OPENING AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL:

A PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY OF THEORY INTO PRACTICE

THROUGH SHARED STORIES

A Dissertation Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Roni Louise Crow Rentfro

May 2013

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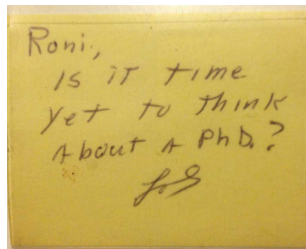
I want to thank my incredible dissertation committee for everything they have done to get me successfully through the process. Dr. Cheryl J. Craig, thank you for helping me better understand the narrative inquiry model and allowing me to use your story constellations approach. Dr. Howard Jones, thank you for never giving up on me over the years and for all of your efforts to get me to this point (also for channeling Dr. Will Weber). Dr. Allen Warner, I really appreciate your passion and for reminding me of the value of telling the stories of these students. Dr. Ava S. Miller, thank you for everything you have done as a friend, confidant, sage advisor, and inquiry facilitator.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to chronicle the beginnings of a South Texas Early

College High School from theoretical, professional, and personal perspectives and to

share stories and perspectives from a number of its participants. The Early College High

School Initiative has attracted a great deal of attention due to preliminary indications of

how significantly it can impact the college readiness of at-risk and underrepresented

youth. These high school-college partnerships provide acceleration to college-readiness

for primarily minority, low socio-economic students who are often the first in their

immediate families to achieve a college degree (Berger, Adelman & Cole, 2010;

Edmunds, Dallas, Bernstein, Glennie, Willse & Arshavsky, 2010).

The study involved the telling of stories via the narrative inquiry (Connelly &

Clandinin, 1990) research methodology. The approach allowed for the sharing of

personal and professional experiences in opening an Early College High School with the

inclusion of the perspectives of alumni of the school. The work necessarily involved the

theory-practice-policy relationship. The mode of inquiry allowed the research questions

to develop as the study progressed while sharing the reflections and analysis of the stories

of the researcher and participants (Craig, 2003). As a result of the use of Cheryl Craig's

story constellations approach, a story constellations figure (Craig, 2007b) was created to

illustrate the "multiple contexts within which it [the knowledge] is created" (p. 178).

The reflections and findings of this study were shared to attempt to clarify some of the multiple challenges of converting theoretical knowledge in the acceleration of at-risk, Hispanic, students from low socio-economic homes to college-readiness, provide insight into the complexity of such transitions, and to hearten those who contemplate such journeys by sharing stories from alumni about the impact on their lives to date.

Keywords: narrative inquiry, early college high school, AVID program,
                  secondary education, at-risk students, college-readiness program

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INTRODUCTION

*To fill our head, like a scrapbook, with this and that item as a finished and
done-for thing, is not to think. It is to turn ourselves into a piece of
registering apparatus. To consider the bearing of the occurrence
upon what may be, but is not yet, is to think. Nor will the reflective
experience be different in kind if we substitute distance
in time for separation in space.*

(Dewey, 1916, p. 147)

Introduction to the Study

The goal of education reform is to change the way we do the "business" of

education to better prepare our students for the changing world we live in and, contrarily,

to make those "changes" permanent. Over the past 40 years, I have been working in both

formal and informal education in varied capacities with various organizations. I started

my professional association in 1986 with the district in this study. I have spent the past

twenty years involved with various systemic education reform activities. It truly amazes

me how many things can change and yet really remain the same—and, of course, some of

the lasting changes are not what we attempted to change or reform.

I came to realize that education reform reminds me of doing needlepoint, one of

my hobbies. Needlepoint is usually done on a "canvas" with an imprinted pattern and a

guide that shows what types of thread should be used in what colors and using which

stitches. I liken this to systemic or education reform, especially one supported by a large

grant, in that the reform also comes with a guide of the types of activities the organization

should implement, a description of how to conduct the activities and what audiences

should be included in the activities. Another way I visualize needlepoint and reform

work as related is (if you are successful) it takes a significant amount of time to

accomplish—certainly longer than the grant funding lasts. Finally, a different way I see

needlepoint and reform as related is that on the surface the "reform" looks tidy, but on the reverse you can see evidence of all of the different "untidy" pathways taken to accomplish the reform. I am including the two following pictures to illustrate this. It should be noted that the needlepoint is not finished—just as true reform is rarely finished.

Figure 1. Front of needlepoint illustrating tidiness and back of needlepoint illustrating untidiness. Photos by Roni Louise Rentfro.

This dissertation study was not specifically about *what works* from education reform, but it did look at a number of the reforms that frame the early college high school (ECHS) initiative and how the ECHS in the study attempted to implement these education reform activities. This study used narrative inquiry methods to bring in the stories of several alumni of the first graduating class of the Early College High School, interweave their stories with my story as the researcher and the existing research to illustrate what impact the ECHS model has on students as well as share some of the findings resulting from the sharing of these multi-perspective stories.

Introduction to the District

The district in which this research was conducted serves an almost 100% Hispanic student population and is the largest single employer in southern Texas. Based on the district's student population, it ranks in size in the top twenty in the state of Texas and in the top one hundred in the nation. The district is located in one of the poorest counties in the United States and its poverty level is so high (over 90% of the students are classified as from low socio-economic homes) that all students receive "free" meals. It has been determined that it would cost the district's funding agencies more to keep track of and collect the meal funds from the small percentage of students who are not eligible for a free or reduced cost meals than it does to provide all students with free meals.

The school district was at-risk of being taken over by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) as a low-performing district in 1990. That year teachers, administrators, and board members all agreed to work together so that the students of the district would receive the education they deserved. The change from a district at-risk to a district successfully working on many fronts with a majority at-risk population is part of the story to be told here. This is both a personal story and the story of many students, teachers and administrators with whom I have interacted on a personal and professional basis during this period.

Since the early 1990s, the district has participated in numerous reform activities funded by external agencies. From 1994 through 2006, the district participated in two large National Science Foundation grants focused on mathematics and science. The district participated in three major reading grants since 1992 and, at the time of this study, had just been named the recipient of another large K-12 literacy grant. The district was

also a major recipient of funds for Texas incentive pay research grants. These grants provided funds for faculty and staff at campuses that made significant progress in academic for all students and recognized subpopulations.

Besides the district's "personal" determination to improve the academic achievement of all students, the external funding and oversight of major grantees also contributed significantly to its progress. The district's progress on state reading and mathematics assessments and the closing of underrepresented population academic score gaps resulted in the district being nationally recognized with the prestigious 2008 Broad Prize for Urban Education. This recognition confirmed that, despite being one of the largest districts in the state of Texas situated along the southern border of the United States, focused attention on struggling learners using "best practices" could make a difference.

While 2012 found the district struggling to meet the increased standards required for both Federal and State accountability, we were confident that as district teachers and students gained confidence with new assessments, we would once again achieve this level of recognition. As part of the current struggle, the district received significant funding for federally supported Texas Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS) for six campuses and other Federal School Improvement Grants (SIGs). These grants all require campuses to "transform" using research-based instructional programs to improve student performance under federal and state accountability guidelines. The external oversight and implementation requirements kept the district committed to implementing specific research-based reform activities despite numerous changes in administration at the district and campus levels.

Introduction to the University Partner

The university partner for this Early College High School is recognized as one of the most Hispanic-serving colleges in the nation. This Institution of Higher Education (IHE) has been progressive in attempting new and innovative programs to help underserved or minority students. At the time of the study, this IHE was serving a little over 13,000 students according to its website. The IHE website also noted that it was offering significant numbers of dual enrollment courses for high school students in its service area (over 9% of the enrollment of the university). This university continues to be focused on meeting the needs of the individual student and making a difference for the surrounding community. It is, like the district in this study, one of the largest employers in the metropolitan area. Most of the local district educators, including myself, are graduates from this institution of higher education.

The university was and is a fully engaged partner in the operating the Early College High School in this study. The university provided (and continues to provide) all ECHS students up to 60 hours or an associate's degree tuition free. In fact, as long as the students are enrolled in the ECHS, they can continue taking courses towards the degrees being offered. The university continues to provide a liaison to work closely with administration of the ECHS. The university also continues an open-door policy for the principal and staff at all of the university offices. The IHE is very committed to working with staff to address any ECHS challenges or concerns.

The university was also committed to offering ECHS students a wide variety of free services including tutorials and mentoring through their Title V grant, Title V S.T.E.M Learning Communities. The Title V grant hired successful college students to

serve as both tutors and mentors for the ECHS students. For the past two years, some of the Class of 2012 graduates became tutors to other college freshmen and the ECHS students through this program. The Title V staff worked closely with the ECHS staff, especially through the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes, to maximize the use of time during the instructional school day.

Introduction to the Campus

In Fall 2007, the district and local university staff were encouraged to apply for a grant to start up an Early College High School (ECHS) by the Texas High School Project (now Educate Texas). The leaders of both organizations discussed the possibility and agreed that this would be an incredible opportunity for district students in addition to creating a pipeline of well-prepared students for the university. Both the district and university partnership staff reviewed the ECHS Core Principles and decided to put the campus on the University campus initially staffed by high school teachers, but with students taking university courses with IHE faculty at the earliest opportunity. Legal agreements were approved and by January 2008 the partnership submitted the application to the Texas High School Project for the necessary funding. The superintendent of schools and the university president took the leap of faith that if they built the facility, they would be making a significant difference in the lives of not only the students, but their families, too.

The district-university grant application proposal summary describes the school design as follows:

In order to meet the unique needs and characteristics of its students, by necessity the ECHS will utilize an innovative approach to scheduling, personnel,

curriculum, and budget. The ECHS will need to be able to implement adaptations to the traditional high school model to ensure success. The structure of the ECHS will be modeled on the T-STEM, Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative, proposed by Governor Rick Perry and supporting the idea that our current education system is not producing enough graduates with strong backgrounds in these areas to sustain job growth for the future. Students would pick a T-STEM pathway that would concurrently lead them toward an Associate's Degree in their chosen field (ECHS grant application, 2008, n. p.)

Not all of the proposed STEM design ended up implemented due to revised placement of the campus and the small percentage of students selecting the campus to follow a STEM career.

The district was notified that the application was funded and both entities went into high gear to prepare for opening the school in Fall 2008. When receipt of funding was delayed and construction of the campus on the university grounds had to be halted, the commitment was so strong that alternate plans were immediately put in place so the campus could open for the 2008-2009 school year. The implementation did follow the Texas Education Agency/Texas High School Project required design elements and the ECHS Core Principles with significant fidelity.

The 2011-2012 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report for the campus contains the following statistics for the campus. The campus had a total enrollment in grades 9-12 of 308 students of which 99% were considered to be from low socio-economic households, 99.4% Hispanic, and 30.6% At-risk by Texas State at-risk criteria (see Table 1 and Appendix F for additional data). The campus had 16 teachers, a

counselor and two administrators. The campus had significantly higher Texas Success

Initiative results in English Language Arts and Mathematics than the district, region or

state.

Table 1

Comparison of ECHS Demographic and Assessment Data to District and State

Indicator	ECHS (%)	District (%)	State (%)
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	99.4	98.8	50.8
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	0.6	31.4	16.8
Economically Disadvantaged	99.0	96.0	60.4
At-Risk	30.6	63.5	45.4
Annual Dropout Rate (2010-11)	0.0	1.1	2.4
Attendance Rate (2010-2011)	97.0	93.7	95.7
ELA Met 2012 Standard	99	88	92
Math Met 2012 Standard	96	81	82
Science Met 2012 Standard	96	80	84

Note. Data is from the Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System
Report for the ECHS for 2011-2012. Met Standard data is a sum of Grades 10 and 11.

