

A STUDY OF FAILURE
IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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the Faculty of the Department of Education
Indiana State Teachers College

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Master of Science

by
Dorothy R. Lang
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credit.

Committee on thesis:

Chris H. Jamison
Helen Ederle

Elmer J. Clark, Chairman

Representative of English Department:

Sara King Harvey

Date of Acceptance October, 14, 1952

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS TO BE USED

For many years the appalling number of failures in the senior high school has been a matter of serious concern for those involved in the educative process. During one phase of educational history, a high percentage of failures was taken as an indication of effective teaching. However, in modern philosophy of education, nearly the reverse is true. With the present emphasis on the total development of the individual, failure has come to be considered as an educational malady which needs diagnosis and treatment. Numerous opinions have been expressed, and many studies have been made to ascertain the causes of, and the remedies for, school failure. There is vast divergence among them.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study (1) to obtain the causes for failure, as expressed both by the students who failed and by their teachers; (2) to compare the reasons for failure as given by the students and teachers concerned; (3) to determine the relationship between IQ and failure; (4) to discover in which subject areas failing marks were most prevalent; and (5) to arrive at suggestions for minimizing failure.

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Importance of the study. Since the modern concept of education is one of providing educational opportunity for all regardless of abilities or backgrounds, the problem of failure has become a basic one. In many instances it has been considered to be a significant factor in high enrollment mortality rates, in the form of drop-outs. In recent years nearly every high school community has been putting forth concerted efforts to ferret out the causes of failures, and to propose methods for minimizing their occurrence. Various plans for determining the causes of failure have been followed, with the larger portion of them using the opinions of teachers as the bases for their conclusions. In this study an attempt was made to employ techniques which would tend to eliminate the above bias and bring together the thinking of both students and teachers.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Failure. The term "failure" as used in this study refers to a mark of "F" in a school subject and signifies loss of credit in the subject.

Students' reasons. The term "students' reasons" should be interpreted as meaning the reasons which the students gave as being pertinent to their failure in a subject.

Teachers' reasons. The term "teachers' reasons" is used in referring to the reasons for failure as given by the classroom teachers.

Attitude. In an effort to make the reasons for failure into as few general categories as possible, the term "attitude" embodies such expressions as "indifference," "laziness," "non-cooperative," "disregard for subject," "unwillingness to work," "refusal to work," and "did not care."

Ability. The use of the term "ability" is primarily in reference to the intellectual capacity or competence of the student. In specific subject areas, i.e. typing and physical education, it may also involve the physical capability of the individual.

Outside activities. The realm of "outside activities" includes school sponsored extracurricular activities, home duties, social activities, and jobs.

Pupil-teacher tension. The term "pupil-teacher tension" refers to a clash of personalities or a lack of understanding between student and teacher.

Failure to develop techniques. The category "failure to develop techniques" designates the failure of the student to develop specific physical skills necessary for competence in a subject area.

Retardation. The failure of the student to make scores on standardized tests which are commensurate with his mental ability is referred to as "retardation."

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE THESIS

The chapters which follow contain a review of the literature on failure appearing from 1942 to 1952; an explanation of the procedures and methods used by the investigator; an analysis of the data obtained through student interviews, teacher replies, and test results; conclusions based upon this and previous studies; and recommendations, suggested by this study, for the reduction of the incidence of failure in senior high school.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much has been written in regard to the alarming number of failures in the senior high school, the philosophy of education which was conducive to the increase in this number, the contributing factors which apparently have to do with the causation of failure, and the procedures which have been developed in an attempt to minimize failure. However, the material presented in this study has been delimited as follows: only pertinent material written within the last ten-year period, 1942-52, has been discussed; the literature in three areas--reasons for failure, suggestions for reducing failure, and related studies--has been presented; and brief summaries of only the more representative studies concerning failure have been included.

Literature on reasons for failure. ^{H. M.} Lafferty pointed out that studies on the causes which prompt failure have maintained a fairly stable position in educational research over a prolonged period of time because failure is costly to the pupil, to the school and to society. In the same progress report, he suggested that the reasons for failure might be grouped under the following agencies: (1) teacher and school, (2) the pupil, (3) home conditions, and (4)

pupil health--responsibility of both the school and home.

The same author selected the studies of ten individuals as being representative, and tabulated the results obtained as to their appearance in each of the studies. These investigations of Farnsworth, Cornell, Anderson, Fensch, Hunter, Johnson, Lafferty, Myers, Penhale, and Lozo indicated considerable agreement in the first five of the thirty-three reasons given. Eight of the reports listed irregular attendance and low mentality as major causes; seven found lack of interest an important reason; and six gave poor health, physical defects and poor effort as significant reasons for failure. It is interesting to note that only two of the ten studies included information gathered through reasons given by the students who had failed.

Further in the progress report, Lafferty cited the twelve most frequently mentioned reasons for failure in the studies for the 1935-45 period. He stated that they compared closely with those in a similar report for the previous ten-year period, except for a few changes in the order of importance. The reasons cited in the order of their importance were (1) irregular attendance, (2) low mentality, (3) lack of interest, (4) poor health and physical defects, (5) poor effort, (6) poor home conditions, (7) poor foundation, (8) outside work, (9) incomplete work, (10) outside interests,

(11) laziness, and (12) failure on tests.¹

A high correlation between attendance and school success was derived by Chambers from a teacher-made check list on reasons for failure. He found absence to be the chief cause with thirty-five per cent of the failure cases reviewed. Poor preparation ranked second with twenty per cent. Fourteen per cent of the cases failed because of lack of concentration and a like percentage because of lack of interest. This study was also contradictory to the prevalent idea that students with low scholastic standing were frequently maladjusted, since teachers failed to report any perceptible effects of personality maladjustments.²

Glicksberg stated, "If we take as a central aim of education the development of wholesome integrated personalities, then there is no justification for a high percentage of failures." He further concluded that many teachers are under the impression that their job is one of merely giving out assignments, grading papers, conducting recitations, and holding examinations in a particular subject. For that reason they are likely to attribute failure to such excuses as excessive absences, inability to pass tests, lack of atten-

¹ H. M. Lafferty, "Reasons for Pupil Failure--A Progress Report," American School Board Journal, 117-18, 20, July, 1948.

