

1-30-2014

Struggles to Reach the Disengaged: Narratives of Young Men Who Left School Before Graduation, and Stories from Middle School Teachers and GED Instructors Who Try to Help

Lara Lynn Golden
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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STRUGGLES TO REACH THE DISENGAGED:
NARRATIVES OF YOUNG MEN WHO LEFT HIGH SCHOOL
BEFORE GRADUATION, AND STORIES FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS
AND GED INSTRUCTORS WHO TRY TO HELP

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Lara Lynn Golden

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2013

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Lara Lynn Golden

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 29, 2013

Signature on File
Gian S. Pagnucci, Ph.D.
Distinguished University Professor, Chair
Professor of English

October 29, 2013

Signature on File
Ben Rafoth, Ed.D.
Distinguished University Professor
Professor of English

October 29, 2013

Signature on File
Sharon K. Deckert, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Signature on File
Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Struggles to Reach the Disengaged: Narratives of Young Men Who Left School Before Graduation, and Stories From Middle School Teachers and GED Instructors Who Try to Help

Author: Lara Lynn Golden

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci

Dissertation Committee: Dr. Ben Rafoth
Dr. Sharon K. Deckert

This study includes the narratives of nine people: three young men who left high school before earning their diploma, three middle school teachers who witness the events of student disengagement in their writing classrooms that precede the event of leaving, and three General Education Development (GED) instructors who help young men such as these recuperate their writings skills and earn a GED certificate.

The narrative framework employed here focuses on privileging the stories told by this study's participants in order to explore the connection between young men's school writing experiences as well as general school experiences and the influence those experiences had on the student's decision to leave high school. The narratives of the middle school teachers and GED instructors serve as bookend perspectives to help to portray a broader picture of the academic issues that students who struggle with school regularly contend.

The results of these narrative stories conclude that student risk factors begin well before middle school in the seventh and eighth grades. There also seems to exist a strong correlation between the number of cumulative risk factors a student accrues and the likelihood that he will leave high school before earning a diploma. Although each participant in this study—the young men and the teachers alike—noted writing as an

important feature of either academic success or ongoing academic frustration, each participant also regarded reading as a highly important foundational skill for writing.

This study indicates that cumulative risk factors and ongoing academic frustration and failure can be detrimental to a student remaining in high school until he earns a diploma.