadrant consisting of anxiety, failure avoidance, and uncertain control. Finally, on the lower left is the maladaptive behavior showing disengagement and self-handicapping. Martin’s (2009) work with the MEW doesn’t specifically outline exactly what motivated or demotivates students, but through use of the MES and the results he obtains, he plots where students’ motivations lie on the wheel and makes decisions based on the results.
Schiller (1999) explains academic transitions as “a process during which institutional and social factors influence which students’ educational careers are positively or negatively affected by this movement between organizations” (p. 216-217). She also relates that moving to a new school can be a critical turning point in young persons’ social and academic lives. According to Akos (as cited in Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009), girls are worried about being bullied by bigger
students, whereas boys found peer relationships, conflict with authority, and academic pressure equally difficult. Some of the challenges students fall victim to in the ninth grade are declining grades, failing courses, increased absences, and a decrease of involvement in school activities says Schiller (1999) and Newman et al. (2007). In their phenomenological study, Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) agree by labeling the challenges: curricular, geographic, physical, and organizational changes. Using journals from sixteen students, they found seven essential themes emerge for students to be successful in the transition to high school. They write,

Schools need to support transitions through programs and activities; peers are significant others who can help or hinder a smooth transition, new procedures, locations; routines have to be learned in a new environment; learning occurs through academic, practical, and extracurricular activities and some learning is more challenging than other types of learning; feelings of confidence, success, and achievement can enhance high school transition. Homework is a challenging and necessary component of the high school curriculum and teachers’ attitude can affect student integration into high school and make learning fun or boring. (p. 68)

According to Christie (2008), many eighth graders get cocky at the end of the year, and being at the bottom of the pack in ninth grade has a tendency to make them put their academic success at risk by skipping, as well as other bad habits, that have a huge impact on their success. Teachers sometimes worsen school transitions, a critical rite of passage, with lower expectations and a diminished self-esteem among students says Alvidrez and Weinstein (1993, as cited in Weinstein, Madison, & Kulinski, 1995). A teacher’s expectation of incoming ninth graders can have quite an impact on the group as a whole. Weinstein et al. (1995) found that students,
responding to the ideas of the self-fulfilling prophecy, would often lower their quality of work and work ethic due to the expectations of their teachers. Delpit (as cited in Leroy & Symes, 2001) believed that teachers’ beliefs about children in lower income families and visible minorities to be inaccurate, stereotypical, and resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. This tragedy triggered an intervention focusing on a model of expectancy communication for change. A simple intervention based solely on the beliefs of the teacher about the abilities of his or her students. Over a two-year period, a collaborative group of researchers, teachers, and administrators met weekly, combed over research, and shared ideals and best practices about the ability for all students to learn and raising expectations to improve student growth. It is amazing that something so simple, such as perceived expectations, can make such an enormous impact on the lives of students in public education. According to Bulterman-Bos, Verloop, Terwwel, and Wardekker (2003), teachers doing simple adjustments, such as encouraging students and avoiding negative talk, can help prevent failing grades.

Since high school can be such a huge step into a seemingly uncaring environment for many students, some schools have taken a focus on building smaller communities for their students to help them navigate and acclimate. Smith (2008) describes a Freshmen Center Model, which operates more like a middle school, where teams of students and teachers are housed together focused solely on one grade level. In Smith’s mixed method study, he interviewed teachers, counselors, and administrators to see what ninth graders struggled with, how they navigate through the first year of high school, what resources are available to help them in transition, and why the Smaller Learning Community model worked. Alspaugh (1998) agrees and states in most cases students are more likely to stay in school if they have caring
relationships with adults, are involved in school activities, and are in a smaller school or, better yet, a small learning community. Knesting (2008) adds,

Students’ behavior often changes when they feel part of a community at school. First, a sense of belongingness increases the likelihood that students will accept school rules and policy. As they become important and valued members of their school’s network of peers and adults, students are more likely to take education risks when they feel safe in their school environment. (p. 3)

Christie (2008) also mentions a need for the instructional support services necessary for successful completion of high school that can be offered through the use and development of smaller learning communities. She emphasizes that teachers working in teams will have a much greater impact on the students and know their needs better. Another idea involving smaller learning communities comes out of Fulk’s (2003) research, as she describes a Freshmen Academy model for twenty-five targeted ninth graders each year. The students are assigned a mini-team of teachers for four hours of intense instruction in reading, writing, social studies, and study skills. The teachers have valuable planning time together to discuss interventions and instructional techniques.

As mentioned earlier, researchers view the transitions from middle school to high school as a major event that has a tremendous impact on students’ future academic and social engagement for better or worse. One thing Schiller (1999) found was students who made the transition with more of the same students from middle school were less likely to be negatively affected by the changes. Unfortunately, without strong transitional programs, prevention strategies, and interventions, the hierarchy remains relatively the same. Those who were on top in middle school, remain there and vice versa. Newman, Newman, and Giffen (2007) add that
ninth graders who experience negative impacts in their transition to high school result in depressive symptoms and lower levels of belongingness. Without three key areas of social support (family, peers, and school belonging), students are more likely to succumb to these depressive tendencies. Through this research, it is concluded high schools play a much more critical role in the development of young people through socialization and belongingness, making the need for community and prevention even more important. Alspaugh’s (1998) findings show that the more transitions a school district has within their system, the higher the dropout rate. Association between dropout rates and transitions are attributed to arise from diminished relationships between educators and students, building on the idea and importance of community.

Whether a school builds smaller learning communities to help their ninth graders transition to the high school, or they have programs developed to ease the anxiety of moving to the new big school, researchers such as Rhodes (as cited in Liang, 2007) have found that mentors help positively develop students in general and acclimate the students to their new surroundings. Using ten focus groups, Liang, Spencer, Brogan, and Corral (2008) studied salient characteristics reported by youth when describing their relationships with mentors and compared common characteristics within adolescence. The researchers found that the focus groups identified the characteristics in the mentor relationship that affected them in a positive way such as the importance of spending time together, trust and fidelity, role modeling, balancing connection and autonomy, and empowerment. Young people have few chances to connect with adults outside of their family and Liang et al (2008) show in their study that schools should look to providing more opportunities to facilitate connections, empowerment, and psychological benefits. In addition, Spencer and Liang (2009) emphasize psychosocial approaches that tend to
emphasize interpersonal relationships that form between the mentor and the protégée, which is believed to then influence the developing characteristics of the youth.

**Systems Interventions**

Many schools have realized the relative importance of having a system of interventions to help students who struggle. Some buildings and districts are going as far as building a Pyramid of Interventions (Baffum et al. 2009), while others are trying to find a Response to Interventions piece, and are implementing community cores or a counseling intervention. Researchers like Adelman and Taylor (2002) find that schools need to find systemic reforms combining both community and school programs that encompass systems for positive development, systems for prevention, and systems for intervention. Daly, Whit, Martins, and Dool (1997) have five reasons why systemic interventions need to be developed for the sake of students: they do not want to do the work, they have not spent enough time doing it, they have not had enough help to do it, they have not had to do it that way before, or it is too hard for them. Weick (1996) explains through a firefighting metaphor that administrators must have a “fire triangle” or an “LCES system” to respond to failure. Without these system interventions and a solid goal of increasing student learning and decreasing failure, Anagnostopoulos and Rutledge (2007) believe many teachers develop coping strategies (extending deadline, lowering expectations, changing grading practices) to deal with student failure. This is not effective for the teacher or the student. They also discuss principals who vary systemic interventions for their buildings and rely on the teachers solely to implement classroom interventions for students who struggle and need academic or socio-emotional support. Although this is the broad scope, many other systemic programs have specific designs that can be implemented system-wide utilizing both packaged curriculum and support staff.
According to Black (2008), some systems use assessments to monitor and manage students’ performance in light of state curriculum and district achievement goals. This concept has one standard for all students and makes the level of interventions more fluid for all students based on their needs, and in regard to the state assessment standards. This is just the beginning. Assessments to monitor students such as the diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments are great to inform teachers where their students are, but do not answer the questions as to how to help when they do not understand! Some schools, like Valley High School, describes their rudimentary intervention system as teachers providing extra assistance like setting up individual and small group tutoring sessions during their preparation time and lunch (Chance & Segura, 2009). Sometimes it can be seemingly simple, as Chance and Segura (2009) describe. Through strong leadership, a true collaboration process, and organization, schools can make change positive for student learning.