² W. Max Chambers, "What Causes Failures," School Executive, 65-56-7, January, 1946.

tion, restlessness in class, reading difficulty, failure to prepare home assignments, and truancy.

The author maintained also that an entirely different picture is presented by the student's point of view. He said:

Though a number of pupils complain about the attitude of their teachers, they are on the whole more just and restrained in their comments than are some teachers about the shortcomings of their pupils. They are acutely conscious of temperamental clashes, of unreasonable (or what seems to them as unreasonable) demands, and of harsh and inconsiderate treatment. Education is for them a highly personal matter. It is an experience they are living through, a dramatic social situation. They crave understanding and affection; they wish to be treated as adults.³

Smeltz holds the view that the teacher places the blame for failure upon the pupil and that the pupil places it upon the teacher. In a survey of several hundred failing pupils' reasons for failure, he found the following ten to be most significant; (1) dislike of teacher, (2) dislike of subject, (3) laziness, (4) irregular attendance, (5) poor health, (6) poor effort, (7) lack of home study, (8) too many social activities, (9) slowness in answering, and (10) too much expected of pupils.⁴

³ Charles I. Glicksberg, "Failure and Guidance," American School Board Journal, 105:26, September, 1942.

⁴ E. E. Smeltz, "Facing the Failure Problem," American Teacher, 29:12-4, January, 1945.

In comparing the listings of the teachers of the above group, the author found the following reasons given: (1) irregular attendance, (2) poor health, (3) poor home conditions, (4) low mentality, (5) lack of interest, (6) poor foundation, (7) teacher inabilities, (8) poor effort, and (9) changing schools too often.⁵

In discussing failure from the pupil's view point, Cornell presented also classifications of reasons for failure as compiled from sixty-five papers written by girls. The seven reasons mentioned most frequently were too much home work, indifference about grasping the subject or passing the course, teacher not interested in slow students, teacher failing to put tests in the same language as home work and class work, lack of congeniality between students and teacher, teacher explaining work in too difficult terms, and teachers taking up new work too rapidly. Some of the other reasons given were too many outside activities, lack of parental co-operation, lack of study, lack of interest in the pupil on the part of the teacher, outside work, excessive absence, inadequate preparation, and lack of interest.⁶

"The reasons for failure on the part of high school

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ _____ Cornell, "Why Pupils Fail--From the Pupil's View Point," Texas Outlook, 26:16, September, 1942.

pupils," declared Carrothers, "are in great need of much more thoughtful, unbiased, unprejudiced study than they have heretofore received." He presented an inventory of reasons as given by teachers in a study by Penhale, with these major ones: lack of application, laziness, misuse of time, lack of interest in subject, lack of background, lack of ability, frequent absences, incomplete preparation of written assignments, failure to read daily assignments, refusal to recite, and never reciting. In a second listing, Carrothers offered the reasons which he considered significant causes of failure: heavy load carried by teachers; lack of interest on part of the pupil; lack of understanding of pupils on the part of the teacher; indifference and unconcern on the part of the teacher; inability of youth to do the work expected; parental unconcern for the education of boys and girls; community misunderstanding or lack of understanding of what education really consists; inability of educators to measure educational growth satisfactorily and the inability to show the pupil and the public the extent of growth; spoon feeding at home, at school and in the community; and rigidity of school curriculum and requirements for both the pupils and the teachers.⁷

It should be noted that there are fundamental differ-

⁷ G. E. Carrothers, "Why Do High School Pupils Fail?" National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 30:29-36, March, 1946.

ences between these two lists. The former is concerned primarily with school accomplishment, and the statements given are from the viewpoint of the teacher who is responsible for the work of the pupils. The latter is concerned with the total educational development of youth, and the observer was one concerned with the entire process and not directly responsible for classroom accomplishment.

A quotation from Lindel placed the blame for failure upon the shoulders of the school:

. . . For the first few years of my professional life I believed the child had failed. But for the past fifteen years I have shifted the responsibility. I believe that when the pupil does not learn, to the maximum of his capacity, the school has failed.

.
Some children respond to one kind of treatment and some to another. Unless the school exhausts every resource, it has failed.⁸

Arkola and Jensen were of the opinion that the leading cause of failure is reading difficulty. They maintained also that emotional disturbances have not yet been recognized sufficiently as major causative factors in lack of school success.⁹

Flaum indicated that the single most common problem contributing to failure is testing when he implied that

⁸ A. L. Lindel, "When the School Fails," Journal of Education, 132:108-10, April, 1949.

⁹ Audrey Arkola and Reynold A. Jensen, "Cost of Failure," Educational Leadership, 6:495-99, May, 1949.

frequently the material being tested in unreal and often unrelated to life as it actually is. He said further that formal tests cannot measure the concomitant learning which accompanies true learning activities. A few of the other more common reasons which he gave are misplacement of grade material, useless unactivated subject matter, and the social maladjustment of the student to certain course requirements.¹⁰

Viola Ames conducted an investigation to determine the relationship of IQ to school success and the correlation of personality factors to school achievement. Using students from three graduating classes of a Midwestern high school as experimental groups, she arrived at a correlation of $.54 \pm .05$ between school achievement and the Otis IQ test. From the data concerning various personality characteristics which she obtained, she concluded that the ability to succeed socially was not related to scholastic achievement, but that the ability to conform to school situations was related to school success.¹¹

Doll said that one of the important causes of failure is emotional disturbance. He gave as additional major causes:

¹⁰ Flaum, "Social View of Student Failures," Journal of Education, 126:12-13, January, 1943.