What does not show in the AEIS report is the large number of college professors

and instructors who provided instruction at some part of the school year for these

students. The ECHS students actually took most of their dual enrollment courses with

university faculty. Only a few dual credit courses were taken with high school teachers.

Students also earned college credit by achieving a score of "3" or better for Advanced

Placement Exams, primarily on the Spanish Language Exam. It should be noted that although students were pursuing an Associate of Arts degree, this partnership was one of only a few in Texas where students had to meet university entrance exam requirements and took university courses towards a four-year degree.

In 2009, the campus was rated as Exemplary by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). An article in the local newspaper noted that the campus was the first high school in the district to be rated as Exemplary (Long, 2009). There were 85 seniors that graduated in the class of 2012 and 34 of those students had already graduated three weeks earlier from the IHE partner with an associate of arts degree. Based on unpublished data from the Title V grant staff of the university, this group attained on average more than 45 college credit hours with a range of 14 credits to over 80 credits.

Personal correspondence with various alumni and staff of the ECHS provides an unverified statistic of more than 65% of the Class of 2012 currently continuing their college careers. It is of note that the 85 students garnered $1,868,250 in scholarship awards according to the district's newspaper advertisement thanking scholarship funders. This amount was about twice as much on average per student than the awards to the comprehensive high school graduates for this district. In addition, the valedictorian was one of four district students that received a prestigious Gates Millennium Scholarship (UTB/TSC News and Information website, 2012).

Introduction to the Researcher

Dewey tells us, in *Democracy and Education*, "Reflection also implies concern with the issue—a certain sympathetic identification of our own destiny, if only dramatic, with the outcome of the course of events (1916, p. 147). In retrospect, it was while

working on my dissertation proposal and thinking about theory into practice, that I realized that I have been taking on new endeavors most of my life that involve the start-up of new organizations. Beginning with my high school years, I worked at a newly opened zoological facility, one of the first of its kind. My formal education experiences went from being one of the first secondary gifted and talented teachers in the district to being one of the teachers to start a new ninth grade "fish tank" campus. From there, I worked as one of the first gifted program district-level lead teachers. After six years, I became the Project Director for the newly awarded $7.5 million dollar National Science Foundation (NSF) Urban System Program (USP) mathematics and science grant and, at the end of this grant, initiated the Grants Department for the district. In 2008, I opened the district's Early College High School as the first principal for the campus. After three years there, I was reassigned as a Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 Science Specialist in the Curriculum and Instruction Department and now I am currently serving as the district's first District Coordinator for School Improvement. My career continues to be a personal and professional journey of theory into practice.

I never started out to be a formal educator although both my maternal and paternal grandmothers were classroom teachers. My first love was working with animals and I started high school planning to become a veterinarian. Once the local zoological facility opened, I was determined that I would get a veterinary degree and work in a zoological facility. I have a vivid memory of being about fourteen years old, sitting in the offices of the new zoo, and telling the keepers and curators that one day I wanted to be a zoo director. At the time they laughed at me - girls just did *not* grow up to be zoo directors (and they may still be right since there are still very few female zoo directors).

My future husband and I started as volunteers in the "Zoo Business" in the early

1970s while we were still in high school. The zoological facility where we worked was

one of the first facilities in the United States built without bars between the public and the

animals. I have included Figure 1 with pictures of me as a volunteer working with a

young tiger. My husband's favorite picture of me is the one with my arms around the

neck of the juvenile tiger. My favorite picture is actually the one taken immediately

following that shows me face-to-face with her. These pictures remind me to embrace and

face any new challenges that come along.

Figure 2. The researcher at the zoological facility where I started my first career in
informal education that lasted over twelve years before I started my career in formal
education. Photos by Jill Arnett.

I left home to attend Texas A&M University (TAMU) and enrolled in the pre-

veterinary program but I knew if I wanted to be a zoological facility director rather than

its veterinarian, I needed business courses as well. I went back and forth between the

biological program major courses and business major courses several times. The

business courses turned out to be very helpful as I worked to support myself as an

apartment manager, public utilities clerk, and miscellaneous other part-time jobs at this point in my life.

I worked at several zoological facilities for over twelve years while I continued to take courses a few hours at a time towards a bachelor degree. The "Zoo Business" is a strange and wonderful career. I will never regret the different roles I had at various facilities ranging from a zookeeper for children's zoos, clinic technician, bookkeeper, and head keeper. More information about what zoological jobs and careers were like in the 1970s can be found in *Maybe You Belong in a Zoo!: Zoo and Aquarium Careers,* by Karen O'Connor (1982), a book in which the zoological group I was a part of was featured.

Working with animals will always remain my first passion, but as the age of thirty approached, I began to believe that I was probably not going to get my dream job as a zoo director. Taking a graduate course in zoo management finally made me realize that, even in the 1980s, females were just *not* hired as zoo directors and only rarely as zoo veterinarians. Although my husband and I have never had children, we still wanted to be able to afford a home of our own. Looking around my hometown where the median household income is still around $25,000 per year, I determined the only employers that paid a decent salary were the finance industry, the medical and health-related services, and institutions of formal education.

After ten years of intermittent college attendance at several different universities, I obtained a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Biology. I was also only a few hours away from graduating with a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) degree. It continues to amaze me how useful the business coursework continues to be in my

career in formal education. While taking courses for a finance degree at the master level (which I decided was not a career I wanted to have for the rest of my life), a friend told me the local school district was desperate for secondary science teachers.

The district was desperate and hired me literally out of the zoo without any teaching coursework or a teaching certificate. I was placed on a "deficiency plan" of 43 hours and assigned to a middle school earth science classroom within just a couple of weeks of applying. After starting the coursework at the local university, I was transitioned to one of the first alternative certification programs in Texas so I could attain my teaching certification. While many have concerns about alternative certification programs, I would never have been able to become a teacher any other way.

I remember telling my peers during my first year of teaching that I was interested in eventually holding the science curriculum specialist position at the district offices. I suppose because I was interested in running a zoo as a kid I thought I could have an "equivalent" position in a school district. As I continued my undergraduate education courses and worked as a secondary science teacher, I became surer this was the formal education career I wanted to pursue.

Teaching middle school science while taking courses in education theory was my first attempt to put education theory into practice. Learning academic and instructional theory while attempting to teach "for real" brought many of the challenges of teaching using "best practices" into strong focus for me. I did not initially experience success in implementing many of the strategies I was being taught theoretically. I often fell back into teaching the way I had been taught by my own teachers in school. I continued to

work on my competency as a teacher and the successes I did have encouraged me to continue to teach using "best practices."

Even before I was a fully certified teacher, I interviewed for and was transferred to another campus as one of the first teachers in the district's new secondary gifted and talented program. This became my second experience with taking theory into practice in formal education. The classes assigned to me gave me the opportunity to work with truly creative and highly academically able students in "homogeneous" classes for several years while at the same time I was also teaching students working at lower levels of academic achievement. During this period, I worked to determine what activities that met the needs of the gifted students could be adapted to meet the needs of all learners.

After moving to the new ninth grade campus at the district, I became a part of the National Science Foundation Comprehensive Program for Mathematics and Science (CPMSA) funded training program. The many hours of coursework, district professional development training, and teaching experiences all continued to provide me with opportunities to reflect on the theory I was learning and my attempts to implement "best practices." The district's resources for implementing change including activities that came out of the work on change by Hall and Hord (1987).

I had been a successful teacher in the gifted education program for six years when, in 1994, I had the opportunity to become a district level "Lead Teacher" with the gifted and talented program in the district. In this role, I continued my graduate level education and conducted the district's training for hundreds of teachers and administrators in the basic tenets of gifted education. As is my habit, I traveled a slightly different pathway by pursuing a Master of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies degree

with a major in Biology and minors in Education (so I could become certified for mid-management) and Sociology (an interesting opportunity to learn more about statistics and people). The gifted education program continued to expand at the state and district level. I learned a lot about professional development over the next six years by doing workshops and sessions at the local, regional, and state levels for gifted education and science education. These sessions were often designed to get teachers and administrators to put current educational theories into practice.

Our district received a National Science Foundation (NSF) funded Urban Systemic Program (USP) grant and the position of project director was opened in Fall 1999. I had just attained my Texas State Board of Educator Mid-management Certification and believed this position would help me prepare for a position in the district's curriculum and instruction department. I was hired as the USP Project Director in December 1999. As Project Director, I had the opportunity to work with district staff to implement systemic reform for mathematics and science. This position also allowed me to be active at the national level with education reform efforts.

The work was incredibly challenging and often frustrating because efforts to make change "stick" take years. I learned that it takes a lot of talking, professional development, and persistence is required over time to get change to occur. Until the activities and strategies become "owned" by the individuals who actually "do the work" then the reform is rarely implemented. In the middle of guiding this reform, I applied to the University of Houston doctoral program in curriculum and instruction and began my doctoral studies. In one of those strange coincidences, some of the professors I ended up studying with were also heavily involved in science and general education reforms.

At the end of the funding for the grant, the district declined to continue to fund the program using district monies. All of the staff had to find new positions by the end of the school year with either the district or other agencies and all did -- except me. I contemplated returning to the classroom and applied for the position of principal for a newly opened alternative school for credit recovery -- my first serious consideration of taking a campus administration position. Just as my contract with the district was ending, the board agreed to my proposal to form a department to help make sure existing grants were being implemented and required reporting was being completed, determine what grants should be pursued and coordinate the writing of these grants, as well as help coordinate the implementation of grants received. I transferred into the position of Administrator for Grants as of July 2006.

As the administrator for the Grants Department at the district, I had the opportunity to work closely with the curriculum department staff, campus administrators and outside partners and perform a lot of research in various areas of education reform. While holding this position, I was twice asked to serve as a temporary campus principal. After I was informed by the superintendent that I would never be *the* finalist for administrator of the district's curriculum and instruction department without the campus leadership experience, I began to seriously consider becoming a principal. My two terms as an interim or temporary principal also helped me realize that change at the campus level can occur much more rapidly than it can when led at the district level. In fact, because I was only placed temporarily, the challenge was actually not to change much until the official principal was hired.

The interim principal stints made me consider becoming a campus principal to see how much of the theory I was learning through my career and doctoral studies could be put into practice at the campus level. The biggest stumbling block was that I was at the pay grade of a comprehensive high school principal position. I did not believe it to be realistic to take my complete lack of campus administrative experience into a campus the size of our comprehensive high schools (ranging from 1,700 to over 3,000 students). In addition, I was much more interested in alternative programs that try to address the needs of learners in non-standard settings.

I applied for the position of principal of the Early College High School (ECHS) the district planned to open in Fall 2008. I was eventually called in for an initial interview and then a second interview as a finalist for the position. In July 2008, on my birthday nonetheless, our superintendent called me into his office and told me he was transferring me to be the principal of the Early College High School. The following is part of what I wrote in my personal journal on that day:

> …got called to the Superintendent's office and told I was his choice for ECHS principal and that the delay had to do with getting official contract signed by UTB, still expect me to spend some time with Grants (30-40%), but need to hire teachers ASAP and can recruit if needed to get the best teachers available.

I learned that students had been selected and notified, but no teachers or staff had been hired yet. In addition, the planned campus location on university property was not going to be possible due to some recently discovered facilities issues. Because of the change in the location, the district was rapidly working to convert part of an unused elementary campus facility into the first ECHS facility. Just to add to the tension, the area was struck

by a hurricane and the work on the campus had to be shut down for a week. In the midst of all of this turmoil, I began my journey as the principal of an early college high school.

This incredible journey continued for three years. In some ways, the reality could be described as Charles Dickens wrote in *A Tale of Two Cities,* "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times." I recall it this way because of the range of rewards and challenges I encountered during those three years. The rewards were working with an amazing faculty and staff who were very dedicated to the students, the vision, and the mission of the campus. The challenges included guiding students from being in many ways typical at-risk high school freshmen to becoming atypical high school and college graduates.

