

EXPLORING THE COLLEGE-GOING SCRIPTS OF STUDENTS
ENROLLED IN A RURAL EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

A Dissertation
by
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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE COLLEGE-GOING SCRIPTS OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN A RURAL EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL (December 2011)

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While much has been written about the characteristics and demographics of first-generation college students and about their problems and successes once in college, little has been written about the psychological transformation that first-generation college students undergo on their way to a university education. This qualitative case study explored how school-based narratives about college-going and family-based narratives about college-going interact in an Early College High School, particularly for first-generation college students. It explored how students with hybrid subjectivities perceive themselves within a social institution which has designated them as first-generation college students and sought to understand how these students negotiate multiple discourses and come to see themselves as college-going. Finally the study sought to discover ways in which educational leaders can improve the effectiveness of college readiness programs to better serve those under-represented in college.

The design for this case study was a focused ethnography in which data was collected through interviews, observations and document review of documents, particularly student

writing. The notion of scripts (Abelson, 1996; Bieber & Worley, 2006; Rubin & Berntsen, 2003; Steiner, 1990) was a central metaphor in this study. The school-based narratives and family-based narratives that the students of the Early College High School negotiate are scripts that reflect both the lives they may have lived and the lives that others envision for them.

The themes that surfaced this study were: 1) the way in which the small size of the Early College High School impacts student learning and relationships with teachers; 2) the metaphor of family that students and teachers use to describe their experience at this Early College High School; 3) the lack of academic preparation of the students admitted into the program; 4) the barriers that students face becoming ready for college; 5) the emerging identities of adolescents heretofore not destined for college; 6) the family narrative, or life script, reinforced at home; 7) and the institutional message of college-going enacted at the Early College High School.

The data and its interpretation and analysis have been represented as a script that integrates the discourses observed in this particular Early College High School and suggests ways in which students may become authors of their own life narratives. Implications from the findings involving policy and practice are presented, and suggestions for future research are offered.