¹¹ Viola Ames, "Factors Related to High School Achievement," Journal of Educational Psychology, 34:229-36, April, 1943.

unfortunate home or neighborhood conditions, lack of mental ability, lack of reading development, lack of aptitude for certain subject matter, inability or unwillingness to accept responsibility, and poor health. That until recently no one regarded failure as a possible symptom of undesirable conditions in the child's life was also brought out by Doll.¹²

Slattery was in agreement with Doll that the major cause underlying failure is emotional maladjustment. He based some of his conclusions on the fact that many high school students who are mentally equipped to master subject materials fail to make the grade. They can fail also, Slattery claimed, in vocational subjects where they have the necessary aptitudes.¹³

In a report of a Mansfield, Ohio, school study, Edwin Fensch said:

The problem of whether to hand out failing grades for a year's work seems to be as perennial as the coming of spring. . . . In spite of a good many approaches to the problem, there remains a widespread belief that a pupil either passes or he does not pass; either he has measured up to standard set by somebody or he has not.¹⁴

¹² Ronald C. Doll, "It doesn't Just Happen!" National Parent Teacher, 43:27-29, April, 1949.

¹³ Ralph J. Slattery, "Spotting the Maladjusted Pupil," Nations Schools, 30:45-6, July, 1942.

¹⁴ Edwin A. Fensch, "Failed Without Good Cause," Clearing House, 18:326-8, February, 1944.

Fresch maintained that many of the reasons for failure as given by teachers are illogical and smack of subject matter rather than people. He pointed out that many of the items should be interpreted as teacher failure rather than pupil failure and that some may be the fault of the school as a whole.¹⁵

Nelson's study of students who had the capacity to make a satisfactory academic adjustment but who did not reach expected levels of achievement, brought out the idea that factors which have a negative influence appear to be sufficient to cause a break in the successful progress of the pupil. She learned that while there were no significant handicaps in regard to health, economic security, or home and family conditions in the group studied, these students evidenced no purpose or aim in continuing education or planning for the future. Likewise they received little or no motivation in school or out; there was no intellectual stimulus from family or friends; their individual interests had not been developed; and there apparently had been no effective efforts made to help the pupils improve their adjustment to the school situation.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Mary-Lois Nelson, "Why Do Capable Pupils Fail?" Nations Schools, February, 1944.

Kurtz, in a study on attitudes of students, teachers, and parents, pointed out that attitude seemed to be more closely related to achievement test scores than to intelligence test scores; that those who liked school had good achievement records, indicating that high achievement and good attitude ratings go hand in hand; and that the acquisition of educational knowledge and skills was not necessarily in proportion to the degree of measured intelligence.¹⁷

Literature on suggestions for reducing failure.

"Failures are not a natural necessity. . .," declared H. J. Mussleman. His suggestions for minimizing failure included getting at emotional disturbances; working with the student, the parent, and the teacher in an attempt to change the pupil's attitude toward school; adjustment of the school course of study and curriculum to fit the needs of the pupils; and discovering the interests of the pupils and capitalizing upon them.¹⁸

Irwin asserted that ideally there should be no failure in a school which must attempt to educate all comers, regardless of intelligence, ambition, or future plans. The school

¹⁷ John J. Kurtz and Esther J. Swenson, "Factors Related to Over-Achievement and Under-Achievement in School," School Review, 59:473-80, November, 1951.

¹⁸ H. J. Mussleman, "Are High School Failures Necessary?" Texas Outlook, 28:33-4, June, 1944.

program, he continued, must recognize that there will be a wide diversity of interest and ability and should provide for meeting these; it should not require all children to adjust themselves to a fixed program and fail those who cannot achieve it. Irwin believed that, actually, the failure of any student represents a failure on the part of the education system rather than the pupil.¹⁹

If a philosophy of total education of children is to be adopted, Glicksberg said:

. . . then teachers will have to pay more attention to a pupil's character and temperament and proportionately less to his degree of intelligence and his docility in submitting to the formal learning process. A function of the school is to develop a sense of adequacy in pupils. . . . Primary attention would be paid to personality reaction and not to grades. Efforts would be made to adapt the contents and methods of instruction to the needs and capabilities of the learner.²⁰

Flaum contended that failure must be viewed in a social sense and that the emotional result of retardation may cause the student to become a misfit socially and academically. He proposed that the student must share and accept his responsibility in the failure, and that teachers and administrators must realize the enormity of their responsibility in light of the effects such failure may have on the future of students.²¹

¹⁹ Leonard B. Irwin, "Failures in High School," Social Studies, 37:232-3, May, 1946.

²⁰ Glicksberg, op. cit., p. 26.

²¹ Flaum, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

G. D. McGrath wrote: "The appalling increase in pupil failure . . . is one which demands study and concerted steps for alleviation." He recommended these corrective steps, summarized as follows: (1) provision of special techniques of methodology for the less apt, (2) rapid adoption of the common learnings segment of the curriculum, (3) widespread adoption of a scientific philosophy of evaluation, (4) adoption of techniques involving personalized and individualized instruction and teaching through percept and example, (5) provision for a cooperative relationship between teacher and pupil, and (6) the adoption of realism and humanism by the schools.²²

Curriculum reorganization was recommended by Nelson as a step toward reduction of failure. She suggested that in such reorganization, vocational courses be developed, taking into consideration the needs of the community and the aptitudes and interests of the pupils; that a strong guidance program be promoted; that activity and interest groups be provided to reach each individual; and that facilities be made available for necessary remedial work. She contended that it would seem reasonable to assume that increased guidance and expanded curriculum would extend greatly the capa-

²² G. D. McGrath, "Pupil Failure: Seven Corrective Steps Schools Can Take," Clearing House, 24:25, September, 1949.

bilities of these failing students.²³

In discussing the meaning of learning difficulties, Talmack cites several points relevant to the job of the teacher in meeting them. She believes teachers should provide standards of behavior commensurate with the capacities, abilities, and ages of their pupils; they should be prepared to guide the child to further knowledge through increasingly complicated social relationships; they should provide emotional security; all agencies, techniques, and devices should be utilized for recognizing and remedying school difficulties and their causes; and other individuals should be consulted when necessary.²⁴

Arkola and Jensen said that teachers should be encouraged to think of school failure as some inability on the part of the pupil to meet successfully experiences of living and learning and to recognize the inability as a symptom of underlying difficulties.²⁵

Following a study of teachers' reasons for failure, suggestions for decreasing the number of failures were made by Chambers and are summarized here: (1) additional con-

²³ Nelson, op. cit., p. 14-5.

²⁴ Regina E. Talmack, "Learning Difficulties--Their Meaning," High Points, 30:57-61, January, 1948.