I rapidly learned that, unlike a regular campus principal, everything related to facilities, transportation, and even the courses offered would have to be negotiated with other entities—even outside organizations. As other principals of ECHS campuses have told me in personal conversations (including the principal who took over the campus from me), operating an ECHS can be more difficult than being the principal of a large comprehensive high school. The three years I served as principal was the personal story I share in Chapter Four of this dissertation study.

My journey as principal came to a close before I had the opportunity to occupy the office of the principal at the new campus I helped design. In July 2011, I was called to the main office and reassigned (read demoted) "in the best interest of this district." I was one of over 150 district administrators reassigned during the 2011-2012 school year as part of a district-wide re-organization under the new Superintendent of Schools. Although never confirmed, I suspected that my move was at least in part a result of

"dragons" much like those that breathed down the neck of the principal in Craig's story of reform, "The dragon in school backyards: The influence of mandated testing on school contexts and educators' narrative knowing" (Craig, 2004). The campus accountability rating was going to slip from "Exemplary" to "Recognized" by missing the Commended Performance requirement that was part of the state accountability system by one percentage point.

My placement by the district (against my wishes) as a Curriculum Specialist for Science was rather ironic considering that in 1987 I was sure that it would be my dream job. The district reassigned as the assistant superintendent for the department the very competent woman who had been the co-principal investigator who hired me as the project director for the NSF USP grant. It was also a bit surreal because I was working as a colleague and peer with a number of the staff I had hired as mentor teachers when I was the USP grant project director. In addition, my immediate supervisor had been my supervisor during my term as principal. She fortunately made the transition as effective and smooth as possible before she was also reassigned. In retrospect, serving as a Curriculum Specialist for Science became one more opportunity to put theory into practice, but that is another story for a different setting.

In July 2012, I was again reassigned "in the best interest of this district" to my latest position as the Interim Administrator for Secondary Curriculum and Instruction-- Texas Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS) because of my experience with implementing grants. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) calls this position the "District Shepherd" because it is responsible for "shepherding" campuses through their multi-million dollar school improvement grants. Then, in addition to this role, in September 2012, I was

designated as the TEA required District Coordinator of School Improvement (DCSI).

The DCSI is responsible for coordinating all of the required school improvement

activities of the district to address its staging in the current state and Federal

accountability systems. The decision was made because of my background with reform

and experience in working with the Texas Education Agency and Regional Service

Centers in my prior positions.

Where to next? The answer to this question is in part dependent upon my success

in attaining my doctoral degree. As I approach the final stages of this endeavor and the

closing years of my formal academic career, I hope to use my experience and degrees to

either continue to work with the ECHS programs in some leadership capacity, be named

as a district's administrator for curriculum and instruction, or to attain a university

position helping to train other educators how to shift theory into practice. Through my

dissertation, I planned to share some experiences and insights into the successes and

challenges of opening an ECHS while providing a sampling of stories from its first

graduates. It would be wonderful to be able to inspire entities and individuals to continue

to open and operate this model for the benefit of at-risk and underrepresented students.

Introduction to the Need for the Study

A large variety of research has been focused on various systematic and systemic

education reform movements and activities. Current mathematics and science education

reform research goes back to the days of Sputnik while reading research goes back even

further; however, content specific reform will not be central to this study. Small and

smaller learning communities education research has been a big piece of high school

reform over the past decade and one of the more recent versions of this reform is the

Early College High School movement. While there is a significant amount of research being focused on the efforts of the Early College High Schools as part of the funding agreements supporting their initial implementation, much of this research has been focused on personal outcomes for administrators, teachers and students and the components of the research used in the schools, not on the overall transition of the theory into practice.

It may be obvious that we need educational studies addressing the "gold standard" using a quantitative format with experimental designs that allow us to determine with fair certainty what is and is not effective. That being stated, however, I believe it is critical to collect and share some of the stories of what it looks like as theories are put into practice. Descriptions of experiences can illuminate the data that is otherwise seen by people as just numbers with no relevance to their lives.

Based on the requests I have received to provide stories ("nuggets" as they are called by the National Science Foundation) about programs and participants from agencies I have worked with, these funders also believe that stories can open the portal to continued funding that the statistical data simply cannot do on its own. People still relate to stories much more effectively than to statistics and a dry recitation of facts and findings (Bruner, 1960). Stories will get people to commit to actions that the numbers simply cannot seem to do—no matter how compelling or how data driven we claim to be.

A colleague, in her dissertation study conducted in the district in 2003, described the level of poverty of the community—especially around her campus at the time.

She noted in her study:

These *colonias* are home to thousands of children who enroll in public schools. As the stakes continue to rise and the United States strives to "leave no child behind," at sense of urgency develops as to how educators can best meet the educational needs of these students, educational needs that are complicated by poverty, culture, and community (Hernandez, 2003, p. 6).

The students she describes in her study are still in the district and may already be or may become students who attend the ECHS in this study. Unfortunately, the poverty level has not significantly improved over the past ten years. According to the latest QuickFacts retrieved from the U.S. Census Bureau website, the per capita income average is $12,900 (the Texas average is $25,548) with over 35% of persons in the city living below the poverty level as of 2011.

Kati Haycock, from The Education Trust, told an audience in McAllen, Texas, on February 25, 2013, that the United States now has one of the lowest rates for improved economics for families between generations. In her presentation she stated, "At the macro level, better and more equal education is not the only answer. But at the individual level, it really is." Because the ECHS model has shown some indications of improving the education levels of underrepresented students (Berger et al., 2010), further research is needed to understand from the theoretical, professional, and student perspectives how learning and engagement is experienced in the ECHS environment. The exploration of the experiences should help inform and shape decisions to be made about what direction ECHS initiatives should go in the future.

Statement of the Problem

Based on the concerns noted below regarding the challenges for keeping at-risk students from dropping out and increasing the number of college and career ready graduates, the problem to be addressed in this study is the lack of understanding about how the ECHS model impacts learning and engagement, especially from the personal perspective of alumni. As funding for education becomes scarcer and outside funding sources demand implementation of more "research-based" programs, the need for stories to be collected and told increases because the numbers alone only tell part of the story.

Jobs For the Future (JFF) described Texas as one of only three states making significant progress in addressing dropout policies and applauds its efforts to "coherent and far-reaching strategy to put dropouts and struggling students at the center of high school reform" by appropriating "$60 million for high school completion and success programs" (2010, n. p.). The U. S. Department of Education's *Interim Report of the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans* (2002), references the study *Coming of Age in the 1990s*, in describing how:

Disadvantaged students—those of low socioeconomic status (SES), with risk factors for dropping out of high school, whose parents did not have a college education, whose mothers did not expect them to complete college—were less likely than those without such factors to report that they had earned a bachelor's degree or higher and more likely to report that they had never enrolled in postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 2-3).

The *Interim Report* (2002) written by the U.S. Department of Education recommended five "strategic imperatives" (p. 21) including a national campaign, a strategic plan to

address the challenge to get more Hispanics to and through college, create a plan that addresses the diversity of the Hispanic population, and determine what works for which students. The report goes on to declare, "Every community must do its part to ensure high academic standards that will result in an educated work force able to contribute to the prosperity and well-being of the United States" (p. 21).

David T. Conley, in *College and Career Ready: Helping All Students Succeed Beyond High School,* asks the question: "Should all students be prepared to go to a four-year or a two-year college?" As part of his response he notes, "The dilemma… is that a choice is being made about a student's life and future" (2010, p. 2). The Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) and model is helping to answer the question by supporting numerous at-risk students going to college while still in high school. The ECHS model gives students the option of graduating from high school prepared to go directly into the workforce with some college coursework or to accelerate through college towards attaining a four-year degree.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to chronicle the beginnings of an Early College High School from theoretical, professional and personal perspectives with shared stories of its impact from the perspectives of alumni of the first graduating class. The ECHS Initiative has attracted a great deal of attention due to preliminary indications of how significantly it can affect the college readiness of at-risk youth. These high school-college partnerships provide acceleration to college-readiness for primarily minority, low socio-economic students who are the first in their immediate families to achieve a high school diploma and a college degree (Berger et al., 2010). The reflections and findings of this

study clarified some of the multiple challenges of converting theoretical knowledge in the acceleration of at-risk students to college-readiness, provided insight into the complexity of such transitions and should hearten those who contemplate such journeys through the sharing of preliminary stories of the impact of the implementation from some of the participants.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to document and narrate the beginnings of a South Texas Early College High School from the theoretical, professional and personal perspectives of the researcher and share stories from the participants (several of the alumni of the first graduating class of the ECHS). The following were the research questions that the researcher posed and answered as a result of the study:

(1.) *What elements of the Early College High School caused students to enroll based on the personal recollections of former students?*;

(2.) *What are students' beliefs about how well the Early College High School prepared them for college?*;

(3.) *What instructional strategies/activities had the most impact on preparing students for college from the personal perspectives of former students?*; and

(4.) *What campus activities made a significant difference in preparing students for college from the personal perspectives of former students?*

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Based on the purpose, this research addressed systemic education reform in the implementation of the Early College High School (ECHS) model. The Early College High School Initiative is one of the private/public funded attempts to make a difference, especially in Texas, along with others including the Texas Science Math Engineering and Technology (T-STEM), smaller learning communities, career academies, and comprehensive school reform strategies. The approach used in this research study was narrative inquiry, including the story constellation approach used by Cheryl Craig (2007b).

Reform Literature Related to This Study

While it may seem inappropriate to cite an encyclopedia to any extent in a doctoral research document, my inclusion here was to try to emphasize that at least part of the more recent reform activities are not truly recent in nature. The following section has remained in my mind since originally reading the information in a copy from an encyclopedia belonging to my father-in-law printed in 1936:

> Perhaps no phase of social activity has undergone so radical a development in
> modern times as that of education. This evolution may be outlined under the
> headings of aim, subject matter, method and organization of education.
> …Science, history, and modern literature have been added to mathematics,
> theology and the classics. In general the curriculum has been enriched by subjects
> giving interesting or valuable subject matter, and the disciplinary subjects have

been reduced in importance. …mechanical memory-work has been replaced by

such as appeals to reason and stirs interest and spontaneity. The inductive

method, involving the idea of development lessons (see Method of Teaching),

library-methods, laboratories, workshops, illustrations, all rouse self-activity

(q.v.), excite interest (q.v.), involve the constant application of what is learned,

and aid in producing a progressive, alert and adaptable rather than a mechanical

and passive character. ("Education, Modern," *Modern American Encyclopedia*,

1936, n. p.)

The focus of this research was opening an ECHS using what we have learned from

researching "what works" and to determine if it worked at this place and time. Marzano

(2003) listed five effective school-level factors: (1) guaranteed and viable curriculum; (2)

challenging goals and effective feedback; (3) parent and community involvement; (4)

safe and orderly environment; and (5) collegiality and professionalism (p. 15). Other

researchers provide other lists. I continue to ask why, if this was perceived as common

enough "knowledge" in 1934 and continues to be part of what research still tells us is

effective, do we still seeing so many organizations and entities still trying to "reform"

education in much the same way?

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has been the driving force behind several

major reform efforts in the area of mathematics and science education for decades. The

district in this study got involved in this reform movement in the early 1990s with a

Comprehensive Partnerships for Math and Science Achievement (CPMSA) grant and

then a NSF Urban Systemic Program (USP) grant. The following description of systemic

reform comes from an Urban Systemic Program in Science, Mathematics, and

Technology Education (USP) Program Solicitation:

> Systemic reform of education is an important part of any strategy to provide
> sustainable improvements in the nation's educational enterprise. Systemic refers
> to fundamental, comprehensive and coordinated changes in education through
> attendant changes in policy, financing, governance, management, content and
> conduct. Systemic reform occurs when all essential features of schools and
> school systems are engaged and operating in concert; when policy is aligned with
> a clear set of goals and standards; when the forthcoming improvements and
> innovations become intrinsic parts of the ongoing educational system for all
> children; and when the changes become part of the school system's operating
> budget. (NSF01-015, 2001, n. p.)