According to Briggman and Campbell (2003), the implementation of Student Success Skills curriculum through counselors showed seventy percent of the participants increased their academic success as a result. The goal of this particular study was to see if a system-wide, counselor-led intervention would have a significant impact on student success academically. “The results reveal that the combined school counselor interventions of group counseling and classroom guidance were associated with a positive impact on student achievement and behavior (Briggman & Campbell, 2003, p. 96-97).” Other schools implement a variety of programs system-wide to respond to student failures. Fulk (2003) shares one school’s interventions as a comprehensive package for all students to benefit: student leadership, decreased class size, summer orientation, student planners, tutoring, and a Freshmen Academy.
Myers and Kline (2002) research illustrates a different route of systematic interventions to deal with students who fail. The Intervention Assistant Team is a group of professionals (general education teachers, special education teachers, school psychologists, counselors, and administrators) whose goal is to create a set of classroom intervention strategies to help students before they are referred to special education. In this system, the teachers benefit through dialogue and the exchange of ideas and the student benefits by not having the title of special education, and the system benefits in a cost effective way. Black (2008) supports this type of systems reform by stating that proactive systemic monitoring and accountability creates redundancy where administrators use several layers of monitoring and intervention so students do not slip through the cracks. There are a few drawbacks to a comprehensive team approach like this, such as: team member commitment, paperwork, added workload, value system, and buy-in of the staff. There are many models of system-wide interventions that can help and do work with the ownership of the staff involved being a key to the effectiveness of the program.

*Dropout Theory*

In the case of the student who might be prone to dropping out, many researchers have taken the route of identifying predictors of the typical dropout and then looked for specific ways to keep this student in school. According to Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007), by identifying predictors early, counselors and other school personnel are able to build prevention or intervention strategies that will help keep the students in school. Their research focuses on comparing different factors that led to dropout in three at-risk categories of students: low socio-economic status, poor academic achievement, and suspension from school. Chinien and Boutin (2001) found only 8% of the students dropping out of school do so because of problems encountered with the schoolwork. Alspaugh (1998) found through a review of the literature that
socioeconomic (SES) status has the “primary contributing factor” of high school dropout rates coupled by family background, personal problems, and school related problems. All in all, Dynarski and Gleason (as cited in Fulk, 2003) concluded, *after conducting a review of dropout prevention programs*, preventing students from dropping out is quite difficult.

Through a quantitative approach to combining variables to dropping out, Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007) found a variety of twenty different items affected the students and led to dropping out and among all three categories having a positive attitude about the future was the most critical factor in decreasing dropout. The researchers also urged counselors to take a proactive role in meeting the various needs of students of the three different at-risk categories. Chinien and Boutin (2001) found teachers who implemented a program, known as the Cognitive Based Instructional System, saw increases in their student’s self-esteem, attitudes toward school, and academic achievement. Many of the teachers involved found themselves enlightened through the process and their attitudes positively impacted their students. Through her research, Knesting (2008) found four things were absolutely critical in support of student persistence in school: listening to students, communicating caring, the school’s role in dropout prevention, and the student’s role in dropout prevention. Cassel (2003) sees a quality systemic Dropout Prevention Program consisting of a pre-diagnostic given to all incoming ninth graders followed by a six-week program (High School Personal Development Course) for all those who qualify. In addition, Wehlage (1991) sees the answer of addressing concerns for potential dropouts as an alternative program. Having an entire program or building designed to focus on and meet the individual students’ needs is a winning combination according to his research in the area.

Finn (as cited in Fulk, 2003) offers one example of a dropout prevention program referred to as the Frustration-Self-Esteem Model. This program works from the standpoint that
there is a mental affect to self-esteem when students fail in school performance and have poor attendance. Another program, the Participation-Identification Model, helps students become involved and participate in school activities. By relating to the school and extra-curricular activities, the students feel less alienated and marginalized and are ultimately less likely to drop out. It seems the challenge for all schools is to break the cycle that is most likely in progress by the time the student arrives at school.

According to Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006), the average national graduation rate is sixty eight to seventy one percent and is based on students moving into the senior year only. The most important offerings from this article were the ways to improve student attitude toward learning: curriculum, delivery, instruction, support, climate of academics, relationships, communication, not the “one size fits all” mentality, engagement, etc. With improved attitude, the students were more likely able to engage and complete their academic studies.

The spectrum is broad when it comes to the factors that have an impact on student failures in education and it seems there are subcategories beyond the ones listed above. Things like student characteristics, home environment, motivation, and prevention are other topics that come up in the literature and need to be explored more intensely. Still, aspects of students’ perception of high school come into play at some point. Altenbaugh, Engle, and Martin (as cited by Knesting, 2008), relate that many students feel overwhelmed by their school’s size and climate, teachers are uncaring and not invested, and counselors are too busy to provide personal attention or care. This is a common feeling and a sad situation for many of the larger high schools in America. The literature review clearly identifies that there is no one thing that will immediately fix student failure and no one school that has perfected the situation. However, many schools and educators are creating new approaches to combating a problem that is
plaguing our school systems nationwide and the more exposure to this type of reform, the better the solutions will be in the long run.
CHAPTER THREE
REPORT OF THE STUDY

Wenatchee High School (WHS) is neither unique among America’s high schools in failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) nor alone in having various improvement oriented initiatives directed at reducing the rate of student failure and increasing the percentage of students graduating. America’s high schools are in need of reform (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Too many students are failing and dropping out (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2010). The ninth grade is noted as an especially challenging time for students given their transition to a new and bigger school, initiation to higher learning standards, and confusion in coping with physiological developments. Curtailing the rate of student failure in the ninth grade is viewed by researchers, practitioners, and policy makers as vital. Better explanation of student course failure and disengagement from learning at this grade level is needed to inform development and implementation of efficient and effective practices or programs. Classroom teachers, in particular, are the professionals whose work is most closely connected to students and these outcomes. Therefore, teacher description of ninth grade student failure promises to provide an important perspective not only on the nature of schooling that contributes to such problems but clues to possible interventions.

The purposes of this study were threefold. First, the investigation was conducted to describe failure of ninth grade students at WHS as perceived by their teachers as well as the efforts teachers made to intervene and assist students. Second, given this description, the interactions, routines, decisions, and conflicts teachers reported in working with failing students were analyzed to identify strengths and weaknesses in teacher assistance for students who are
headed toward or are failing a class. Finally, findings were applied to develop a checklist and guidelines for teachers as recommendations designed to assist teachers in preventing student failure in the classroom.

Chapter three presents the research findings that accompany the threefold purpose and is organized into six sections. The first provides a description of the twelve teachers who participated in the study at WHS. Included in this section is a description and analysis of the students identified in the interviews by teacher and subject amongst other variables as preparation for interpreting the study’s findings. The second section examines patterns in coded teacher interviews regarding their daily experiences with the kinds of problems that contributed to the failure they observed in their ninth grade students. The third section explores the various teacher practices, routines, and strategies that they employed to address the problematic student behaviors, attitudes, and predicaments. The fourth section gives an analysis of intersection of student problems and teacher solutions to identify strengths and weaknesses in teacher responses. The fifth section offers the interpretation of the previous analyses and explains the developed checklist and guidelines for teachers designed to assist them to more effectively intervene with their students in order to prevent failure. The final section of the chapter provides the conclusion that contains the significance and limitations of the study, as well as next steps in instituting the student failure protocols and possible future research.

**Description of Teachers and Students**

The WHS teachers who participated in this study all teach a ninth grade block called iFrosh. Teachers in iFrosh are organized into teams. Each team has a language arts, math, and science teacher who all teach the same group of ninety students and share a common planning period where they collaborate on students, activities, and interventions. There are several teams
that make up the iFrosh block. Only one team had all of its members included in the study. The section that follows briefly introduces the teachers. Following this introduction, the description shifts to examining the gender of the students whom the teachers identified in the interviews as well as a student-by-teacher analysis that begins the study’s findings.

One of the most loved teachers in the school is Mrs. Simmons. She is a language arts teacher who has been at WHS for twenty-two years. She teaches three sections of ninth grade English, AP Literature, and mythology. Mrs. Simmons is known for her love of literature and telling of stories to her students. She is a very creative teacher who continues to grow as an educator even though she is considered to be one of the best by her peers.

Mr. Carlsbad is a language arts teacher who has been at WHS for seventeen years. He is a fun teacher and the students like his sense of humor and continual use of puns. He teaches ninth grade language arts for three periods a day as well as a class on Shakespeare and junior American English. Mr. Carlsbad is the head debate coach and gives debate his all. It is evident to see from the interview that this has been a challenging year for him, based on the mix of students he has been given.

Mrs. McCoy is a language arts teacher who has been at WHS for fifteen years and only teaches part time. She is the leader of the Spirit Club, teaches three sections of ninth grade English, and AVID. She is one of the original teachers responsible for helping create the iFrosh program and fine tuning it to be what it is today.