²⁵ Arkola and Jensen, op. cit., pp. 495-99.

structive effort must be made to effect more consistent attendance; (2) a change in teaching techniques could reduce the number of failures; (3) better pupil placement would reduce failure considerably; (4) an effective guidance program is essential in the senior high school.²⁶ Smeltz agreed with Chamber's last two points and added diversification of curriculum and setting up of minimum requirements which will give the lower ability group some opportunity for success. Smeltz also stated: "The task of teaching the type of pupil likely to fail should be approached with patience and sympathy."²⁷

A general reduction of failure by fifty per cent was obtained in a California high school after one semester of using a Student-Teacher Conference Sheet as described by Janet M. Watson.²⁸ According to the explanation, the Sheet is a cooperative affair which established a definite work program for the elimination of unsatisfactory grades. A conference day following the distribution of grades gives the teacher an opportunity to have individual conferences with each failing student and to fill out the sheet with the

²⁶ Chambers, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

²⁷ Smeltz, op. cit., pp. 12-12.

²⁸ Janet M. Watson, "Technique for Reducing Failures," California Journal of Secondary Education, 18:371-2, October, 1943.

student. The author pointed out that the student understands his obligations and has definite goals toward which to work to change his performance record and that the teacher also learns what is necessary for pupil adjustment.

B. A. Aughinbaugh offered a testing plan which he claimed reduces the number of failures by eliminating the unnatural atmosphere surrounding examinations. In this method the students ask questions of the instructor who attempts to answer all of them. All good and some fair questions are recorded, and the examination is made from the list of questions which the students asked. He maintained that this method of testing gives the student an opportunity to study effectively for an examination and to take it with confidence.²⁹

According to Arthur C. Hearn there is an excessively high percentage of failure in the areas of mathematics and foreign language which can be reduced through effective counseling and guidance. He suggested the setting up of a student's tentative four-year plan at the close of the eighth grade which would allow for enrollment in not more than four subjects per term and insure a better balance between elective and required subjects; the postponing of

²⁹ B. A. Aughinbaugh, "Testing Plan That Prevents Failure," Clearing House, 24:358-59, February, 1950.

languages and mathematics until the tenth or eleventh year if the pupil is not ready for them in the ninth year or does not need more than two years for college entrance; and emphasizing that quality of work is important as well as quantity.³⁰

A plan for working with marginal failures--those who fall a few points below passing at the close of a semester--was proposed by Horst. In this plan the time at the end of the semester when teachers are at school but all of the students are not can be used by the marginal failing students to work intensively for as many hours as necessary in the areas where they are weak. Another battery of tests is given and the students must make slightly above the passing grade for the school in order to pass. The writer remarked that while this does not guarantee that the pupil will pass, he will have learned at least a principle in the art of living--that all things in this life exact payment.³¹

Vijtosa questioned what could be done with the pupils in high schools who are failing because of a deficiency in the fundamentals of English. He said:

To meet the requirements of these youngsters, the

³⁰ Arthur C. Hearn, "Cutting Failures in Math and Foreign Languages," Clearing House, 26:323-4, February, 1952.

³¹ J. M. Horst, "Hope for the Marginal Failures," Clearing House, 24:97-8, October, 1949.

principles to be sought are unification, simplification, and attractive presentation of materials, including sufficient daily drilling in the simple fundamentals to permit their penetration of the average mind.³²

Literature on related studies. Frost declared that the primary aim of modern education should be social efficiency. He questioned whether failing a student in such a school is then justified, adding that it should mean only that the school is unable to contribute to the pupil's development toward social efficiency. He further stated that it is mandatory that the school make its population as socially efficient as the school's and the individuals' abilities will allow. He contended that failing a student simply because of his lack of successful mastery of subject matter is to revert to the selective philosophy of education.³³

A summary of findings concerning under-achievers in an investigation by Kurtz and Swenson presents a picture of frequently unfavorable home conditions with not much exchange of affection and the students seldom anxious to please the parents. Some under-achievers were found to have many friends who did not have a favorable attitude toward school or high standards of achievement, while others appeared to

³² Frances Vitjosa, "It's Time We Were Alarmed," Nations Schools, 34:27, September, 1944.

³³ S. E. Frost, "Failing Marks in Democracy's Schools," Education Forum, 7:281-6, March, 1943.

have no close friends at all. They appeared to be less happy in the school situation, were changeable, unstable, and had inferiority complexes and emotional conflicts. They were not interested in academic activity and preferred to be out of the classroom situation. They seemed to have limited vocational and educational aims.³⁴

In a report on the percentage of failure in the white high schools in Washington, D. C., mathematics headed the list with over eight per cent. Following this were business education with slightly over seven per cent, modern language with seven per cent, and English, science, and social studies with over six per cent each.³⁵ In New York City prior to 1943, the usual per cent of failure was ten per cent in all subjects.³⁶

Lindel discussed a change in report cards to enable the student to compete only with himself for grades and thereby reduce the possibility of failure. His plan would give parents and the pupil a clear description of the kind of work the individual was doing in relation to his own

³⁴ Kurtz and Swenson, op. cit., pp. 273-79.

³⁵ "Percentage of Pupils Failing in White High Schools," National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 30:147-8, March, 1946.

³⁶ Hubert A. Landry, "Subject Failure in the Academic High Schools," High Points, 25:27, October, 1943.

capabilities.³⁷

In her article on learning difficulties, Talmack emphasized the incidence of emotional disturbances and their contributing factors in the development of the child. She asserted that learning difficulties are not isolated behavior problems, but are closely related to other aspects of the child's development. The school relationships of the child may be influenced by the pre-school conditions, the degree of development of the child's natural curiosity, parental relationships with the child, parental relationships with the teacher and school, and the stage of physical development of the child.³⁸

Spears reported the following information based on a San Francisco high school study:

The relationship of failure in school performance to school drop-out needs no elaboration. There is a direct positive correlation.... The rate of failure is 50% higher in the ninth grade than in the upper three grades. . . . Many of those who fail in the ninth grade will not be in attendance in the tenth because of such discouragement. In spite of any idealistic view that the elders may take, youth are just like adults in that they get little satisfaction in doing things at which they show poor performance; and, as the adults, they will as soon as possible turn to something else at which they feel

³⁷ A. L. Lindel, "Competition for Grades," School and Community, 31:272, October, 1945.