The research-based reforms that the NSF supported in the USP grants were district-wide,

kindergarten through grade twelve, implementation of inquiry instruction in science and

mathematics instruction as well as strong integration of technology in instruction in both

areas. Another major piece funded and supported was the use of coaches or mentor

teachers to provide professional development support in the classrooms of the teachers

(Rentfro, Baldwin, Garcia, & Smith, 2004). While the National Science Foundation does

not support the Early College High School Initiative, the NSF was the organization that

immersed me in systemic reform and helped shaped my perspective on moving theory

into practice.

More recently, the Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) movement was added to

the major reform movements as part of the nation-wide high school reform efforts. The

main idea behind the SLC reform was that high school students should perform at higher achievement levels if they are educated in a more personalized environment than found in most comprehensive high schools. Kuo (2010) summarized the smaller learning communities research as:

> The smallness of schools has been a particular focus of consideration over decades (Conant, 1959). Researchers have analyzed and posited ideal sizes of "small" ranging from 600 to 900 students (Lee & Smith, 1995, 1997). The expression "small learning communities" reflects a variety of configurations including academies, schools-within-schools, and magnet schools… Smaller schools also exhibit lower dropout rates, higher attendance, and higher graduation rates. Not only do SLCs exhibit positive effects on academic achievement and attainment, smaller schools benefit low socioeconomic students and therefore improve equity. Other positive student benefits include an increased sense of personalization and belonging as measured by students feeling more satisfied with school climate or lower levels of vandalism (Page et al., 2002). (Kuo, 2010, p. 399)

Kuo goes on to state:

> Smallness or other structural arrangements, such as scheduling and time, leadership or management arrangements, or cooperative and integrated activities with institutions of higher education or businesses, must all be met with instructional improvements in the classroom in order to realize significant academic gains. (Kuo, 2010, p. 399)

In the early years of the 21st century, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, among others, began funding the start-up of numerous middle college and early college high schools around the United States. These entities were designed to provide at-risk students, especially minority and first generation to college students, with an accelerated academic environment (Berger et al., 2010; Kuo, 2010). Shenkman (2008) noted that high schools that were not meeting the Federal Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) standards were more likely to attempt to implement reforms such as small learning communities or early college high schools. He also noted that Gates and other foundation grants were influencing the implementation of reforms.

Early College High Schools focus on the relationships aspect in using these small (recommended to be a maximum of 400 students in size) as one of the "Core Principles" in efforts to create a school climate that is supportive of students taking on the challenge of an accelerated curricular program (JFF, 2009). More information on this movement is provided in the section on ECHS research later in this chapter.

Cheryl Craig, in the foreword to *Narrative Inquiries of School Reform,* states, "The importance of the particularities and individual action… is all too uncommon in the every-day mindscape of contemporary advocacy, analysis, and conversation about school and curricular reform," (2003, p. vii) at least when looking at what ends up in the literature. However, when I look back on many years of involvement in trying to institute "education reform" in various roles in the school district in which I am employed, I recall many conversations with both individuals trying to implement or support reform endeavors and those individuals being asked to actually implement the reform that did revolve around the everyday challenge of doing what is "supposed" to

work. I continue to wonder if we will ever find the keys to implementing "what works" consistently and well across a large district for a considerable period because it takes truly exhausting and continuous commitment and effort.

The Early College High School Initiative tackles many of the policy elements found in the "Six pillars of effective dropout prevention and recovery" including the right to a free public education, closely monitoring dropout rates for 100% graduation rates, implementing reform strategies, establishing a new model for accelerated instruction and preparation for student success and work towards stable funding of systemic reform that works (Almeida, Steinberg, Santos, & Le, 2010). TEA requires that all Texas Early College High Schools provide students with free high school and college coursework, closely monitors the dropout and attendance rates, requires the implementation of effective instructional strategies that provide students with the opportunity to attain at least 60 hours of college coursework (preferably at a college and provided by higher education instructors), and requires the district and higher education partners to commit to sustainable funding for the campuses (see Appendix B for the TEA ECHS requirements for 2012-2013).

Instructional Programs and Strategies Related to This Study

The Early College High School in this study implemented instructional strategies from several areas. They included the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program strategies, the Jobs For the Future (JFF) Common Instructional Framework, as well as differentiated instruction, sheltered instruction, and mentoring. The review here is designed to provide a brief overview of each of these as implemented at this ECHS. The story of how each of these was implemented will be told in Chapter

Four as part of the story of the researcher and explicated as appropriate based on the outcomes of the stories from the participating alumni.

Advancement Via Individual Determination. The AVID program started in San Diego, California, as an academic elective over 20 years ago (AVID, 2012). It is a program providing during school academic and social support for students from the "academic middle" who are generally minority or from low socioeconomic families. AVID is designed to raise the expectations of students and teach them the skills and habits needed to be academically successful. Some of the main activities used at the ECHS from AVID include the Cornell note taking strategies, the studying strategies known by the acronym WICR, and peer tutoring. Cornell note taking is a note-taking format in which students take notes, review their notes, summarize their notes and find the big ideas or questions based on their notes in a structured process. The WICR process is one in which students write about what they are learning in multiple and authentic ways (W); inquire about their learning (I) through framing questions and using critical questioning and developing graphic organizers; collaboration (C) in small groups with purposeful conversations; and reading (R) notes, summaries and reading "again" More information about the AVID program is available at the AVID website. (AVID, 2012).

Common Instructional Framework. The JFF Common Instructional Framework is focused on all content area teachers using six instructional strategies at high levels. The six strategies are described here from the JFF website:

> (1.) *Collaborative Group Work brings students together in small groups to engage in learning, with each student accountable for her or his*

contribution. Activities are designed so that students with diverse skill levels are both supported and challenged by their peers;

(2.) Writing to Learn helps students, including English language learners, develop their ideas, critical thinking, and fluency of expression in all subjects. Students experiment with written language in every class every day;

(3.) Literacy Groups, a form of Collaborative Group Work, provide students a supportive structure for accessing challenging texts, broadly defined, and engaging in high-level discourse. Using roles that have an explicit purpose, students deconstruct text and scaffold one another's learning;

(4.) Questioning challenges students and teachers to use deep, probing questions to foster purposeful conversations and stimulate intellectual inquiry.

(5.) Classroom Talk encourages all students to develop their thinking, listening, and speaking skills and promotes active learning. Classroom Talk takes place in pairs, in groups, and with whole classes.

(6.) Scaffolding encompasses a broad range of techniques, such as pre-reading activities and graphic organizers, that help students connect prior knowledge—from an earlier grade, different content area, or personal experience—to challenging new concepts. (JFF, 2011, n. p.)

The Texas High School Project (THSP) provided external coaches for the first three years of the ECHS in the study. These coaches supported the training of the teachers and

implementation of the strategies through workshops, conferences as well as on-campus and in-classroom professional development.

Differentiated Instruction. Differentiated instruction training was brought in through the district's advanced academic department staff and included implementation of multiple levels of reading resources, student selection of means of demonstrating learning, and targeted instructional supports. The differentiated instruction implemented at the ECHS primarily followed the guidelines outlined by Tomlinson (1995) in *How to differentiate instruction in mixed ability classrooms*. These strategies are grouped around content (what students are studying), process (activities that student engage in to study the content) and product (how students demonstrate their learning). Differentiated instruction was required for students identified as gifted and talented, but the expectation was that all instruction should be differentiated at the ECHS (1995).

Sheltered Instruction. Although the number of students still identified as English Language Learners (ELL) was small at the ECHS, many students had been in the Bilingual program before exiting in elementary or middle school. All teachers were expected to use sheltered instruction strategies, especially those that allowed students to use multiple means of acquiring information. Visualization, preview-view-review, graphic organizers and thinking maps, and scaffolding techniques were all used every week, if not daily, in the instructional methods employed by teachers for all students. The primary source of the Bilingual Education program training on these strategies came from the *Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol* that is now a registered program by Pearson Education and was presented by Echevarria and Short (2000).

Early College High Schools

The Jobs For the Future (JFF) group is a key organization among those working with Early College High Schools in the state of Texas and all around the United States. This organization has supported many of the studies currently published about the Early College High Schools (ECHS), especially those that have been funded, at least in part, by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This organization developed the Core Principles that are the basis of what is recognized as the current ECHS model (JFF, 2009).

The national website for the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), in "A Portrait in Numbers," describes the start of the movement in 2002 and its spread into 24 states and over 200 schools through the 2009-2010 school year. Some of the statistics cited in the report include that 59% of the students come from low income families, about 1/3 of the schools receive Title I funding and about 70% of the participating students are "of color" with about 37% nationwide being Latino (JFF, "Who do early colleges serve?", 2010, para. 1).

The American Institute for Research continues to be one of the primary sources of research on the implementation of the Early College High School model supported by the Early College High School Initiative supported through multiple major funders and the Jobs for the Future. The *Early College High School 2003-2005 Evaluation Report* prepared for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and SRI International (SRI) that was published in May 2006 provided insight into the state of the movement at that time. A more recent AIR publication in 2010 by Berger, Adelman & Cole in the *Peabody Journal of Education*, described how:

Moving students who are at an academic disadvantage into college early cannot be done in isolation: Early College Schools (ECSs) provide a comprehensive experience, focusing on providing small learning environments with an emphasis on strong student supports. … As a result of these supports, ECSs can move students through their school more quickly (Berger et al., 2010, p. 335).

This report concludes with the belief that "Schools in the ECHSI can server as models to educators looking for strategies to cultivate college-ready students" (p. 346).

Tim Weldon, an education policy analyst at The Council of State Governments, authored a paper in 2009 that described the state of the Early College High School Initiative as of that year as being one that "appears to be gaining favor and one that is showing evidence of success" (Weldon, p. 5). The report goes on to provide information on the states that have policies supporting the ECHS model—Colorado, Ohio, Michigan, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania. Weldon lists Texas, North Carolina and Georgia as "leaders in the early college movement" (p. 13) and goes on the give descriptions of the models for each of these states. Articles, such as the one by Morrow and Torrez (2012), continue to provide examples of how the ECHS model can make a difference for first generation students.

There are some challenges that are still to be addressed as campuses continue to work to implement the core principles based on a 2009 article in the *Peabody Journal of Education*. Three findings of concern noted by the authors based on five years of data from upward of 151 schools, were that students who were first in their families to go to college and/or who were minority and/or low income students tended to have lower

GPAs, and some members of these groups tended to feel less positive about the early college high schools and have lower educational aspirations (Berger et al., 2010).

The Texas Education Agency (TEA), in partnership with the Texas High School Project (THSP), as part of their partnership with the Gates and Meadows Foundations, has followed with very similar requirements. Beginning in Spring 2009, to be designated as an Early College High School in the state of Texas, each campus must annually attest that they have a legally binding agreement with an Institute of Higher Education (IHE) for students and agree to comply with the majority of what are currently sixteen specific requirements (refer to TEA ECHS Designation in Appendix B). Current information on these requirements and some of the statistics for Texas ECHS sites is available at the TEA website and the latest information has been included in Appendix A. The TEA *Application for Early College High School Designation* for 2010-2011 listed twenty-one requirements ranging from the requirement to enroll a majority of students who are at-risk by the state definitions above as well as including students who are economically disadvantaged and/or first generation college-goers. The campus must also agree to implement the research-based activities from "Proven Dropout Recovery and Prevention Strategies" from the TEA website (TEA, 2013).

