

MASTER OF EDUCATION THESIS DEFENSE

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COLLEGE STUDENTS FROM THE MARGINS: JOURNEYS OF PERSISTENCE AND EARLY LEAVING

ABSTRACT

The fundamental question guiding this research is how do marginalized college students describe their social and educational experiences before, during, and after a one-year developmental college program? The other questions of importance are how do marginalized college students persist (or not) with their educational goals? What do these marginalized students recommend to college educators and administrators to better support their social and educational goals?

Critical ethnography is used within this study to better understand the school and non-school related factors that contributed to success or withdrawal from a college developmental program. Data was gathered by conducting narrative interviews with participants, by providing my personal standpoint and observations as a teacher in the program, and through critical engagement with policies and program documentation. The 11 participants interviewed were formally enrolled in the College Bridging Program (CBP) within a college operating in an urban area in Atlantic Canada. All of the participants came from marginalized backgrounds. Through critical theory, this study relates the issues around class, socio-demographic background, economic factors, academic preparedness/experiences, institutional and classroom characteristics, and degree of social engagement to the experiences of students as they transition through the education system. Therefore, this study examines these issues from the perspective of a student in an effort to determine why marginalized college students leave or stay in post-secondary education, and what contributes to the success of marginalized students.

Additional research on marginalized youth in tertiary education is necessary considering our current system was designed for a different type of learner. There is pressure on tertiary institutions to provide supports and programs for marginalized students. There is a paucity of research related to the voices and experiences of post-secondary marginalized students from a wider variety of social, cultural, and educational backgrounds. New knowledge from this research adds to our understanding of marginalized students' perceptions of their educational pathways. While this study focuses primarily on research and practice with marginalized students in one program in one community college, the knowledge gained will apply to a wider range of learners, as well as other courses within the tertiary system. It could also be adapted to larger projects in different locations and institutions.