³⁸ Talmack, op. cit., pp. 57-61.

more successful.³⁹

Since excessive absence seems to be a major factor contributing to failure, a discussion concerning the improving of pupil attendance by Schwartz is a pertinent one. He stressed the importance of not merely getting the absentee back in school, but of winning his and the parents' confidence so that there will be a new appreciation of work of the school and the pupil's relationship to it. He contended that the aim of the school will be reached when each child can be made to feel that he belongs to the social group, that he is achieving some measure of success in his work, and that he is secure in his relations with others.⁴⁰

Because it frequently includes some failing students, the educationally neglected group is mentioned here in relation to a study of failure. Segel set down some of the distinguishing marks of beginning high school students who are in this group. They often come from families in the unskilled or semi-skilled occupational group who have low incomes and low cultural environment. Members of this group may begin school later than others, are retarded in school, and usually make lower IQ test scores. In school they tend

³⁹ Harold Spears, "The High School Has Yet to Reach Its Full Stature," American School Board Journal, 116:17-19, March, 1948.

⁴⁰ William P. Schwartz, "We Can Improve Pupil Attendance," High Points, 30:64-69, February, 1948.

to make lower achievement test scores and lower marks; they lack interest in school and tend to have less emotional maturity, manifested in nervousness and a feeling of insecurity.⁴¹

Hudson described a plan which reduced absences by forty-three per cent and also reduced the number of failures. The plan was one for gaining admission to classes following absences and for completing make-up work. Upon returning to school, the student reported to an interviewer who determined the validity of the reason for absence, set a deadline for completion of all make-up work, and issued a slip for the pupil to present to his instructors. The slip, containing pupil data, was initialed by each teacher upon the pupil's return to class and make-up work was agreed upon. The slip was retained by the student until it was signed by all instructors following completion of the make-up work. It was then returned to the office of the interviewer where it was checked against a duplicate slip filed in the office under the date when it was due. Hudson maintained that the improvement in attendance and the decrease in failure were due to the placement of major responsibility upon the student.⁴²

⁴¹ David Segel, "The Neglected Group," Phi Delta Kappan, 30:293, April, 1949.

⁴² C. H. Hudson, "Absences Cut 43%--Plan Also Reduces Number of Failures," Clearing House, 24:328-30, February, 1950.

Limitations of previous studies. Many of the studies of failure reviewed by the writer have been limited in various respects. In some instances, a sex bias was significant as in a study by Berman and Klein which included only boys.⁴³ In another survey by Cornell only the opinions for girls were used.⁴⁴

In nearly every investigation, conclusions were based upon the comments of teachers alone without regard for the ideas of the students who failed. As Lafferty pointed out, only two of the major failure studies within a recent ten-year period have dealt with the opinions of the students involved.⁴⁵

Failure studies have been numerous and diversified, but there seems to be no single study within this writer's scope of reading which presents both students' and teachers' reasons for failure, I.Q. ranges and frequencies, failures according to subject areas and grade classifications, using the same group of failing students as a sample.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 57-63.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 18-20.

CHAPTER III

SOURCES OF DATA, METHODS OF PROCEDURE, AND TREATMENT OF THE FINDINGS

Obtaining valid and accurate information is frequently difficult in a study of this nature; in which interpretation and personal opinion may weigh heavily. The writer attempted to minimize these difficulties by securing a random and unbiased sample, by using written and interview information, and by relying upon test information already available for all students. This portion of the study deals with a description of the group from which the sample was taken, other sources of data, the methods used by the writer in obtaining the data, and a discussion of the findings of the investigation.

I. SOURCES OF DATA

Description of the group. The group used as a sample in this study was composed of those students in Bosse High School, Evansville, Indiana, who failed to receive credit in any subject during the first semester, 1951-52. Bosse High School is one of four public high schools in an industrial city of over 100,000 population. Located in a principally residential area on the east side of Evansville, the school had an enrollment of approximately 1700 in grades nine through

twelve during the 1951-52 school year. The range of social classes is from lower lower to upper upper, with the middle and the upper middle classes predominating. A high percentage of the graduates go to college, and a similarly high percentage of the parents have attended college.

The curriculum has four main divisions--College, Business, Industrial, and Homemaking--with a wide range of subject choice within each. A modified general program is followed in the ninth grade, with area specialization beginning in the tenth grade. A total of thirty-two credits is required for graduation, and these must be so arranged that the student will have six credits in each of two fields and four in each of two others, with elective subjects making up the balance.

Based upon the grade standard theory, the marking system designates a numerical average of seventy as a passing mark. However, students taking ninth grade required subjects are grouped according to level of ability, the three classifications being remedial, regular, and college. Test data, previous scholastic record, educational and vocational aims, and interests are used in determining in which section the student should be enrolled.

The administrative and guidance staffs consist of the principal, who carried on administrative and business affairs; the assistant principal, who is responsible for scheduling of

classes and enrollment and is responsible for handling discipline problems; the dean of girls, who deals with educational, personal, and disciplinary problems of girls; and a full-time counselor, who aids students with their problems, carries on a minimum testing program, secures employment for needy students, and provides educational and vocational counseling. The homeroom teacher is given the principal responsibility for the educational guidance of students in the home room.

Failure lists, test data, interviews and failure report forms. At the close of each grading period and at the end of the semester, each adviser sends to the counselor a list of his advisees who have received failing grades, the subjects in which they have failed, and the teachers in whose classes they failed. From this list, the writer obtained the information concerning the failures for the first semester of the 1951-52 school year.

Test results from the Otis Quick-Scoring Mental Ability Test, Beta, Form Cm; the Iowa Silent Reading Test, Elementary Form Dm; and the Stanford Achievement Test, Advanced Arithmetic, Form G, which are given to all students in the "feeder" schools near the beginning of the eighth grade, were secured from the students' cumulative record folder.