A search of published doctoral dissertations indicates that most about Early College High Schools have been published since 2006 and are about ECHS programs from North Carolina (10) or Texas (16). Some of the earliest published dissertations, like the 2007 dissertation of Nilka Aviles-Reyes titled, *Examining the Components of the Early College High School Model and the Impact on Participants in the Program*, focused on the perceptions of the teachers and administrators and their policy (Aviles-

Reyes, 2007; Kisker, 2007; Slade, 2007). The number of dissertations has grown significantly since 2008 and the topics covered now range from ECHS impact on state policy to leadership practices to student performance or the perceptions of various stakeholders (Chambers, 2009; Carter, 2012; Martin-Valdez, 2009; McMoran, 2011; Smithwick-Rodriguez, 2011; Brenner, 2012). Several of the ECHS studies that examined student performance on state assessments did not find significantly higher performance when compared to other students (Smithwick-Rodriguez, 2011; Brenner, 2012); however, not all of the studies controlled or matched the populations in terms of ethnicity or other demographics.

Other researchers working with the funding and supporting organizations have found overall student performance exceeds or matches the performance of their peers in non-ECHS campuses. Berger, Adelman, and Cole (2010), found that at-risk student performance is not as strong as their non-at-risk peers that are participating in these programs. Berger et al. (2010) also found students attending ECHS campuses located on a college campus had "higher proficiency rates on state assessments relative to their districts, higher attendance rates, and higher …progression rates" (p. 344). A dissertation study by Barba (2012) did find a positive impact on student performance on North Carolina's achievement assessments and some College Board Advanced Placement exams. The dissertation study by Hall (2008), also conducted in North Carolina, found stronger performances on state assessments for ECHS campuses with more college courses taken by students.

ECHS related dissertations about student perceptions have found that students may feel like they are under a lot of pressure to perform (Munoz, 2011) or that the ECHS

they attend claims to be supportive of minority students, but students still felt

discriminated against—especially if they are under-performing (Locke, 2011). The study

conducted by Roberts in 2007 found elevated engagement while the one conducted by

Healy two years later found increased engagement as well as increased self-awareness

and learning habits (Roberts, 2007; Healy, 2009).

A *Peabody Journal of Education* article published in 2010 asks, "What is next for

the American High School?" Victor Kuo, with the Routledge Taylor and Francis Group

that is part of WestEd, answers the question with a brief description of some of the areas

of reform that seem to have promise, including small high schools and smaller learning

communities, comprehensive school reform models, career academies, and early college

schools. Kuo (2010) concludes that:

> Significant advances in research have identified structural and instructional
>
> qualities that contribute to improved student achievement or graduation, such as
>
> small size, smaller learning communities, comprehensive school reform models
>
> and structural pathways and instructional strategies that integrate high school with
>
> career and college. Although questions remain regarding particular design
>
> components, possibilities of scale, and the rapidity and acceleration of student
>
> achievement, the fact that solutions exist and positive gains have been
>
> demonstrated offer not only hope but also confidence to act. (p. 399)

The latest data available publicly for the Early College High School Initiative for

Texas is posted on the Texas Education Agency website and has been included in

Appendix A of this document. Of significant note is that in May of 2010, 30% of the

students who graduated from the eleven schools attained a 2-year college degree with a

savings to the students and their families of approximately $4.5 million for a population

of students who were a majority at-risk of dropping out of school (TEA, 2012). The

model has continued increase in the number of campuses opening over the past two years

in Texas; however, a new model is now being promoted as an alternative and scale up of

the design for comprehensive high schools. Educate Texas, the organization that has

grown out of the Texas High School Project, supports this model as well as the original

ECHS campuses as part of the TEA and private funding partnerships. The district in

which I work has just been notified that it will have three comprehensive high schools

participating in the Jobs for the Future initiative for the next five years.

At-Risk/Resiliency Research

Numerous articles have been published about various aspects of at-risk learners;

however, the focus here is primarily at-risk in relationship to high school students and

their struggles and successes related to going from high school to college. The TEA

"Application for Early College High School Designation" defines the target population as

"students who are at risk of dropping out of school: at-risk students and English language

learners, as defined by the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS),

economically disadvantaged students, and first-generation college goers" (TEA

Application for ECHS Designation, 2011, p. 9).

The Texas Education Agency lists thirteen criteria to be used in classifying a

student in public schools as "at-risk" for weighted funding for Texas State Compensatory

Education. According to the TEA Compensatory Education guidelines in the latest

"Frequently Asked Questions" document under Question Number 3 regarding eligibility,

a student is at-risk if they are under 21 years of age and meet at least one of the following criteria:

(1.) *is in prekindergarten, kindergarten or grade 1, 2, or 3 and did not perform satisfactorily on a readiness test or assessment instrument administered during the current school year;*

(2.) *is in grade 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12 and did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during a semester in the preceding or current school year or is not maintaining such an average in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum in the current semester;*

(3.) *was not advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more school years;*

(4.) *did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered to the student under Subchapter B, Chapter 39, and who has not in the previous or current school year subsequently performed on that instrument or another appropriate instrument at a level equal to at least 110 percent of the level of satisfactory performance on that instrument;*

(5.) *is pregnant or is a parent;*

(6.) *has been placed in an alternative education program in accordance with Section 37.006 during the preceding or current school year;*

(7.) *has been expelled in accordance with Section 37.007 during the preceding or current school year;*

(8.)   *is currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution, or other conditional release;*

(9.)   *was previously reported through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) to have dropped out of school;*

(10.)   *is a student of limited English proficiency, as defined by Section 29.052;*

(11.)   *is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services or has, during the current school year, been referred to the department by a school official, officer of the juvenile court, or law enforcement official;*

(12.)   *is homeless, as defined by 42 U.S.C. Section 11302, and its subsequent amendments; or*

(13.)   *resided in the preceding school year or resides in the current school year in a residential placement facility in the district, including a detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house, or foster group home. (TEA, 2011)*

These are also the criteria that are used to code students as at-risk of dropping out of school for the PEIMS reporting guidelines to be used in consideration selection for student for early college high schools in the state of Texas.

     Bull, Montgomery and Kimball (2000), have compiled a much more comprehensive list of fifty criteria that can make a student be at-risk academically in higher education settings. They also include a long list of instructor characteristics and instructional settings that can also cause students to be at-risk of failure. This list of at-risk problems categorizes the fifty student at-risk challenges eight areas that include

problems of learning history (second language learners, under preparation by prior

faculty, lack of knowledge or experience); problems of family history (single parent,

lower SES background, lack of family support); problems of perceptions/expectations

(loneliness, unrealistic academic performance expectations, prior failures); problems of

behavior (absenteeism, working, partying); and problems of personal condition

(disabilities, lack of motivation, health issues including pregnancy, low self-esteem,

inability to manage stress) (Bull, Montgomery, & Kimball, 2000, n. p.). These at-risk

factors also impact early college high schools because students enter college while still

full time high school students. Research completed for the United States Office of

Educational Research and Improvement by Horn and Chen (1998) found parental and

peer influences to be significant on a student's decision to enroll in college.

Davidson, Beck and Milligan (2009), reviewed the retention literature and created

a questionnaire designed to help determine student persistence or attrition from college.

The study found that there was a lot of variation in factors and what worked at one site

often did not work at another site, even for a similar population. They believe that their

questionnaire does have a high predictability in identifying which college students were

at-risk, but that interventions must be individualized (Davidson, Beck, & Milligan, 2009).

Resiliency or persistence are required for successful completion of schooling

whether at the high school or college level. Richard Sagor (1996), in his *Educational

Leadership* article, "Building Resiliency in Students," described the following

organizational and instructional practices: "logical consequences, mastery expectations,

service learning, cooperative learning, teacher advisory groups, authentic assessment,

student-led parent conferences, learning style-appropriate instruction, activities program

portfolios" (p. 39). Amy Stuht noted in her *Leadership* article that schools that support at-risk students are smaller schools with strong interpersonal relationships, staffed by highly qualified educators with high expectations who find ways to help students meet and exceed expectations, and have rigorous and relevant curricula (Stuht, 2008).

Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Connelly (2000), in the introduction to *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, describe their influences for "Why Narrative" as coming primarily from John Dewey and looking for other influences in anthropology and sociology. The authors describe how "Our questions, our research puzzles, have focused around the broad questions of how individuals teach and learn, of how temporality (placing things in the context of time) connects with change and learning, and of how institutions frame our lives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 1).

John Dewey, in his book, *Democracy and Education*, stated:

We sometimes talk as if "original research" were a peculiar prerogative of scientists or at least of advanced students. But all thinking is research, and all research is native, original, with him who carries it on, even if everybody else in the world already is sure of what he is still looking for. It also follows the all thinking involves a risk. Certainty cannot be guaranteed in advance. (1916, p. 148)

Narrative inquiry research is certainly original and requires the researcher to "think" about what it is one is looking for.

In the second edition of their textbook *Qualitative Data Analysis*, Miles and Huberman narrative inquiry as a qualitative approach is just a brief reference to the work of Clandinin and Connelly on narrative inquiry. Miles and Huberman note:

> We might think first of a "meta-agreement": are we contemplating an equal-status "*narrative inquiry*" model in which researchers and participants are each "telling their stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990)? Or are we heading for a *collaborative action research* model, ... ? (Schensul & Schensul, 1992 in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 47)

In chapter five of Clandinin and Connelly's work on narrative inquiry, they describe more specifically the role of experience and story in qualitative research. In reviewing this particular chapter, a piece that truly resonated with me describes the writing of a dissertation using narrative inquiry:

> As narrative inquirers composing our research texts, we find ourselves at the boundaries in still another way. Students writing dissertations in reductionistic inquiry often complete their dissertations chapter by chapter. They write their introductory chapter, their literature review chapter, their methodology chapter, and so on, moving through their dissertation writing chapter by chapter. Each chapter is approved and checked off by supervisors. When the requisite number of chapters are written and approved, the dissertation is ready for final defense (2000, p. 167).

Clandinin and Connelly continue:

> This is frequently not so for narrative inquirers faced with writing their research texts. This is another tension of working at the boundaries. Frequently, students

engaged in narrative inquiry expect to work through a similar process for their writing. Writing narrative inquiry texts follows quite a different process. In our attempt to describe the process, we say it has a kind of "back and forthing" quality. … a kind of back and forth writing, receiving response, revising, setting it aside, writing another chapter or section… until finally there is a sense of a whole, a piece that feels like it could stand, at least for this moment, alone. (p. 167)

Cheryl Craig (2003), in *Narrative Inquiries of School Reform*, speaks to the theoretical backdrop to knowledge and experience. "The term, personal practical knowledge, resonates with the idea of knowledge as a provisional way of knowing—narratively constructed and reconstructed over time" (p. 9). She describes "the story constellations approach" as a:

…particular version of narrative inquiry, to make sense of educators' knowledge held and expressed within their school contexts. Arising from a body of research that originated with Dewey (1938), Schwab (1983), and Jackson (1967), the approach more recently connects with the narrative methods used by Elbaz, (1983), Clandinin (1986), Clandinin & Connelly (1996), and Craig (1999) and is highly influenced by the theorizing of Schön (1983) and Lyons (1990)." (2003, p. 10-11)

Mark Freeman's chapter on "Autobiographical Understanding and Narrative Inquiry" in *The Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, begins by stating,

Autobiography is the inroad par excellence into exploring the dynamic features -- as well as the profound challenges -- of narrative inquiry, or at least that portion

of it that looks to the comprehensive study of lives as an important vehicle for

understanding the human condition. This is so for one quite obvious reason:

Autobiography is itself a fundamental form of narrative inquiry, …there exists a

valuable opportunity for examining the conditions and limits of narrative inquiry

more generally. (Freeman, as cited in Clandinin, 2007, p. 120)

Freeman goes on to discuss the narrative dimension of autobiographical

understanding:

The narrative dimension of autobiographical understanding may be said to entail a

quite remarkable series of dialectical relationships. First, as we have already

seen, the interpretations and writing of the personal past, far from being a

dispassionate process of reproducing what was, is instead a product of the present

and the interests, needs, and wishes that attend it. This present, however -- along

with the self whose present it is -- is itself transformed in and through the process

at hand. … there a exists a dialectical relationship not only between past and

present but between past, present and future: Even in the midst of my present

engagement with the past, I am moving into the future, giving form and meaning

to the self-to-be. (Clandinin, 2007, p. 137-138)

Freeman's chapter resonated strongly with me as I was searching for the methodology to

use to tell at least my side of the story of opening the ECHS with the purpose of

informing others.