Mrs. McCough is a language arts/French teacher who has been at WHS for nine years. She also teaches three sections of ninth grade English and two sections of French one. She is a very positive teacher who volunteers for many activities and enjoys her job. She is the supervisor for the French Club and the Bodybuilding Club.
Mrs. Elbow is a very young language arts teacher who has been teaching at WHS for three years. She teaches three sections of ninth grade English and also has a mythology class and a sophomore English class. Kelsey is a super-positive teacher who often gets checked for her hall pass because she looks so young. She will be taking maternity leave later this school year and will be putting her heart and soul into her teaching and coaching the cheerleading team.

Mr. Donson is a math teacher who has been at WHS for twenty-five years. He was a special education teacher for a few years in his career some fifteen years ago. He teaches skiing in the winter time and coaches soccer for a school ten miles away from the Wenatchee Valley. He teaches three sections of sheltered algebra, which uses techniques to help second language learners, and two sections of geometry.

Mr. Burgermeister was new to WHS, but not new to teaching by any stretch of the imagination. He is a math teacher who has been teaching for twenty years, of which the last three have been at WHS. He likes his Audi, the music band Snow Patrol, and math. He teaches three sections of geometry and two sections of algebra. Mr. Burgermeister has a very dry sense of humor and students enjoy his class, but he holds them to high expectations. He demands students be on time and work hard while in his class.

Both Mr. Quartz and his wife, who was not a part of this study, teach math at WHS. He is a math teacher who has been teaching for eight years, of which the last four have been at WHS. Mr. Quartz teaches three sections of ninth grade algebra and a section of calculus and geometry. He coaches boys' soccer and has two very young children.

Mr. Buyer is a math teacher who has been teaching for seven years, of which the last four have been at WHS. He coaches track and football and supervises the gym and weight room after school. He teaches sheltered algebra for ninth graders three periods a day and also two
additional regular algebra classes. Kevin is a laid back teacher with a loud coach voice that always gets the attention of the students in his classes!

Mr. Sweet is a science teacher who has been teaching over thirty years, of which the last ten have been at WHS. He teaches two sections of geology and three sections ninth grade introduction to physics/chemistry. He happened to be my science teacher back in the seventh grade year. Incidentally, this was Mr. Sweet’s last year of teaching before retirement. Good luck to him.

As an outdoorsman and hunting enthusiast, Mr. Ferretson brings an interesting blend of textbook and real life to his science class. He is a science teacher who has been teaching for over thirty years, of which the last five have been at WHS teaching biology. Mr. Ferretson loves music and as an entry task, he plays music while his students are writing down the daily learning targets on their notes sheet. If a student can guess the band name or the name of the song, they get a small token prize. The students love it!

Finally, Mr. Faugan is a science teacher who has been teaching for fifteen years, of which the last five years have been at WHS. He teaches three sections of ninth grade introduction to physics/chemistry and two sections of junior chemistry. Mr. Faugan came to WHS from Moses Lake, WA, and had ten years of teaching experience. He is a mild-mannered teacher with a dark sense of humor. His students have to pay attention to keep up with him.

As evident in the above introductions, the teachers included in this study ranged from a beginning teacher (i.e., Mrs. Elbow completed her third year as a teacher) to those who have been in the field for more than thirty years. The average number of years teaching for the participants was 17 (SD = 8). Table 2 below identifies each of the teachers by subject, teaching experience, and age as a summary. Two other key characteristics of the teachers deserve
All the teachers interviewed were white and none speak Spanish fluently. The large majority of teachers at WHS are white and there are only a few who speak Spanish. The degree of experience of the group is high compared to the school’s average, but is not surprising given the administration’s intentional assignment of the school’s most experienced teachers to this grade level.

Table 2
Teacher Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Simmons</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>22 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Carlsbad</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. McCoy</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. McCough</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Elbow</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Donson</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>25 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Burgermeister</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Quartz</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Buyer</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Sweet</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Ferretson</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Faugan</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The twelve teachers focused their responses to questions on the interview to a total of thirty students. Six of the teachers spoke about the critical incidents pertaining to two students.
who were failing their class and the other six named three students. Twelve of the thirty students (forty percent) came from the interviews with language arts teachers. Ten students (33.3 percent) were from interviews with math teachers. Finally, eight students (26.7 percent) were identified in the interviews with science teachers. The above distribution is important since it shows consistency across the group. Data from small groups is susceptible to outliers and needs to be interpreted with that in mind if such is the case. In this study, no one teacher or small group of teachers appeared to provide a disproportionate number of students.

The students that these teachers were to describe were intended to be ninth graders. One student however, ended up being a tenth grader, since he was a repeat student in a ninth grade class.

In introducing these students, teachers shared that, on the whole, it appeared to them that the students were coming to school the first few weeks ready to do their very best and take control of their high school academics. However, for many of the students, they described that their determination didn’t last long or was too difficult to maintain. Mr. Carlsbad, for example, commented that Ashley, one of the students he selected to discuss,

...started off strong, I mean, she was willing to engage, and she certainly got some, you know, some of her assignments in. When she was involved in the class that first week, she would contribute. You know, she started off, well like, verbally. She was fairly confident—a little more than I had hoped—and it didn't take long to figure that group out, but she especially seemed very willing to give her input. She didn't seem, you know, some ninth graders are pretty awkward, but she, she kind of just fit right in.

Mr. Carlsbad’s positive view was something that many teachers identified with. It was a minority of students who were perceived as starting off apathetic and overwhelmed.
Unfortunately, it was not long before many were noted as starting to fall behind in their work, missing school, or slipping up in their academics. Mr. Donson explained how this process went for Jesus.

Beginning of the semester with minimal prompts, he would have his books open, paper out, pencil in hand, and ready to work. After a couple of weeks, no paper, doesn’t bring a pencil. His demeanor is almost a passive defiance because we have to use pencils. And then forty minutes of…as soon as I’d come by, he attempted a step. And then he would, he never asked for help. But if he attempted the work, I said, “Okay, what do you do next?” So I would provide guided practice through the process. Then it would be like, “Okay, I’m going to let you finish. You start the next one. I’ll come back.”

Students seemed to follow a pattern of settling for less and requiring more attention. Mrs. Elbow shared her frustrations with Jose as he went from attending to his studies to giving her next to nothing as he focused on socializing.

Once he started to meet people and get to know people, his friends kind of became an issue. He was never really the instigator or a big distraction or big disciplinary issue or behavior issue, but I think that distractions of other people or of his friends became an issue. Whenever we did group projects or group assignment where they get together all answers for the questions to the story or whatever, he would be the one doing the work. I think that he was easy to make fun of or if something just got to him then he just kind of, he was done.

Another turning point for students was related to severe attendance issues. Mrs. Elbow described Gustavo’s issues with attendance.
So he was frustrating to me more than anything because he was a kind of student that you send a bunch of work homework home with him. As a teacher, you go overboard like making copies, writing out lesson plans, getting instructions explaining it to him, and then you will never see him again. Then you give him this copies of work, okay you’ve been gone for three weeks. Like here is what we’ve been doing get this done and he would never come back. I don’t know what the situation is. I know his mother works a lot. And, I think he was home alone a lot. This situation often leads to students staying home without any permission.

Other than this general pattern of disintegration, analysis of the interviews and classroom observations revealed little that supported categorizing students by type of problem as found in the literature (Buffum et al., 2009). More will be shared momentarily about the nature of the problems and interventions teachers employed, but first the gender of the students is examined as well as student gender by teacher gender and student gender by teacher subject analysis.

Eleven (thirty seven percent) of the students were female and nineteen (sixty three percent) were male pupils. Cross tabulation of student gender by teacher gender revealed that nine students were male of the ten students mentioned by the female teachers, while male teachers identified male and female students equally. Since all of the female participants were language arts teachers, the gender imbalance is also evident by subject. The language arts teachers described ten students who were male and only two that were female. Whereas the math teachers were equally split with five male and five female students, just as the science teachers were split with four male and four female students. An overrepresentation of male students as connected to subject or teacher gender is evident in the data.
Teacher-identified Student Problems

The interviews were coded using student behaviors, attitudes, or predicaments that teachers attributed to student failure or were presented as noticed by the teacher as they described the critical incidents that led up to the failure of a student. A total of 199 problem characteristics were cited in the twelve interviews for the thirty students that they selected to discuss. The section is divided into two parts. The first explores how the coded incidents of student problems were distributed across the interviews. The second part presents a description of the teacher-identified student problems that address the first purpose for the study.