Confidential interviews with each failing student were

used to obtain the reasons which the students considered as contributing to their failure.

Written failure report forms were employed to obtain from the teachers the reasons why each student failed.

II. METHODS OF PROCEDURE

Formulation of failure card file. From the counselor's failure list at the close of the semester, a file was made consisting of a card for each student who did not receive credit in one or more subjects. On the card was recorded pertinent information about the student: name, subjects failed, names of teachers in those subjects, grade level, and results from I.Q, from reading, and from arithmetic tests. The daily class schedule for each student was also recorded on the back of the card so that the student could be located readily and called for an interview.

Interviewing failing students. A private and confidential interview was held with each student to ascertain why the student thought he had failed in each subject. Interviews ranged from a few minutes to an hour, with the student the determining factor as to time used and material discussed. All information was recorded on the student's card either in his exact words or in summary. Notes were taken during some interviews; in others the recording was done immediately

afterward.

Prior to each interview, the writer familiarized herself with the test information any any pertinent information concerning the student. A brief description of the problem was given to the student, along with such information as was desired from him. He was given assurance of the confidential aspect of his remarks. The individual was made aware that teachers' reasons would also be obtained. However, it was understood that no information obtained from the student would be passed on to the teacher, or vice-versa.

In so far as possible, the student was given free reign in the discussion. Most comments and questions by the interviewer were cued from the remarks of the pupil. It is the opinion of the writer that basic and valid information was obtained by this client-centered methodology.

Teacher failure report forms. An outline of the project was presented to the entire faculty, and their assistance was solicited in filling in the forms which they were to receive. The form was entitled "Failure-Study--Teacher's Report," and it included the name of the student, the subject failed, the name of the teacher, a space for reasons for the student's having failed, a space for any additional pertinent information, and a place for the signature of the teacher. These mimeographed sheets were given to the proper teachers, and their

return to the investigator was requested. Those which were returned were filed with the interview cards of the failing students.

Tabulation of data. All cases were checked for the information available for each, and only those cases which had complete files, including all test data, interview reports, and teacher failure reports, were used in tabulating and reporting.

The cases having all of the necessary information were numbered according to their alphabetical order in the interview file, and all information was recorded in chart form. From a survey of the reasons for failure given by both the students and the teachers, the writer arrived at a set of more general statements and placed the reasons as stated by the individuals into these categories. A frequency tabulation was then made of the reasons given by students, and one for those given by teachers.

The range of Otis IQ test scores was determined and plotted on a ten-point interval frequency table, Table IV, page 42.

A distribution of failures according to the various subject areas was charted, and the frequency of occurrence in each grade level recorded and totaled. Table II, page 38, contains this information along with the percent of failure in each area.

Other material, though not presented in chart form in the report, will be dealt with in the portion on the findings which this writer obtained.

III. TREATMENT OF THE FINDINGS

Although there were 191 students who failed to receive credit in a total of 259 subjects during the semester, complete data could be obtained for only 100 individuals. The latter number is the one upon which all findings, summaries, and conclusions have been based. Approximately twelve per cent of the original 191 had dropped out of school by the time this study was begun. Another group could not be reached or could not report for interviews. Test data either was not available or was not complete for some students. One teacher went on leave of absence, and another was deceased before the investigation was completed.

Reasons for failure. As shown in Table I, page 35, there was a high degree of agreement by the students and teachers as to the major causes of failure. The orders of frequency of these major causes, however, differed considerable. Students ranked their reasons as follows: lack of interest, too difficult work, lack of ability, failure to work to capacity, absences, lack of effort, failure to meet course requirements, and poor attitude.

TABLE I

FREQUENCY OF REASONS FOR FAILURE
GIVEN BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Reasons for failure	Stu- dents	Teach- ers	Total
Lack of effort	14	40	54
Lack of interest	29	19	48
Poor attitude	10	38	48
Absence	14	30	44
Lack of ability	17	23	40
Failure to work to capacity	15	18	33
Failure to meet course requirements	13	19	32
Too difficult work	24	4	28
Failure to develop techniques	7	10	17
Weak educational background	6	9	15
Poor study habits	5	7	12
Competition from outside activities	8	3	11
Reading difficulties	2	9	11
Pupil-teacher tension	8	0	8
Lack of concentration	2	5	7
Lack of equipment or materials	4	2	6
Fault of teacher	5	0	5
Emotional problems	2	2	4
Physical handicap	2	2	4
Reasons not known	4	0	4
Too heavy schedule	1	1	2
Failure to see value of subject	1	0	1

The picture changed somewhat in the importance of the reasons for failure which the teachers of these students presented. Teachers ranked the major causes in the following order: lack of effort, poor attitude, absences, lack of ability, lack of interest, failure to meet course requirements, failure to work to capacity, and failure to develop techniques.

When the frequencies of both the students' and the teachers' lists were tabulated, the following ranking list of the thirteen major causes resulted: (1) lack of effort; (2) lack of interest; (3) poor attitude; (4) absences; (5) lack of ability; (6) failure to work to capacity; (7) failure to meet course requirements; (8) too difficult work; (9) failure to develop techniques; (10) weak educational background; (11) poor study habits; (12) competition from outside activities; and (13) reading difficulties.

Lack of effort and poor attitude were at the top of the list of teachers' reasons with frequencies of forty and thirty-eight, respectively. On the other hand, only fourteen students mentioned lack of effort, and ten stated poor attitude as a cause for failure.

Lack of interest, given twenty-nine times, headed the students' list of reasons for failure and too difficult work, given twenty-four times, came second. However, teachers designated the former reason in just nineteen instances to

rank it sixth. They considered the latter in only four cases, thus giving it little or no significance in their list.

It is interesting to note that in no instance did the teacher feel that there was any tension between himself and the pupil, while eight of the students felt such a situation did exist. Similarly, five students felt that the teacher was at least partially responsible for the failure while no teacher placed the blame upon himself.

Reading difficulties, often listed by many writers as a significant major cause of failure, seemed to be of lesser importance in this report with only eleven instances having been recorded. Considered by some as an important contributing factor in failure, emotional problems were of little significance since they were mentioned only four times.