Robert Evans (1996), in his book that stories the human side of change, describes

one of the gaps that narrative studies can help fill. He describes it this way, "Despite

what has been learned about implementing change, we… still face a major

implementation gap" (p. 4) in referring to the need to know more. Because the ECHS initiative is still rather new, education research still has some of these gaps regarding its implementation --especially as it is scaled up in Texas where most campuses have opened since 2007.

The story constellations is a narrative approach that has been used by Craig to share research into the impact of reform activities on schools and their faculty and staff (Craig, 2007a, 2007b). In one study, Craig describes the approach as seeking to "make visible the complexities that shape school landscapes, influence the nature of educators' experiences, and determine who knows and what is known both within, and about, the educational enterprise" (2007a, p. 2). She goes on to explain how the approach is "intimately connected to Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) idea of teachers' knowledge constituting a professional knowledge landscape" (p. 2). The approach is used because is "unearths experiential stories about the school-based educators working in relationships" (2007b, p. 175).

Summary

Perhaps some of my attraction to narrative research models comes from my addiction to reading and from my sociological coursework completed as part of my Master of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies. The literature that has been reviewed creates a tapestry of the components of this study as well as the threads that are the research basis for the Early College High School model and initiative in its current being.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The problem the study addressed was the lack of understanding about the impact on me, as researcher and participant, and alumni of the education reform activities that took place as part of the opening of an Early College High School. More specifically, the problem addressed was the lack of understanding of how the ECHS model impacts learning and engagement of at-risk, minority students of low socio-economic households, especially from the personal perspectives of the alumni. In collecting the needed information to present these stories, I used the following narrative inquiry research methodologies and procedures.

Research Design

The purpose of the study was to chronicle the beginnings of an Early College High School and examine the impact that the campus has had on some members of the first class of students with a view on the impact from theoretical, professional and personal perspectives. Narrative inquiry has grown significantly in the area of education research as a means of illustrating what is taking place in action research activities. This researcher used autobiographical information and stories from alumni to describe an emerging understanding of the impact of an early college high school on underrepresented students. The study used the story constellations approach to create the understanding through the patterns and interrelationships uncovered in the process (Craig, 2007b). The following figure provides the original form for the story

constellation approach as shared by Dr. Craig in personal correspondence that I modified

to show the interactions for this study.

Stories of
Teachers/
Teacher Stories

Stories of School/
School Stories

Stories of Communities/
Community Stories

Stories of Reform/
Reform Stories

School District
Context
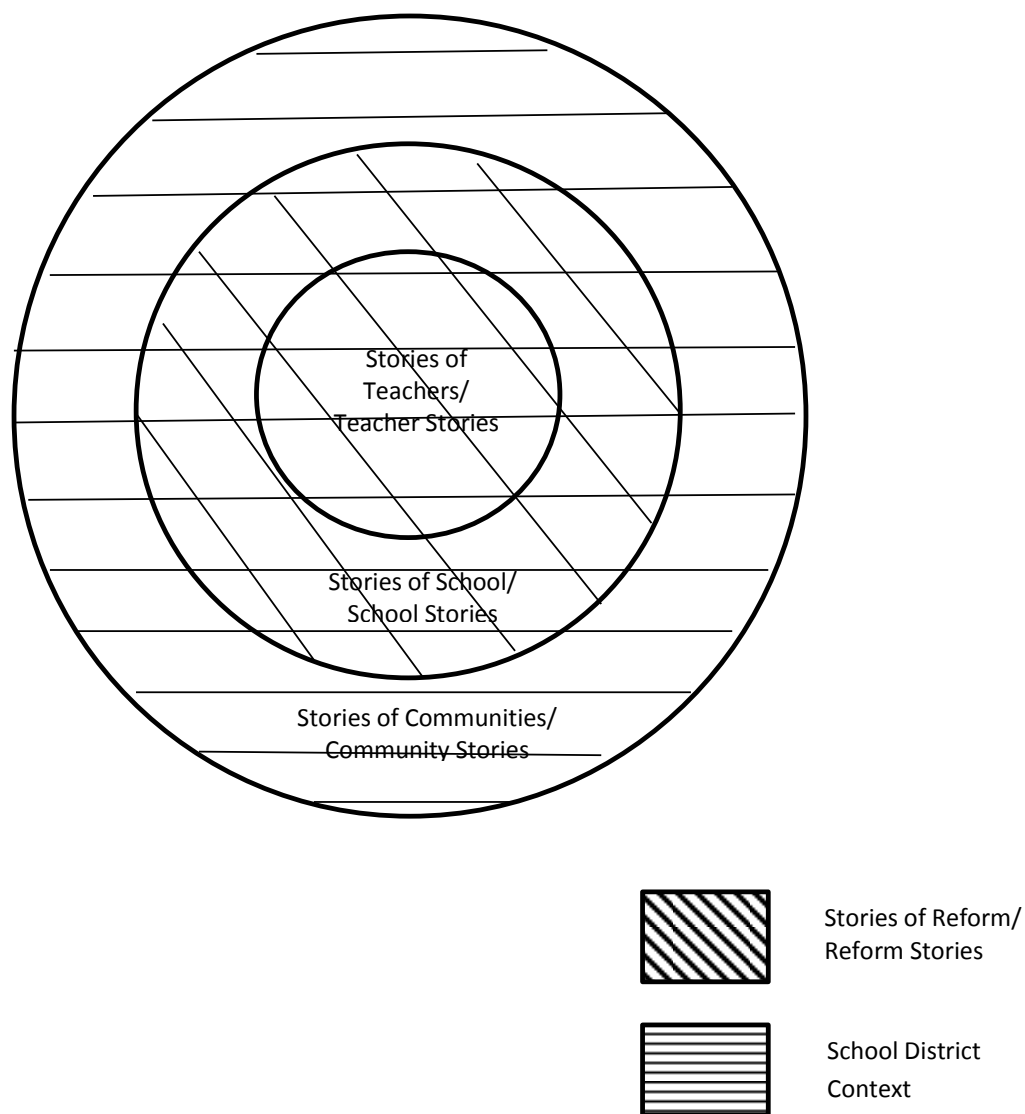
Figure 3. This is the original story constellation model used by Cheryl Craig in her approach and shared with me for use as the basis for the design provided in Chapter Six of this study.

Three different analytical tasks were used to create the form: broadening (general context), burrowing (reconstructing events from the perspective of participants), and re-storying (meaning making from the stories shared) (Craig, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Broadening took place through looking at the stories and seeing the context in which the events occur to reveal the complexities behind the stories—the social and intellectual climate. Burrowing occurred through the reviewing of how the participants connect the parts of their stories to other parts or times of their lives. In burrowing, the researcher attempted to focus on "the event's emotional, moral and aesthetic qualities" and restructure "a story of the event from the point of view of the person at the time of the event" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 11). "In the process, tough realities and gritty details become public" (Craig, 2007b, p. 179). The third part of the process (although Connelly and Clandinin (1990) noted that you may use any one or all three of the tasks) involved returning to the present and looking into how the "new story of self which changes the meaning of the event, its description, and its significance for the larger life story the person may be trying to live" (p. 11). Craig described how the process does not produce answers. "Instead, it offers a means of thinking more deeply about the dilemmas and challenges" (2007b, p. 180).

As the researcher, I also needed to fictionalize some of the information obtained through the interview process used to collect the case study stories. Alumni who were participants in the study at times referred to specific individuals that were not included in the interviews or had not consented to participate. To help in maintaining anonymity, names were changed and, in a few quoted recollections, slight alterations were made to time and place.

Another way in which research texts included here were altered was through reducing the stutters or circular statements made by participants to help with the flow of understanding what was being said rather than being interrupted by its inclusion. An example of what was done by the researcher is as follows. The original Aphrodite interview transcription, "To definitely do it, I mean I know sometimes you know, we had students who didn't take the full, you know, like they didn't take advantage of it, but there was many more students who did take advantage of it" became "To definitely do it, …we had students who didn't take the full... advantage of it, but there was [sic] many more students who did take advantage of it."

Materials and Data Analysis

The documentation used to support the stories told here included records from my personal and professional journals, campus weekly letters, published and unpublished reports created for the district and grantees, archival data for students from campus and district documents, newspaper articles, district publications, and other archival information sources. Four alumni of the Class of 2012 were purposively selected for audio-recorded interviews to gain direct personal perspectives on the impact to date of the Early College High School on their lives based on a structured set of questions (see in Appendix E).

These interviews allowed for the creation of case studies that were storied around the Core Principles of the ECHS with emerging threads relating to the interview questions. Emerging threads or themes from the case studies along with my reflections and other documentation were then re-storied around the research questions. This was done as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). "The purpose of retelling is to

offer possibilities for reliving, for new directions and new ways of doing things" (p. 189). The following are the research questions for the study:

> (1.) *What elements of the Early College High School caused students to enroll based on the personal recollections of former students?*;
>
> (2.) *What are students' beliefs about how well the Early College High School prepared them for college?*;
>
> (3.) *What instructional strategies/activities had the most impact on preparing students for college from the personal perspectives of former students?*; and
>
> (4.) *What campus activities made a significant difference in preparing students for college from the personal perspectives of former students?*

Participants

The participants of the study were four purposively selected alumni from the Class of 2012 and me. I interviewed four alumni of the Class of 2012 who had remained in contact with me and who had stories that provided important illustrations of the impact of reform activities on individuals over time. The participants selected represented different numbers of attained college credits and not all immediately continued to attend college after graduation from the ECHS. The participants also represented various sub-populations including at-risk due to a variety of criteria, gifted and talented, English Language Learners (ELL), mainstreamed special education and migrant. Gender was also considered in the selection to ensure not all participants were of one gender. All participants were first generation to graduate, minority students who remained in the locale of the campus and stayed in communication with me.

Validity and Reliability

In narrative inquiry, validity and reliability are not judged by the same criteria as more traditional research methodologies. Webster and Mertova (2007) discuss how Polkinghorne and Huberman help us look at reliability using "new measures such as access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability, and economy (Huberman, 1995)" in the chapter on "Rethinking validity and reliability" (p. 90). Verisimilitude and truthfulness is addressed to a certain degree by the similar threads found in the recollections of the participants. The negotiation or the communication between the researcher and the participants about the setting of the contexts is also a component of attempting to ensure that the study has validity and reliability in the framework of narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Limitations

Truthfulness and trustworthiness were two threats to the validity of the study. There was the possibility that the participants told me, their past principal, what they believed were "the answers" I was looking for rather than sharing the reality of their recollections or beliefs. Scripted questions were used to organize the interview process (refer to Appendix E). All of the initial interviews were audio recorded by me as the researcher and then transcribed by a professional service. In addition, because these were recollections told up to five years after the events, there is the possibility that they have become glamorized or narratively smoothed. "The conditions under which a memory is recalled make a difference as well—in a conversation, in a letter, in a research interview, and so on" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 183).