Distribution of student problems

The following section explores the distribution of student problems identified by the teachers to assess the representativeness of these descriptions as provided by the participants. Several strategies were used to gain such insight. Each of the strategies and the order that they are presented below are as follows. First, the problems were analyzed per teacher. Next, the coded problems per subject taught by the teacher were examined. The third component of this analysis attended to a per student investigation. The last aspect of the analysis probed or sorted the coded problems using student gender.

The average number of problems reported by the teachers was seventeen problems per interview (SD = 6). The frequency distribution was generated for the data and a median of seventeen was observed. At the high end of the distribution was a teacher who delineated thirty such problems as she discussed her failing students (fifteen percent of the total number of problems). At the other end, one teacher shared a low of nine problems (4.5 percent of the total). The distribution suggested that no teacher stood out as either over- or under- identifying problems as compared to others in the group.
In order to better compare the number and percentage of problems as distributed across the three subjects, comparisons were made to the number and percentage of teachers per subject, as well as the number and percentage of students identified by the teachers of each subject. Table 3 below presents the findings. The table shows fairly consistent proportions for each of the subjects across teachers, students, and problems. For example, the five language arts teachers, which made up forty two percent of the participants interviewed, spoke of about twelve students (forty percent of students), and provided ninety-five problems, which was forty seven percent of the incidents coded in the data. It does not appear that teachers in one subject area were more descriptive of problems their students encountered as compared to teachers of the other content areas.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Comparison by Teachers, Students, and Problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 shows a histogram of the number of teacher-identified problems per student. The figure shows that three students were mentioned as exhibiting one or two problems. The distribution appears slightly balanced in favor of the lower end of the spectrum. The largest
number of students or half of the thirty students were described as exhibiting between three and six problems. At the high end of the distribution, there were two students who the teachers portrayed as very troubled. The mean number of problems for the thirty students was seven (SD = 3) with a median of six.

Figure 3

Problems per Student

Student gender was examined to assess how it may have influenced teacher responses. The total number of problems coded as attributed to incidents involving female students was sixty-nine (thirty five percent) and for males that number was one hundred thirty (sixty five percent). These percentages closely match the proportion of students identified by teachers as male and female discussed earlier. The findings suggest that teachers were not singling out one gender more than another when they were speaking to the problematic aspects of student behaviors, attitudes, or predicaments for the pupils who were failing their classes.
Five categories of student problems

The analysis of the data examined the specific words, topics, or ideas teachers mentioned in describing the problems exhibited by their failing students. In other words, the analysis focused on clarifying the particular kinds of behaviors, attitudes, or predicaments of students that teachers noticed as signals of trouble. The words and phrases teachers used in the interviews that were similar in meaning were standardized for purposes of tallying the frequency with which a particular kind of problem was referenced. Two examples—chatty or talkative, and off task or distracted—show pairs of synonyms that respectively cover the same problem. The coding procedures for synonyms resulted in thirty-four kinds of problems as found in the interviews. The thirty-four problems themselves were examined and grouped together with like constructs to form five types or categories of problems. The specific procedures followed were discussed earlier in the methods section of chapter one. The five categories to emerge from the analysis were labeled affective, social, physical, veiled, symptomatic, and foundational. The presentation examines these thirty-four problems under the categories that they were assigned to and provides a description that addresses the study’s first purpose. The description begins with affective problems, which was the category that teachers least referenced in their interviews.

Affective problems. The first category contains those codes that center on student affect and included three codes: makes fun of themselves, feels picked on, and immaturity. Only one student in the study was described by his teacher of making fun of himself. Three students were viewed by their teachers as feeling picked on and exhibiting immaturity. Zack, a student named by Mr. Sweet, was described in this way, “He should have been in seventh grade. He is very immature and he comes to school to play. It’s what they do in middle school. They run everywhere and then they finally hit someone. That’s what Zack is doing.” Mr. Sweet also felt
that Zack perceived Mr. Sweet as picking on him. Brian, discussed by Mrs. McCough, fell into all three categories because he made fun of himself, felt picked on, and was immature. Mrs. McCough shared how Brian made self-deprecating jokes about his size, since he was smaller than many of the other students. His making fun of himself opened up the door for others to do the same thing. His immaturity was expressed in a quote he said to the entire class that Mrs. McCough shared with me in the interview. “My goal is not to pass this class, but to have the most people like me.” What teachers were discussing were the ways students’ affects, particularly about themselves, got in the way of their learning. Appendix C provides the tabulated frequency and percent age for the number of incidents reported per student for affective problems.

Social problems. There were four codes that were grouped under student social problems. As a group, social problems were disruptive activities in which students were engaged that disrupted the learning environment. The problems manifested as inappropriate social interaction and tended to frustrate the teachers since these student behaviors not only impacted the student, but others with which they were interacting. Three students were discussed as having control issues that got in the way of their learning, two students ignored instructions, five students were verbally confrontational with their teachers, and seven students were noted as talking too much. Eight students fell into at least one category, one student had two of these incidents in this category, and two students had three collectively. Appendix C provides the frequency and percent age of these reported incidents per student.

One student provides a clear example of this kind of problem. Ashley, according to Mr. Sweet, “tended to ignore my instructions and she was always off task, talking with other students and doing her own thing. She was offered after school time, but she refused it. You do not tell
Ashley what to do, she tells you. In a parent conference, she told her sister to shut up right in front of her dad.”

Physical problems. A number of the problems teacher encountered with students were attributable to physical or even physiological difficulties or conditions experienced by their students. The nature of these problems tended to be rooted in events external the classroom. Being tired and being absent (i.e., not physically present) received many comments by teachers. Things that were going on at home or things that should be going on but weren’t, were included as well. Inattentive parenting, taking drugs, and an assortment of other problems that were happening at home were coded as home issues. Two other codes from the interviews, suspension and bullying, were grouped under this category. It was apparent that teachers were recognizing some of the baggage that students bring with them from home or outside of the classroom can have a significant impact on their ability to focus and learn. Things like fighting, lack sleep, being absent, and worrying about family issues can stand in the way of a student being able to follow directions and retain information. Appendix C again provides the frequency and percentage of these incidents per student shared in the interviews.

Veiled problems. Many students who were failing were described as hiding, withdrawing, or avoiding participating in classroom learning that would expose their inadequacies to teachers. Teachers observed students engaging in a wide range of behaviors that could be seen as an effort to veil or mask a deeper problem: copying other student’s work; leaving the room to go to the bathroom, get a drink, or see the nurse; being tardy; faking work; allowing small tasks to take all period; and intentionally doing nothing were some examples. Teachers perceived these problems as students avoiding work. Teachers spoke about seven of the thirty students who used small tasks to get out of doing assigned tasks (taking out paper,
sharpening their pencil, etc). Eleven students reportedly made the error of doing nothing during class. Appendix C provides the frequency and percent of students by number of incidents shared in the interviews for veiled problems. The challenge for teachers dealing with such problems was the picture they had of the student was intentionally distorted. Teachers were kept at bay and off balance.

Mr. Sweet had this to say about Ashley’s efforts of faking her work. “Oh yeah, she went through the motions. There was all this stuff on the paper, but nothing was answered or done. She was a big faker because after fifteen minutes she would still not have anything done.” He continued,

She really didn’t pay full attention while I was giving instruction, and then when it was time to do the labs and the worksheets and the actual lessons and stuff, she wasn’t able to do them very well. She found herself copying other kids when she could or just write down whatever they put down, but didn’t really give it any thought, and so when it came time for the assessments, of course, she did not do very well and then she was gone couple of times a week.

Mr. Buyer described how Alondra would be late to class and needed prompting to take her materials out. Then she would ask to get a drink, or go to the bathroom, or go see the nurse. It wasn’t long before the teacher realized a pattern was being created and that she would waste time outside of class so she would not have to actually accomplish anything.

Symptomatic problems. Students who fell into the next category had problems doing their work: poor individual work, turning in work late, sitting quietly, not being prepared, not doing homework, using excuses for not doing their work, having no materials, and not turning in work. This category of critical incidents was seen as very frustrating to teachers since the
students were present in the class could have done the tasks and kept pace, but were viewed as choosing for various reasons not to do so. Four students were identified as handing in poor work, five turned in their work late, five sat quietly, eight were viewed as frequently not prepared, five students gave what their teachers thought were excuses for not working, ten came to class with no materials, ten were unorganized, and fifteen did not practice turning in their work. There were many students who were described as eliciting more than one of the incidents in this category. In fact for seven students, teachers discussed five specific instances of such problems. Appendix C provides more detail about the frequency and percent of students by number of incidents shared in the interviews for symptomatic problems. The label of symptomatic was applied to these incidents since these student errors were not necessarily the problem—they were symptoms of something more problematic.