Failures according to subject areas. The one hundred cases in this study failed in a total of 127 subjects. Eighty-one students failed in one subject, sixteen in two, one in three, and two in four subjects. Table II, page 38, shows the overwhelmingly large portion of the failure in English--41.7 per cent. That English is a required subject might possibly be of some influence, since all students in grades nine through eleven and all seniors intending to go to college must enroll in that area. Teachers of English listed failure to meet course requirements, lack of effort,

TABLE II
 FAILURES ACCORDING TO SUBJECT AREAS

Subject	Class				Total	Per cent
	9	10	11	12		
English	11	20	10	12	53	41.7
Business	2	13	8	1	24	19.0
Social Studies	4	0	8	2	14	11.0
Mathematics	7	0	1	2	10	7.8
Physical Education	7	1	1	0	9	7.2
Languages	1	3	1	1	6	4.7
Science	1	4	0	0	5	3.9
Industrial Arts	0	2	1	1	4	3.1
Health and Safety	0	0	1	0	1	.8
Home Economics	1	0	0	0	1	.8
Art	0	0	0	0	0	.0
Music	0	0	0	0	0	.0

and lack of ability as the principal reasons for failure, while the students blamed lack of interest, and weak educational background in addition to these.

Nineteen per cent of the failures were found to be in business courses which included the areas of selling, clerical, and stenography. Fifteen of the twenty-four students who failed in this field did so in typing, with failure to develop the required techniques as the most frequently mentioned reason.

Social studies ranked third with fourteen failures, followed by mathematics and physical education with ten and nine respectively. Languages, science, industrial arts, health and safety, and home economics had minor failing lists. Health and Safety was taken by eleventh graders only, a fact which would account for its low figure. No failures were reported in art and music which are, by their nature and the nature of their requirements, selective courses.

Failure according to grade classification. In this study failure was most prevalent in the tenth grade and least in the twelfth grade, with the per cent of failure equal in grades nine and eleven. Table III, page 40, may be consulted for frequencies and exact per cents of failure in each grade.

TABLE III
FAILURE ACCORDING TO GRADE
CLASSIFICATION

Grade	Frequency	Per cent
9	25	25
10	34	34
11	25	25
12	16	16
Total	100	100

It might be reasonable to expect a substantial decrease in the number of failures in the twelfth year for the reason that a high per cent of those who have made failing marks consistently have dropped out of school by this time. Another factor affecting a decrease might be the elective nature of much of the course work in the twelfth year. It is possible to elect all but one subject in the senior year.

Test scores and failure. In the failing group, the range of Otis IQ test scores was found to be from 58 to 122. The median score was 94.5, and the mean score was 93.9. Table IV, page 42, provides frequencies and per cents of failure in ten-point intervals of IQ range. Since sixty-five per cent of the students who failed had IQ test scores of 90 or above, it seems apparent that factors other than measured intelligence are of major significance in failure. This might be substantiated further by the fact that thirty-five per cent of the group had scores of over 100 on the Otis test.

Thirty-one of the failing students who had IQ's of 90 or above made scores on the Iowa Silent Reading Test which indicated retardation of one month to two and one-half years. This was also found to be the reading level retardation range for the entire group. All of the cases

TABLE IV
DISTRIBUTION OF OTIS IQ SCORES
OF FAILING STUDENTS

IQ Range	Frequency	Per cent
120-129	2	2
110-119	10	10
100-109	23	23
90-99	30	30
80-89	19	19
70-79	9	9
60-69	5	5
50-59	2	2
Total	100	100

with Otis scores of below 90 were found to have low reading scores. Since the Otis Quick-Scoring Mental Ability Test requires a considerable amount of reading skill, it is possible that many of the Otis IQ figures might not be accurate and that some might be markedly low.

Summary. Considerable agreement was found between the reasons for failure as given by students and those given by their teachers, but their order of frequency showed little concurrence. A combined list of causes of failure indicated that both students and teachers considered as major causes of failure lack of effort, lack of interest, poor attitude, absences, and lack of ability. A general comparison of the interview notes taken by the author and the failure report forms submitted by the teachers indicated the readiness of the student to look for reasons for failure within himself first and place little direct blame upon the teacher, while the teacher tended to place the initial responsibility upon the student and none upon himself. However, the factors which underlie the reasons as given by both groups might indicate that the principal portion of the responsibility lies with the teacher. Many writers have considered lack of effort, lack of interest, and poor attitude as failure of the teacher to provide adequate motivation.

The greatest number of failures was found in the area

of English, and none were recorded in art and music. A peak year in percentage of failure was found to be the tenth year, and the lowest was the twelfth year.

As measured by the Otis Quick-Scoring Mental Ability Test, there was an IQ range of from 58 to 122 with a mean score of 93.9. Sixty-five per cent of the group had IQ's of 90 or above with more than half of that number in the range above 100. Coupled with the fact that only sixteen per cent of the failures had IQ's of below 80, this would seem to indicate that factors other than measured intelligence are significant in failure causation. Also to be considered is the finding that all reading scores of the students with IQ's below 90 were low. Because of the reading skill required in the Otis test, many of these IQ's may not be accurate. Thus the actual mean score might be even higher than indicated in this investigation.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary. Failure has become increasingly important as an educational problem within recent years, although the actual number of failure studies may have decreased. Lafferty¹ declared that the number of failure studies was less for the period from 1935 to 1945 than during the previous ten-year period because of revised promotion policies which tended to reduce the percentage of failure. However, any occurrence of failure in a modern school with its philosophy of total education for all must be considered as a vital problem. Most of the writers during the period from 1942 to 1952 agreed that the real responsibility for failure rests with the school and its personnel.

Most of the studies concerned with the causes of failure were content to draw upon information obtained from the opinions of teachers alone with but a few seeking the reasons from the students who had failed. From the data secured in that manner, the more frequently listed causes were lack of interest, excessive absences, lack of effort, lack of ability, and poor foundation. Some authors suggested emotional maladjustment as the principal underlying cause of failure, but pre-

¹ Lafferty, op.cit., pp. 18-20.

sented little scientific investigation to substantiate their claim. Most authorities agreed that there has been, as yet, no significant indication of the importance of emotional problems in the causation of failure.