Ethical Assurances

I obtained approval from the University of Houston Committee for the Protection

of Human Subjects to conduct the interviews (see Appendix C for approval letter).

Participants self-selected pseudonyms and were only referred to in the audio recordings

by their pseudonyms. One participant decided to change her pseudonym during the

follow-up interview so her pseudonym does not match her audiotaped pseudonym. The

interviews took place in one-to-one settings to help ensure the anonymity of the

participants. The pseudonyms have been kept separate from any identifying information

of the participants' identities. Participants were given multiple opportunities to withdraw

from the study after giving their initial consent including when conducting the follow-up

interviews to negotiate and clarify meaning and after the defense of the dissertation.

CHAPTER FOUR

STORIES SHARED

Introduction

This dissertation research study using narrative inquiry methods described my stories as the researcher and selected participants about the opening of an early college high school. The study retells or "re-stories" these stories around the Early College High School Core Principles (JFF, 2009) and the questions about what elements, strategies, or activities made a difference from the perspectives of me and those of the participants.

Situating the District and Change

Research in change tells us that change requires a great deal of "talking" about the reform; in other words, successful reform requires a great deal of communication between and among all stakeholders. This is especially true in a border culture. First impressions not only include what you look and sound like, but also whether or not the individuals can find common friends or experiences to use as a basis for your relationship. We often laugh about what a "small world" it is when we are able to find common ground through family or friends with only two degrees of separation. When the connections are more remote, it takes longer to build the trust needed to take the necessary risks to initiate change activities.

Large-scale education reform efforts have been underway with the support of the United States Department of Education and the National Science Foundation for well over twenty years in this South Texas school system. The district became an active participant of these reform efforts in the early 1990s in three subject areas: reading, mathematics and science. I personally began participating in these activities as a teacher

in the early 1990s as the district began the mathematics and science reform initiatives with the support of National Science Foundation grants.

Over the next twenty years, the district continued to garner and implement ever more ambitious reform activities in these areas to raise the capabilities of our teachers and our students to perform well academically. During this period, many teachers have become campus and district-level providers of professional development and administrators. As teachers have moved into campus and district management, the efforts to expand and scale-up reform efforts are sustained and become the "norm" district-wide because they can speak from personal experience. A strong validation of the impact of these on-going endeavors was the district receiving the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2008--a national award for consistent increases in student performance made by some of the most typically low performing students over the three-year period prior to the award. The district has continued to tackle reform with external support coming from the Department of Education with a Department of Education Reading First grant, from the Texas High School Project with grants to initiate an Early College High School, and most recently, a large Texas Literacy Grant that supported literacy coaches on almost every district campus.

A new piece of the reform activities underway in this south Texas district included smaller learning communities in our high schools and participation in the Texas-Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (T-STEM) and the Early College High School (ECHS) reform. The district has designated Texas Career and Technical Education magnet programs in a range of STEM areas in efforts to increase the number of students in the pipeline for STEM careers. For the past three years the district has

been the recipient of a total of six Texas Title I Program School (TTIPS) grants designed to implement best practices to significantly improve student achievement, teacher quality and parent and community involvement. As of February 2013, the district became the recipient of a five-year grant to create college preparatory academies with three of its comprehensive high schools based on the early college high school model.

The Journey

Although I was the Grants Department Administrator at the time the district applied for the Early College High School grant to help start the ECHS, I was not part of the initial grant writing and planning team. I was not involved because at that time I was guiding and supporting twenty-three campuses with Texas Educator Excellence Grants (TEEGs) and was responsible for the implementation of district-wide activities for the Federal Title II, Texas Accelerated Reading Instruction and Texas Accelerated Math Instruction (ARI/AMI) grants. I was also writing a United States Department of Education Smaller Learning Communities grant application while assigned as the interim principal for the district's school for pregnant students and new mothers. One of my journal entries at the time describes an afternoon as "…did research some more on different pieces for grant, had [pregnant] girl trip, but since nurse was out I had to do the report which made me 5 minutes late" to a meeting with the comprehensive high schools applying for the SLC grant. However, as part of submitting grant required reports, negotiating the required memoranda of understanding, and actually doing the work of the opening of the campus, I became very familiar with the plans for the opening of the ECHS.

The original application planned to include the STEM component with its additional principles and requirements, but after not receiving additional funding for the implementation of this component, the district did not commit to being a state designated campus in this area. In 2009, the state of Texas began requiring all Early College High Schools to apply for annual designation and as STEM academies as well. Going with the STEM designation would have required the district to commit to implementing a pre-engineering program and there was not sufficient interest among the students at the time. The campus continued to push students to consider STEM programs of study and provided multiple opportunities to learn about STEM careers.

Student selections had already been completed by a team of university and district staff before I was named as principal. The first year the team interviewed almost all of the 150 applicants and offered places at the ECHS to about 120 students. Since this was a new endeavor, there were many questions about what students were getting into and few people had answers to the questions at that point in time. Numerous presentations continued to be made to the various stakeholders from the university partners to the actual students by the district and university partners to help with obtaining the needed support for a successful implementation.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to select and have transferred to the campus some of the best teachers in the district. This situation did cause most of the other high school principals in the district to be angry with me for taking some of their best teachers right at the very beginning of the school year: however, the Superintendent backed me up by allowing them to transfer to the campus. Unfortunately, the hard feelings resulted in a number of the principals trying to re-recruit students back to their

zoned campuses. Fortunately, the campuses did not have much success with the student re-recruitment and, in the end, it meant the few students who decided that the ECHS was not for them were welcomed back to their zoned schools—the staff at those campuses could "claim" their campus offered more than the ECHS.

By the beginning of the 2008 school year, 105 students had accepted the challenge to transfer to the ECHS instead attending their zoned comprehensive high school campus. The campus opened in its temporary location of an old elementary school and shared facilities with a credit recovery/dropout recovery campus. The cafeteria was the district's catering facility and the physical education facilities were the district Wellness Center and Stadium along with part time use of university gyms and facilities. Arrangements were made for the students to travel to the local university for weekly college experiences that meant busing the entire student body and faculty several miles to the IHE campus.

The ECHS was what I termed a "build a school" because each year the campus adds students, staff and new activities. Initially there were seven teachers, one counselor, a few support staff, and ninety-nine students. The second year we added teachers, staff, courses, more university activities and classes. The third year found about ninety students attending the university full time while still juniors in high school and about 170 freshmen and sophomores attending mostly high school classes at the "temporary" high school facility. During the students' freshman year of high school they were enrolled in a dual enrollment computer course taught by high school faculty and a university faculty taught physical fitness (Kinesiology) course. During their sophomore year, students had

the opportunity to choose between Music Appreciation and Art History taught as dual enrollment by IHE faculty to complete their high school fine arts course requirement.

The following introduction to the campus was written in Fall 2008 and posted through a link to the ECHS website I created as the principal and has only been edited here to disguise the identities of the campus and the students. I did correct a few typographical errors and added italics for clarity of the extended quotations:

Once upon a time, there was a campus filled with students who wanted to graduate twice in four years. This is the tale of the Blue Scorpions who took on the challenge to receive a Distinguished Achievement High School diploma and an Associate of Arts degree between Fall 2008 and Spring 2012. Many of their friends told them they were crazy, that they would not be able to do it, or that they would never make new friends, or that it would be too hard for them, or... well, you get the idea.

However, this group of students decided to listen to the advice of their parents and/or teachers and/or counselors (yes, as unbelievable as it may sound, these teenagers actually listened to someone significantly older than they were). They will tell you that the first few weeks they were beginning to believe that maybe their friends were right after all because things were not like they had imagined or expected. But they stuck with it and pretty soon they noticed that their teachers actually WANTED to see them every day, that they got to go to the University and meet faculty and staff members there, do activities to prepare them to be leaders and to have a little fun learning how to do different physical education activities. Finally, after 3 weeks of school they were assigned their

own laptop computer and began to use them in all of their classes to do their

work. Cafeteria food started to get more varied and their busses were getting

them to and from school a bit faster and, despite what their friends from their

middle school had predicted, they began to make more friends... Maybe it was

not such a bad place to be after all!

Later on the same website, I wrote the following conclusion to the story to that point in
time:

As is to be expected, not all of the students realized immediately just how lucky

they were to attend [XECHS] but bit-by-bit it began to sink in. While attending

the HESTEC Leadership Conference, the students heard students from other high

schools "yelling out" their school names or mascots. When the emcee asked them

where they were from, 100 voices tried to yell out "the [X] Early College High

School" in unison--that did not work and a few students quickly rallied the group

to yell out they were the "Scorpions" and at that moment, the class of 2012 began

to realize they WERE the [XECHS] Scorpions!

The campus mascot was selected as a scorpion similar to the one for the campus

associated Institute of Higher Education. Unfortunately, right after the grand opening,

the campus learned the logo was already registered to another school. The new mascot

and logo became a Blue Scorpion designed by one of the faculty.

The "glue" holding the campus together was and still is the school counselor.

The individual in this position when I was principal and at the time of the study came

from being the head counselor at one of the largest high schools in Texas to serve as the

lone counselor for the ECHS. This amazing person helped establish the academic

program while keeping the faculty, staff, and students sane. As noted by Ramsey-White in her ECHS related dissertation, students are "under a spotlight" and "under a lot of pressure" "…to achieve a lot. To do a lot in both places in high school and in college" (2012, p. 101). The feeling of being under the spotlight was not just for the students, but also for the faculty and staff as well at our ECHS. This is how I described the counselor in the campus website description of the campus:

> *As time went on the students and teachers got to know each other better and learned that they had the most wonderful counselor in all of [X'ville]--maybe even in the Nation--since if [XISD] is recognized by the Broad Foundation as one of the best schools in the nation and they were attending the best school in [XISD] then logically their counselor must be the best in the nation, right???*

I still believe that without this counselor, the students and the campus would not have achieved the success we did. The paraprofessional support staff was also very critical to the smooth functioning of this campus. The secretary for the campus had to serve as the coordinator for parental involvement activities and the counseling department secretary handled all of the data entry chores and served as the registrar. The third year the campus added an attendance clerk who assisted me in chasing errant students all over the campus of the university as students learned to deal with the freedom of the college setting.

The teachers for the ECHS were and are amazing teachers. This is what I wrote about the first group of faculty on the campus website in Fall 2008:

> *And let me tell you about their teachers... Their English teacher constantly makes them work to make their writing more clear and to laugh while she tortures them for torturing their grammar. Their BCIS teacher is definitely crazy but a real*

whiz with computers and makes learning about computers fun. Their Spanish teacher is not only great at teaching them how to conjugate verbs and pronounce big vocabulary words in Spanish but also turns out to be an inspiring Health teacher who helps them deal with stress in the fast lane. Their Math teacher loves to use calculators and neat visual technology to teach math and works with students morning, noon, and evening to help them master their mathematics skills and be ready to pass the college math class as soon as possible. Their World Geography teacher is always making them laugh as they learn more about the world around them using research and models. Their AVID teacher not only teaches them about the skills to be successful in high school (note-taking and test-taking skills) but can also help them with using their technology and a bit of other subjects as well. And their Biology teacher loves Biology and they are doing interesting experiments using a variety of science equipment in a first class high school science laboratory.

The expectations the ECHS teachers had to meet were high and complex. Because there were so many different instructional components and strategies that were required to be implemented by different programs that supported the students, teachers were getting very frustrated. To address this, in the fall of the second year, the faculty came together and compiled a chart around the JFF Common Instructional Framework (CIF). This chart matched the instructional strategies that teachers were expected to implement by the district, state, or ECHS model with each of the CIFs. As a benefit of creating the chart, the teachers could communicate with the different program staff that

came in to follow up on implemented requirements while simplifying the on-campus conversations among and between the faculty and staff.