Alondra (Mr. Buyer), Alex (Mrs. McCoy), and Thomas (Mrs. Simmons) were the students who fell into six areas in the category of problems doing their work. Mr. Buyer claimed Alondra would not do well on the assessments and frequently did not turn in her work. Mrs. McCoy describes Alex by saying, “He wasn’t prepared with his homework and every single assignment that was not in class was turned in very consistently, late. He often didn’t have his materials, or they were lost.”

Foundational problems. The final category of critical incidents leading students to fail was labeled foundational and covered codes associated with gaps in student knowledge and poor attention skills. This category accounted for the eight most commonly described problems teachers perceived as leading to failure. The problems included lacking the ability to connect ideas, needing attention, having a low reading level, being overwhelmed, not possessing study skills, having significant gaps in the content area, not being able to focus, and, finally, being off
task/distracted. Three students lacked ability to make connections with content, two needed attention in class, three had low reading levels that added to their struggles, three others were overwhelmed with school and academics, seven had no study skills, seven had gaps in the content area, fourteen were not focused, and seventeen were continually off task or distracted. Overall, eleven students total exhibited two of these incidents, three exhibited three, two encompassed four, and two had five incidents associated with their classroom behavior. Nestor, as described by Mr. Buyer, displayed being overwhelmed, off task/distracted, having gaps in the content, not focused, and lacking in study skills. “Nestor was a typical ninth grade boy who was overwhelmed and didn’t really know where he fit in. He was a student who really didn’t want to do much. He started out okay, but once he realized it was going to take hard work and that he was a few grade levels behind in math, things started not working.”

Teacher Interventions

The various teacher practices, routines, and strategies that teachers shared in the interviews to address problematic student behaviors, attitudes, and predicaments were coded. A total of 117 interventions were identified. Forty-five (38%) of the incidents were interventions that teachers presented as having been successful or addressing the problem in ways that curtailed failure. A smaller number of the incidents, 33 (28%) interventions, were shared by the participants as having no impact. In 39 of the scenarios (33%), the description of outcomes given by teachers was ambiguous. Note: write out percentages. In these situations, it appeared that teachers remained uncertain or unclear about the benefit to students given the intervention. Repeating the analysis for problems above, this section will also be divided into two parts. The first examines how the coded interventions were distributed across the interviews. The second
component provides a description of practices, routines, and strategies teachers used to prevent student failure.
Distribution of teacher interventions

The distribution of teacher interventions or solutions to student problems enacted occurred to assess the representation of the topic as present in the twelve interviews. The frequency of solutions (using the four categories of total, worked, failed, and uncertain) are examined for each teacher. Next, the coded interventions per subject taught by the teacher were examined. Interventions per student are then shared. The last aspect of the analysis probed or sorted the coded solutions using student gender.

Table 4 provides the number of incidents reported by the teachers as well as a per teacher analysis of the average number of interventions used, the standard deviation and median score for the sample. These findings show a fairly normal distribution; however, it is a distribution with a large spread. The frequency distribution supports this interpretation as two teachers each named only using 3 interventions (2.5% each of the total number of solutions) while at the other end two teachers shared 15 interventions each (13% each).

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention by Outcome</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The nature of the outcomes for these interventions, as observed on Table 4, reveal a critical distribution: a third each for effective (i.e., worked), ineffective (i.e., failed), and
uncertain. This finding suggests teachers perceive their interventions as more or less a “shot in the dark.” Perhaps this distribution contributes to another interpretation that was made visible through the analysis. In comparing the average number of problems teachers reported noticing (i.e., 17) that the average number of interventions they described using and the ratio approaches favored “noted student problems” 2 to 1. Teachers appeared to discern two problems for every intervention that they attempted. More about the finding will be discussed later in the chapter’s conclusion and recommendations.

Table 5 provides the subject comparison of the interventions reported by teachers. The number of teachers and number of student data were provided in table 3 earlier. The math teachers interviewed reported less failure and more uncertainty, given their interventions, while the science teachers appeared to be more willing to speak of their interventions as failing.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of interventions total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of interventions total</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interventions worked</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of interventions worked</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interventions failed</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of interventions failed</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interventions uncertain</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of interventions uncertain</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The per student analysis of the total number of interventions is provided in Figure 4. Six students were described as receiving none or one intervention while two others were given a lot of attention by their teachers. Showing the imbalance in how teachers approach intervention from one student as compared to another is clearly necessary. Almost a third of the 30 students discussed by teachers received two or three interventions. The mean number of interventions for the 30 students was 4 ($SD = 3$) with a median of 3.

**Figure 4**

*Total Interventions per Student*

![Bar chart showing the frequency of interventions per student.](image)

Histographs were not generated for the breakdown in the interventions. Table 6 below does offer the key indicators of the sample which are comparable to the mean, standard deviation, and median scores identified for total number of interventions per student identified in the previous paragraph.
Table 6
Per Student Intervention by Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worked</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final analysis to be examined for representation of teacher comments about the interventions they employed concerns student gender. Table 7 offers these findings. The values on Table 7 as compared to the number of problems analyzed by gender suggest that teachers were not providing preferential treatment given the gender of the student.

Table 7
Student Gender by Intervention Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Students</th>
<th>Female Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of interventions total</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of interventions total</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interventions worked</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of interventions worked</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interventions failed</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of interventions failed</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interventions uncertain</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of interventions uncertain</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four categories of teacher interventions

Through the analysis of the coded data, teachers’ comments regarding how they went about addressing the student problems they observed were examined to create categories for these interventions. Teachers reported they were using a number of tools (interventions) in order to push students to make more progress, to make better use of their time in class, or to simply turn in their work. As presented above, some of these interventions were identified as successful in outcome, some were more ambiguous, and some failed. The codes were grouped into four types of intervention practices or routines including: communication, classroom management, teaching, and systems.

Communication. The first category of teacher intervention was communication and it contained the codes: teacher reminders, showing a student his/her grades, praise, parent contact, and conferences. Teacher reminders were often informal conversations used to intercede on behalf of a student in a variety of ways. Sometimes communication was about securing new information — other times it was about sharing information. Here are a few examples of teacher reminders as presented in the teacher interviews. Mrs. Elbow described her use of talking with Jose to remind him of what she needed from him. “I think he needed to hit rock bottom. Once he got his grades, I was constantly nagging him and pushing him to get his work turned in.” She also mentioned working with Jose individually and talking with him often to keep him focused and moving forward. With a different student, Mrs. Elbow noted that she used daily reminders so that he could keep track of homework each night. Teachers explained how, at times, they would have a student in their class who had failed previously and was there to take the class over to receive credit. Mr. Burgermeister described this situation with Erik. “I tried to impress on him to
remember what happened last time he was in this class and didn’t turn in any work. He finally started to do his work and ended up with a C, but I had to stress that he had to do it.”

Another form of communication teachers related that they used as an intervention to reach students was showing the students their grades. Once students reach high school, many teachers believe it is the responsibility of the student to monitor their own progress in their academic courses. Some teachers have resorted to sharing the grades with their struggling students in hopes of creating a desire to change the behaviors that result in failing marks. Mr. Burgermeister shared how he talked to Maria about her grades and actually showed her a progress report. “If you want this F on your grade then fine, but if not you need to figure this out. You do not do homework. If you do not do the homework, you will not be able to pass the assessments and the class.” In an effort to help a student understand how his behavior and lack of effort will eventually lead to failure, Mr. Sweet sits with Zack to help him understand. “Zack, this is a report from four of your classes. You earned a D and three Fs. What are you doing in school all day long? You have to fix this now or else it will be too late.”

Teachers also reported using praise as an intervention for students who struggle in the classroom. Often, praise is looked upon as a motivational strategy and in both of these situations the praise was used when the student did something outside of his normal actions. One student for example, came to class early and the teacher made an intentional conversation about the lack of tardiness for the day in a way that was positive. The other situation involved Mr. Quartz describing a student who had trouble grasping the concepts in math. Whenever she would understand something on her own, he would reinforce it with positive praise.

More communication strategies described by teachers were parent contact, student-led conference, or iFrosh collaboration from their teachers. Five students received the intervention of
their teachers contacting their parents. Mrs. McCoy related how e-mails home and parent contact has helped her students be more successful.

I decided that I was just going to send emails home like every three weeks to all the parents that I had email addresses for and just say this is the upcoming due dates. This is what we're doing in class. This is what you can talk to your kids about. And so, that goes home to everybody. And then, if I've got kids that need it, I usually give them about a week to get the assignment in and then I say, okay, I'm emailing home now.