A few specific plans for reducing failures were found in the literature, but in general, educational writers suggested a revamping of curricula, courses of study, and teaching methods and techniques. The majority proposed a movement for deeper understanding of the total individual and his development and adjustment of the educational program in accordance with that understanding.

Previous studies have been somewhat limited in that they tended to lean heavily upon the opinions of the teachers alone, used what appeared to be biased samples, and frequently presented an apparently narrow picture of the factors involved in a study of high school failure. The investigation of this writer was an attempt to minimize the above criticisms by using (1) a representative failure group which included both sexes and all high school grades; (2) interview technique for obtaining information from the failing students; (3) written forms for securing information from the teachers of the failing students; (4) test data for determining any relationship between IQ, reading ability, and failure; and (5) tabulation of instances of failure in specific subject areas and according to classes.

The findings of this investigation indicated that teachers and students agreed as to the most significant causes of failure but differed as to the order of their importance according to the frequency with which they were mentioned. Teachers ranked lack of effort, poor attitude, absences, and lack of ability as most important causes, while students most frequently named lack of interest, too difficult work, lack of ability, and failure to work to capacity. A combined list of frequencies of mention by both teachers and students produced the following order: (1) lack of effort, (2) lack of interest, (3) poor attitude, (4) absences, (5) lack of ability, (6) failure to work to capacity, (7) failure to meet course requirements, (8) too difficult work, (9) failure to develop techniques, (10) weak educational background, (11) poor study habits, (12) competition from outside activities, and (13) reading difficulties.

The area of English produced the largest number of failures with 41.7 per cent of the total failure group. Business courses ranked second with nineteen per cent, and social studies was third with eleven per cent. All other subjects each had less than ten per cent, and art and music reported no failures.

The number of failures was greatest in the tenth grade and least in the twelfth grade. In the ninth and eleventh grades, the number of failing students was the same.

Otis Mental Ability Test scores showed a range of IQ from 58 to 122 in the failing group. The mean score was 93.9 and sixty-five per cent of the failing students had IQ test scores of 90 or above. Nearly half of the students who had IQ's of 90 or above made scores on the Iowa Silent Reading Test which were indicative of retardation. All students in the failing group who had IQ's of below 90 made low reading scores. The reading level retardation range for the entire failure group was from one month to two and one-half years.

Conclusions. From this study it seems apparent that lack of school success is the result of a number of factors in which both students and teachers have a share of the responsibility. However, in general, students seemed to be more aware of those factors which actually underlie their failure than were their teachers. Many of the reasons listed by both groups were in reality merely superficial ones having more deep-seated causes. To give lack of interest or lack of effort as a reason for failure is to tell but a portion of the story. The question of "why" must be dealt with if there are to be adequate diagnosis and treatment of the failure problem.

The findings of this writer seem to indicate that measured intelligence is not necessarily predictive of scholastic achievement, since sixty-five per cent of the cases

studied were average or above in mental ability. Since the instrument of measurement used in this instance was a verbal one and many of the cases who made below average intelligence scores on it were also retarded in reading, the actual percentage in the average and above intelligence group may be even greater.

The fact that the incidence of failure reached its height in the tenth grade might be attributed to the beginning of specialization in which students in the group studied were attempting to decide into what channels they were going. By the eleventh and twelfth grades most of them had discovered where their major interests and aptitudes were, and the number of failing students decreased. Another factor in this decrease might also have been the mortality of those who were potential failures.

Since English was required of all students for three years and of college bound students for four years, it might be logical to expect it to head the list of subject failures just as it did in this study. The large number of retarded readers in the failure group would seem to be a contributing factor also, since there was no classification according to level of ability after the ninth grade. Reading difficulty might possibly have been a pertinent factor in the high percentage of failures in typing in the business area.

Selectivity seemed to be a factor in producing low

percentages in those courses which were taken as a matter of the students' own choices, i.e. languages, art, music, and so forth. This would seem to indicate that students tend toward higher achievement in those subjects in which they are most interested.

It seems to this investigator that there are three areas of adjustment to be considered in the problem of failure--personal, instructional, and curricular. In the area of personal adjustment may be included the abilities, interests, and attitudes of the student; parental background, capabilities, interests, and economic status; and general home conditions. The background, training, abilities, and the personalities of the individual teachers and other school personnel might be considered in the instructional adjustment area. Curricular adjustment would seem to be of utmost importance in bringing about changes in the subjects to be offered, requirements to be met, and methods of presentation in an effort to meet the needs of widely varying individuals who attend the public schools.

Recommendations. On the basis of this study there are five major recommendations which seem to be significant if the failure problem is to be treated successfully in the high school. The first of these is the attempt to discover the basic causes of failure which underlie the more superficial

ones that are often presented as reasons for lack of school success. Lack of interest and effort, poor attitude, lack of concentration--to mention a few--are only symptoms indicating that further investigation is necessary to determine the actual causes.

Closely related to the previous recommendation is developing an understanding of all aspects of the student. The individual's personality, ability and capabilities, his family background and status, his interests, previous achievements, and future goals all must be considered if the school is to strive to meet his needs.

Having arrived at an understanding of the student, the school must recognize that the curriculum must be flexible and adjustable so that all individuals may achieve at least some measure of success. In some instances the timing of courses might be altered to meet the maturity level of the student; course content must certainly differ at various levels; teaching techniques must vary with the nature of the student; and requirements must be set within the reach of the individual.

The foregoing suggestion leads to the fourth recommendation--recognizing and correcting early the misplacement of students according to subjects, level of ability, and pupil-teacher relationships.

The fifth recommendation, the more intelligent use

of test data, could be employed to eliminate misplacement of students. For example, a student with a low level of reading ability would be a potential low-achiever in typing or shorthand just as a boy with low scores on intelligence, reading, and arithmetic tests would be a misfit in engineering preparatory courses.

The problem of failure in the high school is likely to remain one of major concern for school personnel, students, parents, and members of the community so long as there is reluctance to use every available technique and device to alleviate it. Only through the concerted and coordinated effort of all concerned with the educative process and its outcomes can the problem be reduced to one of minor significance.

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