Two teachers also mentioned that the iFrosh collaboration helped their student become more successful since the teachers were more aware of the things that were hindering their success in other classes or what was working particularly well. This intervention is also listed in the “failed to work” category when the collaboration broke down or through a discussion with the student who failed to improve.

Only one teacher described a situation where a personal note was written to a student. Mrs. Simmons explained she wrote a note to Thomas to help build the relationship and let him know that she truly cared about his academic progress, but the results were not as good as anticipated. “I even wrote him a note one time that said I do care about you if there is something I can do let me know and he said, ‘Just back off.’ That was the first time I’ve ever gotten that from a kid and I understood what he was saying and I said so you want me to not to approach you and he said, ‘Just not so much.’”

Mr. Quartz relates his effort to make parent contact with Lindsey. “We had a parent meeting. That was in the beginning of December. We set up a plan where she was going to try to get caught up. For a while, it was OK. She was a little more engaged and I think she just realized more and more that she didn’t have the skills that she needed to be there, to be
successful in that course she needed to go back a little bit.” The interventions that might make sense do not always work with all students, as shown through this last paragraph of this section. Appendix C presents the frequency and percent of communication interventions per student that worked and those that failed.

**Classroom Management.** Classroom Management was another category of intervention that emerged from the teacher interviews and its raw codes included seating charts and moving a student to the front of the class. Creating a seating chart was often described as a way teachers redistributed social students or friends throughout the room without doing so in front of the class in a punitive fashion. In addition, if a student was having trouble engaging, staying focused, or being distracted, then one strategy was to move the student to the front of the room leaving the distractions behind. Mr. Burgermeister described moving Zack to the front of the room, “I just said, ‘Well Zack, I’ve done what I can with you. I’m going to put you here because you’re disrupting the kids around you and I’ve kids who want to be upfront.’”

Other kinds of practices that were included in classroom management category included: push-ups, proximity, isolation, providing materials, peer accountability, and intentional grouping. One teacher described how she handled Brian’s chronic tardiness by having him do push-ups when he did make it to the classroom. She said that the consequence was immediate and had a much better impact than telling the administration. Proximity, peer accountability, and isolation were other tactics administered. Mr. Burgermeister shared his reason for isolating a student.

One of my other things that I do is have an island of isolation, that's what I call it and every once in a while I have to stick him (Eric) up there and I put him there once this semester already and he didn't like it because he didn't know what to do and I said "Well,
if he's sitting there talking and I'm talking, of course, I'm going to expect you not to know what to do."

Intentional grouping seemed to be a bit more widespread than the other tactics, with four students receiving this intervention. Mrs. McCoy described using intentional grouping with Alex. “I've tried to put him, when we do group work, with some people that are little more focused so maybe that can help him get focused, and I do just have to kind of keep my eye on him to make sure he's actually on task in class, doing what he's supposed to be doing.” Mrs. McCough explained that Brian “now sits by studious students intentionally and they make him do his work. I am receiving more from him now.”

Another classroom management intervention, coded from the interviews, was accepting late work as a way to increase academic performance. Appendix C identifies the frequency tables associated with this intervention on a per student basis, showing where it was seen as working and where it was unsuccessful.

Teaching. The third category in the interventions coding process was teaching practices. Appendix C shows that in no instance did teachers report failure when they used this intervention. There were, however, a number of cases where the results were left ambiguous. In this category, teachers used their training and creativity to come up with solutions to student problems. For instance, teachers used a log for make-up work intervention, re-teaching, standards-based grading and elimination of group work. These teacher practices were used with one student or a small group of students. As an intervention, it was seen as costly and inefficient. For example, one teacher used the intervention of scaffolding his instruction to help struggling students understand better, but he did this for only two of his students. Mrs. Simmons also
described how she scaffolded the amount of information she gave Thomas, who was struggling in her class.

What I try to do with him is just break it down. I gave them an assignment where they have to 54 things to research, literally 54 things. It’s a list; check it off, you do it, you know. It should never be easy but definitely doable and he was just like, he was overwhelmed by the size of it all and I said, “Why do you not get a highlighter and highlight the ones you have already done so you can see that you have already done lot of the work?”

Other practices included in this category were: credit completion, homework folders, homework completion logs, re-teaching, student contracts, peer tutoring, and pullout reading. For clarification purposes the process of credit completion centered on allowing students to continue to work on a class assignment after the grading period had ended, in an effort for them to complete the original class instead of taking it over in summer school or the next academic school year. Most of the students who fell into this intervention were right on the bubble between passing and not passing. Usually a student contract between a student and a teacher establishes a deal where if a student complies with a certain obligation, then a teacher will award the student a passing grade. This has usually been done at WHS when a student is not on track to complete a course with a passing grade. Mr. Burgermeister and Maria developed such a contract.

Having students stay in class to finish their daily work was used for two students, as shared in the interviews, to overcome missed schoolwork. Mrs. McCough described her work with Brian by saying “I would give him an assignment and say, ‘this is your one and only golden ticket. You need to finish this and hand it in to me to be able to leave today. Don’t leave this room until I have it.’”
There was only one instance when a student receiving extra time did not lead to better academic success. This is one of the accommodations that teachers often use for students who are on Individualized Education Plans or 504 Plans. But, it was also used for regular students. Mr. Sweet described his efforts with Ashley by saying “I gave her the makeup work, I gave her extra time to do it without penalty, but until she wants to be successful none of those things will work for her.”

**Systems.** The final category of interventions that came out of the data analysis process was that concerned with systems or school-wide efforts. WHS as a large comprehensive high school did not have systems interventions. Recently, the two most prominent tools that teachers identified relying on were PAWS Time and iFrosh. PAWS Time was used both as a punishment and reward for students to assist them in completing their work. Some teachers, however, noted that both were frequently misused as students failed to complete missing assignments. It appeared to several teachers that PAWS Time was taken as a break since students ate food and socialized. On a different level, iFrosh was used by the teachers to discuss students, in order to be consistent within their profession and brainstorm novel ideas and instruction that will work for their particular group of shared students. Appendix C provides the frequency and percent per student for the interventions that worked and those that failed as perceived by teachers.

*Intersection of Student Problems and Teacher Interventions*

In order to address the study’s second purpose, identification of strengths and weaknesses in teacher assistance for students who are headed toward or are failing a class, the analysis examined the efficacy of the interventions as matched against the student problems. The description of the problems and interventions presented in the previous sections suggested some degree of disconnect, at least as perceived by teachers. First teachers shared that they noticed
almost twice as many student errors, mistakes, challenges, or difficulties that contributed to or indicated student failure was on the horizon than the practices, routines, or strategies that they employed to address them. Appendix D provides the raw data for the 30 students named by the teachers, including the total number of problems that were noticed for each student and the interventions that were employed (as broken down by total number of interventions, interventions that worked, interventions that failed, and those portrayed as uncertain in outcome). The data on the table are sorted by number of interventions. The relationship between the number of interventions and number of problems is nonexistent. Most troubling are the cases found in the top third of the table. Danika, Nestor, Jan, Matthew, David, Gus, and Derek each were noted as having demonstrated between seven and eleven problems, and yet their teachers reported doing nothing or used only one or two modifications to assist the student. Other students received multiple interventions. When the efficacy of action is doubtful or not known, such a pattern is not surprising as decision making shifts to other criteria.

The three columns of interventions that worked, those that failed, and those that were perceived as uncertain in outcome, as shown in Appendix D, expose in a detailed way this problem of efficacy for teachers. However, teacher interventions do work. The sorted data in the columns for number of interventions and number of interventions that teachers found successful reveal this important observation. There is an association between the number of interventions and the number of interventions that teachers identified as working. This finding argues against a teacher doing nothing or little in the face of noticed student need. The challenge for teachers centers on determining the right course of action.

The coded interview data did not match student problems to teacher interventions. Such analysis would not have revealed much as the sample size is so small there would have been
many empty cells. Further, teachers talked about noticing multiple problems, but they generally did not speak to which solution was being given to address which problem. Further research is worth pursuing on this topic. The coding procedures did allow for a cumulative intervention efficacy ratio to be calculated. Conceptually, the ratio can be understood as follows: First, it analyzes student data per problem category (i.e., affective, social, physical, veiled, symptomatic, and foundational). Second, it takes the cases and calculates a percentage per teacher intervention category (i.e., communication, management, teaching, and systems). The percentage is the number of times an intervention was identified as having worked divided by the number of times teachers noted the intervention worked or failed (for the intervention of teaching, “uncertain” replaced “failed” since there were no cases where teachers spoke directly to one of these tactics as failing). Since cases were selected by student problem, the interventions they received cannot be considered separate. A better interpretation of the percentages is a cumulative outcome. Tables 8 and 9 provide the results of the analysis.

For example, as shown on Table 8, 83% of the 30 students were reported by their teachers as having experienced a problem in the category of foundations. Teachers noted seven incidents where a systems intervention worked and 13 that failed, or 35% which can be seen on the table. Since these students also received the strategies of communication, teaching, and management, there is support for interventions as having a cumulative outcome. The limitations of this analysis are discussed later in the chapter. The percentages reported on both tables suggest that any one intervention or category of intervention alone may not be sufficient for bringing about an improvement for a student, but in combination there is evidence of efficacy.

What is interesting about the percentages on the tables and why two were created was the manner in which they direct attention to the intervention categories. The student problems listed
on Table 9 point to systems interventions as being a simple and possibly beneficial tool for teachers when they first notice an academically oriented problem. Adding other interventions increase the chance of success and are ordered by the observed percentages. Table 9 contains the data for problems that involve students with difficulties outside of the class or issues related to inappropriate interaction. Communication strategies were recognizable as a fitting place to start. Not surprisingly, the efficacy of teacher intervention for these problems is not as high as the academically sensitive concerns.

*Table 8*

*Problem by Cumulative Intervention Efficacy Pattern One*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reported</th>
<th>Systems</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundational</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptomatic</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veiled</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 9*

*Problem by Cumulative Intervention Efficacy Pattern Two*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reported</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Systems</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings from this study suggest that teacher subjectivity and discretion are prominent features of the current landscape. These two qualities are evident and necessary to explain the ways the participants responded to critical incidents experienced by their students that they noted led to failure. Students come with a unique set of problems and baggage that lead them toward failure and to some degree the flexibility for teachers to respond is necessary and appropriate. Indeed, teachers are themselves unique, with their personal set of experiences, expertise, training, and skills. Today, more than ever, teachers have to battle so much more than a bad home life and poor parenting to hold the attention of their students. Hunger, shelter, safety, and a place to sleep are not the only concerns for our students, but media such as smart phones, Facebook, and video game apps, in their own way draw the attention of students away from academics. There is no “one size fits all” for either students or teachers when it comes to figuring out what to do when students are experiencing problems in learning.

It was tempting to search after those interventions that teachers noted as having “worked” and disregard the ones in a particular category that did not work or were unclear. This effort and its conclusion needed a little more thought. As mentioned above, each student comes with a particular set of circumstances that lead to his failure, and ideally each teacher has his/her own bag of tricks to help intervene before a student gets too far behind. Many teachers who are currently in the public education system and even some of the recent grads have been heavily trained in the areas of instructional pedagogy and classroom management. This training is not bad by any stretch of the imagination, but more emphasis needs to be placed on not only instruction, but assessment, intervention, and even enrichment. The trouble is that in too many cases, at least as shared in the interviews, teachers appeared to be relying on standard practice.
When students are experiencing difficulties, the standard teaching and management practices are no longer enough.

Using the critical incident technique as a methodology within the framework of an action research gathered data from teachers in order to gain insight on the ways they perceived learners as struggling. Looking for the subtle cues and incidents through the eyes of these teachers resulted in identification for the categorization of student problems, as well as teacher interventions. It exposed the various challenges, ambiguities, and uncertainties teachers experienced intervening to assist students before and during failure. Research on error demonstrates that disconnect between problems and interventions is not unusual (Dekker, 1990). Easy-to-use tools such as checklists are routinely developed to address such relationships. Training and standardized procedures and guidelines accompany industries where error reduction is viewed as most critical. Few could argue against the fact that reduction in student failure is vital.

The gathered and analyzed data facilitated the development of a checklist for teachers for this purpose. Table 10 offers the tool. As a rating sheet, it is intended to be used by a classroom teacher in isolation, collaboratively, with the student present, or in a conference scenario. It provides the opportunity for a teacher to select from category areas specific incidents of student behaviors, attitudes, and predicaments that were commonly reported in the interviews. It also includes additional spaces. In addition, it identifies intervention categories and associated practices, routines, and strategies. Inclusion of both problems and interventions is designed to cue teachers to action. A particular problem would not be noticed without identification of at least one or more interventions. The problems are ordered from most common to least, and the
interventions are ordered from “easiest to implement” to “more time consuming.” There are also multiple time periods, with dates to record when teachers responded with what intervention.

When teachers have an intentional focus on lowering the number of students failing their classes and buildings have a systemic way of reacting when students begin to indicate failure to meet standard, the students will have a much better chance of making it. Knesting (2008) also stated teachers have a significant impact when students see them as caring, supportive, and believing in their ability to succeed in school. Without these things in place, the natural selection of the “haves” versus the “have-nots” comes into play and students begin to fulfill their own prophecy based on a stereotype or statistic. While a checklist may appear on the surface to be a bit instrumental, the intent of protocol is to remind teachers that what they do does make a difference.
### Table 10

**Checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Behaviors</th>
<th>Teacher Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name:</strong>___________</td>
<td><strong>Date:</strong>___________ <strong>Date:</strong>___________ <strong>Date:</strong>___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundational (knowledge and attention)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Systems</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Lacks ability to connect</td>
<td><em>PAWS</em> <em>PAWS</em> <em>PAWS</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Needs attention</td>
<td><em>After school</em> <em>After school</em> <em>After school</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Low reading</td>
<td><strong>Comments:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Overwhelmed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Off task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symptomatic (problems doing work)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Poor individual work</td>
<td><em>Discuss grade</em> <em>Discuss grade</em> <em>Discuss grade</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Turns in work late</td>
<td><em>Reminders</em> <em>Reminders</em> <em>Reminders</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Sits quietly</td>
<td><em>Teacher collaboration</em> <em>Teacher collaboration</em> <em>Teacher collaboration</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__No homework</td>
<td><em>Student conference</em> <em>Student conference</em> <em>Student conference</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__No turning in work</td>
<td><em>Parent conference</em> <em>Parent conference</em> <em>Parent conference</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Veiled (distracted)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teaching</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Copying</td>
<td><em>Finish work in class</em> <em>Finish work in class</em> <em>Finish work in class</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Leaving classroom</td>
<td><em>Homework log/folder</em> <em>Homework log/folder</em> <em>Homework log/folder</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Small tasks take all period</td>
<td><em>Student contract</em> <em>Student contract</em> <em>Student contract</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Does nothing</td>
<td><em>Credit completion</em> <em>Credit completion</em> <em>Credit completion</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical (factors outside of class)</strong></td>
<td><em>Peer tutoring</em> <em>Peer tutoring</em> <em>Peer tutoring</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Bullying</td>
<td><em>Re-teach</em> <em>Re-teach</em> <em>Re-teach</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Lacking sleep</td>
<td><strong>Comments:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Suspended</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Home issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td><strong>Management</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Controlling</td>
<td><em>Proximity</em> <em>Proximity</em> <em>Proximity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Ignore Instruction</td>
<td><em>Isolate</em> <em>Isolate</em> <em>Isolate</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Verbal Confrontations</td>
<td><em>Peer accountability</em> <em>Peer accountability</em> <em>Peer accountability</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affective</strong></td>
<td><em>Intentional grouping</em> <em>Intentional grouping</em> <em>Intentional grouping</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Makes fun of themselves</td>
<td><em>Sit up front</em> <em>Sit up front</em> <em>Sit up front</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Feels picked on</td>
<td><em>Seating chart</em> <em>Seating chart</em> <em>Seating chart</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__Immature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

The study explored how teachers of 9th grade courses at WHS interacted with students who were struggling academically or had even failed at least one high school course. These teachers worked in teams of three, covering math, English, and science. There were six teams of three and two administrators in the building responsible for working with these students. The 9th grade has the most failures per class and the research suggests that students in this grade are most vulnerable to dropping out. Smith (2008) states that more course failures, suspensions, and high school dropouts occur at the ninth grade level than any other grade level. Brown (2010) noted that the 9th grade is critically important since it appears to be the last chance for encouraging students to graduate from high school. At WHS, teachers have been put together in teams with the hope of collaborating on strategies to help them all utilize the individual relationships of the team to better understand their students and recognize the difficulties they may be under. Additionally, the hope is that they will have an impact on the number of students meeting standard. Therefore, an important outcome of the study is the manner in which it will help support these teachers in their work. The critical incident technique has been used with many professionals to facilitate their learning and bring about improvement in their practice.

Fourteen year-olds are not always up to the challenges of high school and the responsibilities that secondary teachers believe students are able to tackle and should be taught to hold themselves accountable for their own learning. Knesting (2008) says that students’ behavior often changes when they feel like a part of a community at school. If left to their own devices, we know intuitively that the students who are driven, have family support, and set goals for themselves will be successful and those families who live in poverty, speak a second language, and do not have families who value education will be the ones who are not as successful. There
is a fine line between teaching responsibility to students and letting them sink because they do not have the requisite skills to succeed. High school should not be the proverbial sifter that sorts those students who have what it takes to make something of themselves and those who need to work a blue collar job; it should be a place where all students are expected to learn at their own rate and acquire the necessary skills to choose a post secondary path of their liking.

From what we learned from the data, many teachers feel ill-trained and ill-prepared for the hurdles that teaching brings to them. As Dufour, Dufour, and Eaker (2006) state, there are four key questions to address: what do we want our students to learn; how do we know they learned it, what do we do when they did not learn it; and what do we do when they did learn it? These questions are often a bit disconcerting to teachers in the respected that they must address them each and every day. Yes, they may be ready for the work and responsibilities of teaching, but are they ready for the students who actually show up to their classes and the baggage that each student carries? No one is prepared for the students who show up. Teachers think their district is vertically and horizontally aligned in the curriculum that they deliver and they know their students. This may be true, but what is the transient population and migrant population of the building? These students can throw a wrench into expectations. Teachers today need to have specific professional development in the realm of academic interventions to fill up their “toolbox” in Tier One interventions before we can expect to see a change. The developed checklist provides a beginning for a RTI approach.

Some teachers in this study clearly reflected on the fact that at times they do not know what to do and the resources are not there for success. Mr. Sweet summarized his frustration at what to do by saying, “And that’s a half an hour class time. What, what should a person do? Should I have gone over every minute and hounded him then it, it’s like, why are you picking on
me? You let the kids just do their thing or you go over them, keep them on task you know, same way work should be interesting enough to keep them on task you know, they should want to learn enough so that they stay on the task and job became, where I couldn’t even approach her.”
A few teachers vented their concern about the students not responding to their instruction or redirections in the classroom and not knowing where to turn next: administration, counselors, etc?

Tier One interventions refers to the content specific interventions that teachers can deliver to an individual student to help them overcome the many obstacles and hurdles that hinder student progress. Many of those techniques are described in the interventions that the teachers in this study tried to use. As currently practiced, the interventions that are being used for assisting students tend to be employed in a haphazard fashion and without consistency. The checklist not only provides guidance, it helps record information for more accurate reflection and identification of possible alternatives to standard teaching or classroom management practices. Improved information gathering is necessary for beginning conversations about more systems or school wide practices that reduce the ambiguity students experience as they move from one teacher’s class to another. Reduced inconsistencies are important, for it provides greater clarification of expectations for students and removes contradictions between the ways different teachers handle such simple issues as make-up work, which can easily confuse and frustrate students who are already struggling.

It is clear that utilizing some sort of intervention plan is better than nothing, but a uniform system used throughout a building by the staff is one that will prove much more productive and efficient over the long run. Baffum, Mattos, and Weber (2009) describe their Pyramid Response to Intervention as a model for schools to implement and allow for consistent
interventions delivered in a minimum of three tiers (classroom interventions, more intensive and specific interventions outside of the classroom, and very intense interventions outside of the classroom). In this model, the goal of the implementation of the core curriculum and the in-class interventions is that eighty percent of the students understand the content at this level. The students who still do not understand the content will receive an outside of the classroom intervention that is a bit more intensive than the one in the classroom and the research says this should impact the other fifteen percent of students not understanding the content. The final tier is reserved for the last five percent and consists of intensive interventions and students who may qualify for an Individual Education Plan in a special education department. The goal of the checklist, however, is to keep students in classrooms during the regular period.

Many schools throughout Washington State are moving toward creating built-in intervention periods within the school day. There are a variety of models being implemented and each particular school benefits from creating a little uniqueness of their own. In the Wenatchee School District all of the middle schools have pull-out math and reading intervention times as well as specific times within the school day for intentional classroom interventions for other subjects at the tier one level. The middle schools in the district all have an intervention period of some sort. One school calls it homeroom, while another refers to it as iPeriod. In both cases the students are allowed to read, work on enrichment activities, obtain help from their teachers, or some are required to meet with their teachers through an intervention identification process. As mentioned previously the high school also has an intervention period built into the school day called PAWS Time.

The consciousness that not all students learn the same way and at the same time in our public education facilities is a great thing in a world that still has the concept of the “one size fits
all” education theory. Any steps that buildings and teachers can take to create a more individualized education plan for each student will help them have a better opportunity with success.

There are several limitations to this study that will impact the nature of the findings. The study was more exploratory than definitive given the application of CIT to student failure. Data collection was challenging and resulted in a small number of interviews being conducted rather than the more robust projections that had been proposed. Administrator duties got in the way of the study and resulted in teachers selecting not to participate. Teachers who did participate where therefore not representative of all teachers involved in iFrosh at WHS. The change in employment of the researcher prevented new data from being collected.

Addressing the issues that keep students from being successful is very challenging work for the classroom teacher. There are not simple and clear cut answers or solution to the vexing concern of student failure. What works for one student might not work for another. What is implemented in response for one teacher may not be implemented in the same fashion for another teacher, thus changing the results. The goal of this study was to identify strategies to prevent student failure, but it also found out that many teachers lacked the resources and background to adequately address the multitude of student issues that they are dealing with on a daily basis. Teachers appeared to rely on standard teaching and classroom management practices and procedures for dealing with student problems even when teachers believe students are heading down the path of failure.

The current study looked at student failure through the eyes of the educator and with the lens of the CIT. The errors, mistakes, and omissions exhibited by students that were perceived as contributing to their failure became an incident and were analyzed to generate student problem
categories (affective, social, physical, veiled, symptomatic, and foundational). The practices, routines, and strategies teachers used to assist students were also analyzed as incidents and used to identify four categories of intervention (communication, management, teaching, and systems). Finally, the problems of the students were summarily juxtaposed with classroom interventions from the teachers to develop a checklist and guidelines.

It is clear from the findings of this study there are interventions that teachers can implement that do work, but it is necessary for teachers to employ them. Standard teaching and management procedures are not enough. The checklist provides a valuable tool that allows teachers the flexibility to choose different interventions for their students. They just have to do it. Hopefully, the findings offered in this study can be seen as encouraging teachers to realize that what they do is important and they can try new methods that may prove successful.
REFERENCES


Lewin,


APPENDIX A

Adequate Yearly Performance Summary 2009-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Met Proficiency Goal</th>
<th>Met Participation Goal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>N&lt;Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
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<td>N&lt;Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income</td>
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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHER INTERVIEWS

I will be interviewing you as a student researcher and there will be nothing evaluative in nature during these interviews. However, if something is uncovered that relates to improving student learning, I will most definitely share it with others. I will be asking you to participate in at least one interview. I need you to describe experiences in the classroom working with failing ninth graders. In this interview I need you to be as detailed as possible. I have, therefore, structured the questionnaire to guide you to describe one or more incidents in which a student failed. I am not attempting to find fault, blame, or responsibility for the student failure. The purpose is to better understand our system and the various factors that influence your decisions, plans, and strategies for helping our students. Your insight will be helpful in better understanding the process of student failure. You will not be evaluated in any way shape or form through this interview.

1.  Think of a student last semester who failed or was failing in your class.
   a.  Remembering back to the beginning of the semester, what did you first notice about this student? What were your first impressions?
   b.  Describe for me what happened over the course of the semester?
   c.  Tell me what were the things you did to help this student?
   d.  What resources did you draw on for supporting this student?
   e.  When did you know that he/she was going to fail?
   f.  What did the student need to do that didn’t happen?
   g.  What didn’t you anticipate in this student’s response to your interaction?
2. Can you think of another student who failed your class whose story was different than this first? Maybe you had a connection with this student or you knew this student was in trouble from the first day.

a. Remembering back to the beginning of the semester, what did you first notice about this student? What were your first impressions?

b. Describe for me what happened over the course of the semester.

c. Tell me what were the things you did to help this student?

d. What resources did you draw on for supporting this student?

e. When did you know that he/she was going to fail?

f. What did the student need to do that didn’t happen?

g. What didn’t you anticipate in this student’s response to your interaction?
Incident Counts of Students by Problem

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Affective</th>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Incidents</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
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</tr>
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<th></th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
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APPENDIX D

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