College and career readiness is a critical piece of the education reform being implemented in the ECHS Initiative. The teachers at the ECHS were required to not only address the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for their courses, but were also trained in and expected to address the *Texas College Readiness Standards* adopted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board on January 24, 2008 in their instruction (Educational Policy Improvement Center, 2008). It is my belief that this focus on the IHE standards helped the faculty to address and achieve the level of rigor that was a critical component in the level of college readiness of the Class of 2012. When the campus underwent its AdvancED Southern Association of American Colleges and Schools and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) accreditation study, academic rigor was one of the areas of commendation in the report of the site visit for the campus.

The initial story posted as a link to the campus website was followed by another story I wrote about one year later:

> *We are now in the middle of our second year at the Early College High School and have two classes under way. This means double the number of teachers as well as students. It has been another semester of firsts with students putting on their first [XECHS] Talent Show, participating in the AVID Conference sponsored by the Viper's Sports organization, and a wide variety of other activities.*
>
> *Friday afternoons found these students participating in leadership classes,*

learning about personal fitness and touring various campus departments. The

sophomores took their fine arts elective class (Music Appreciation or Art History)

with well-known university instructors while freshmen took their first lecture

class, Kinesiology 1164, with 2 great professors.

These incredible students have accepted the challenge to attain not only

their high school diploma, but also attempt to get an associate of arts degree or

classes towards their bachelor degree. Way to go Blue Scorpions...

During the third year of the existence of the ECHS, the district was deeded

property from the university partner and began construction of a new facility for the

ECHS. I never got to move into the new facility; however, the ECHS has continued to be

successful beyond my leadership and that will always be a source of sincere satisfaction

and a validation of my selection of faculty and staff for the campus.

The campus was rated as "Exemplary" in the state accountability system the first

two years, but missed maintaining the "Exemplary" status because the mathematics

scores fell short of the "Commended" standard by less than one half of a percentage point

to drop to the rating to "Recognized" in my third year as principal. All Texas ECHS

campuses actually fight three "dragons" like those described by Craig (2003) with

different accountability system standards for the state, higher education and federal

government. I was proud that almost every student not only passed their high school

state mandated exams but also their college entrance exams that third year of the campus.

The final entry, in my online story was put on the school website in November

2010:

On August 23, 2010 a new story began for 89 students in the Class of 2012--they

began their Junior year in high school by starting the Fall term as full time

college freshmen. The first week was fast and furious with getting to classes,

meeting professors, starting tutorial classes, joining learning communities, and

figuring out how to make it across campus [almost a mile] in 10 minutes.

Some of the instructors who were the most skeptical about their

preparation in just 2 years were some of their earliest converts--telling staff that

the Blue Scorpions are at least as prepared as students with 4 years of high

school instead of just 2 years.

The unfolding of this story is a tale of determination and dreams and

thanks for the many organizations that are working together to support them.

Stayed tuned for more stories in this tale...

No further entries were shared publicly. This was in part because of the intense pace of

running an ECHS, but also because I was not the principal the following year. I was, as

foreshadowed in my beginning story, removed in the best interests of the district. Like

Henry Richards in the tale shared by Craig, I had multiple dragons in the backyard

(Craig, 2004).

The outcomes of opening the ECHS and more of the details of the process will be

re-storied around the five ECHS Core Principles and illustrated with the stories provided

by interviewing representative members of the Class of 2012. This was done in the spirit

of Schön (1983) who described the high ground of professional practice (high, hard

ground of effective use of research-based theory and technique) versus the swampy

lowland of messy situations not capable of being solved technically. He pointed out that

many high ground problems are of great technical interest, but low societal interest while

the swampy problems are of greatest human concern (p. 42).

Schön, in 1987, continued his push for a greater use of the reflection-in-action in teaching and learning in his book, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Profession,* which he wrote as a follow up to his work published in 1983, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. I saw this applying to the work of an ECHS because the model is based around providing students with actual college experience while they are still in high school. I related this to the way Schön described how difficult (or impossible) it would be for a student to learn architecture without attempting to design structures or a music student to learn music without practicing and guided practice (Schön, 1987). One of the threads that I found through all of the following students' stories is how important it was for them to learn the skills needed to be successful in college through experiencing them as well as being "taught" them. In particular the two skills that the participants repeat are "reading" (which they separate from just *reading*) and "studying" which they now understand is not the same as doing homework.

Introduction to the Participating Alumni

Four alumni from the Class of 2012 of the ECHS were interviewed as participants in this study. The purposive sampling was challenging in several ways. First, I wanted to make sure that various levels of ability and success in college were represented along with selecting students who were representative of the different demographics of the campus. Second, I have stayed in touch with a number of the alumni and know there are many great stories to tell from among them. Determining which alumni would be best able and available to tell their stories was another dilemma faced. Then, when the study

is completed and other students find out they were not selected for the study, would they understand that I could not include everyone? We have always said we were "family" and yet I am not telling all of their stories. Finally, I will always ask myself what if I had selected different students, could I have told the story of opening the ECHS more effectively?

Like this researcher, all of the participants are the first in their immediate family to attain a college degree. The alumni participating in the study were all adults (over 18 years old) and successfully graduated with Texas Distinguished Achievement Diplomas from the ECHS in this study as members of the Class of 2012. They were part of the initial class enrolled in the ECHS as freshmen in Fall 2008. Two had been accepted into other advance high school programs, but decided to attend the ECHS. Some have family members living out of the state of Texas and more have family members living in Mexico. All are minority (Hispanic) ethnicity and come from low socio-economic income level households. Spanish is the main language spoken in most of their households. Several are working and going to school, but not all are doing both. The participants selected their own pseudonyms for the study and were given multiple opportunities to end their participation as the process continued.

What follows are portions of the stories they shared in the interview process that provided a look at their present, their plans for the future at the time of the study, and reflections on their past. Quotes from the interviews have been edited to smooth out the texts for readability (deleting hesitations and stutters), but every effort was attempted to share the stories as told to me as the researcher. So, let us meet the participants: Ruby,

representing the "A" level student; John, representing the "A-B" student; Annabel, the "B-C" student; and Aphrodite, the student not enrolled in college at the time of the study.

Ruby's Story

   Introduction to the participant. Ruby was as one of the alumni purposely selected to be interviewed for this study because she was one of the at-risk students that fit the profile of the type of student the ECHS initiative is designed for and who has made the most of this opportunity. She was always one of the top students academically at the ECHS and fits the mold of students that many expect to be in the ECHS -- highly academically able, highly motivated, rarely absent, and never a discipline problem.

   At the time of the study, Ruby was twenty years old and a member of a large family in which she was the oldest and the first to attend college. Besides her parents, she had five younger brothers, a younger sister, and two young nephews living at home. Her family was of very modest income and, although she was not doing so at the time of the study, she had held part-time jobs to help with her personal expenses. She is literate in both English and Spanish: however, when excited or stressed, she slipped back to Spanish -- the primary language spoken at her home. She once told me about not being able to participate in an offered internship because her family's car broke down and it took a while to get fixed due to the financial challenges of her family.

   Present. At the time of the interview she was enrolled in the local university and had over 90 hours of coursework to her credit as of the Fall semester after graduating from the ECHS in June 2012. Her major was biological science with pre-medical related coursework. Ruby described her mix of sophomore and senior level coursework (italics added for clarity):

I'm taking genetics and that's… 3000 level. I'm taking the lab for genetics. I'm

taking [Anatomy & Physiology II]. Those are like… sophomore level. I'm taking

… chemistry II and the lab. And I'm taking evolution and that's a 4000 level

[course]. I'm not working, but I am tutoring for chemistry at the office of health

professions. It's only once a week [for] three hours.

    I have been shadowing a physician assistant and I really like the career. I

like general medicine and I understand it's kind of general medicine is general

and you can work in any area like cardiology, … pediatrics, and, …I've heard a

lot of medical students that go to medical school and they want to do something at

first and then they end up doing something else. And for me it will be … general

medicine and well that's one of my goals.

Past. When asked to reflect on why she decided to apply to and enroll in the

ECHS, Ruby described the influence of her counselor,

I used to go and talk to the counselor often… he saw this as an opportunity for me

and I kind of trusted him and I wasn't sure where I wanted to go. But I… this

sounded like a fun and interesting, uh, experience going to… a high school that

will prepare us for college … I didn't even know that we would get a laptop. …

But he said that, … we would graduate with… two years of college and that

sounded good. Even though, …we were not gonna have sports and choir and

band and art and everything, …I thought it was okay.

Future. Ruby went on to explain that even though she received a large and

prestigious scholarship, it will not pay for medical school so she will probably need to

finish college and start practicing as a Physician Assistant (P. A.) before attempting

medical school. I knew Ruby had been interested in a medical career from her beginning

year at the ECHS, but it was interesting to listen to her reasoning about how she planned

her future:

> *...for now I have to do the Bachelors in biology and I am interested in going into*
>
> *[a Physician's Assistant's program] and that's a Masters degree. And well I'm*
>
> *working towards that ... before I think I want to go to medical school. ...it's kind*
>
> *of ... hard for the situations I'm going through right now. ...I don't think I am*
>
> *prepared for medical school yet, because I have not taken the MCAT and I still*
>
> *have a lot of more courses. And if I want to go to medical school, I should be*
>
> *taking like the MCAT like next week. ...I still have a lot of material I have not*
>
> *covered yet because I still need more upper level courses.*

Ruby continued, explaining more about her MCAT and medical school plans:

> *So I am still planning to ... take the MCAT, because ... that's still one of*
>
> *my...goals, ...medical school. [I think] physician assistant because it's a shorter*
>
> *program and I... even though I got the [deleted] Scholarship, um, they don't pay*
>
> *for medical school. That was a bummer. ... I don't know why. People ask me ...*
>
> *I feel sad to tell them it doesn't. They... pay for like Ph.D.'s and other things, but*
>
> *I... don't want to do research on a Ph.D. on molecular biology and genetics.*

Ruby was obviously frustrated when she talked about her strong interest in becoming a

Physician's Assistant and eventually a general practice physician, but that to use her

scholarships she would be forced to go into biological research, an area she was not

interested in pursuing, rather than having a scholarship that truly supported her desires

and dreams.

Annabel's Story

Introduction to the participant. Annabel was another of the Class of 2012

interviewed for the study by me. She was chosen because she, to me, embodied a student

who succeeds due to determination and hard work. She does not match the profile of the

typical student that I have found people expect to be in the program. Annabel has always

had major struggles in reading and admits schoolwork is hard for her. She was not in the

top group of students academically although she was almost never absent and definitely

not a discipline problem. She admitted she at times considered giving up, but then, "I

wanted to be known as that girl that 'oh wow,' she actually made it through even though

it was hard."

Present. At the time of this study, Annabel was a biomedical program student at

the local university where she was enrolled in classes that run as accelerated three-week-

long sessions instead of the standard semester schedule. The following was how she

shared her present activities (italics added for clarity)

> *I'm currently going to school. I am in the biomedical program. This is my, I*
>
> *believe my second semester in the biomedical program. I'm also working at*
>
> *[deleted name] Spa. I am a laser technician there. I work the morning shift.*
>
> *Thursdays, I work all day, and Fridays I work uh, from 6:00 to 8:00.*

Annabel continued to explain to me about her participation in a new biomedical program

at the IHE where she was a full-time student:

> *...our courses just last, uh, well, it's an entire semester, but it's like a unit.*
>
> *...they're three weeks each. ...this is my third class right now. It's Intro to*
>
> *Physiology. It's pretty hard. It's not easy. ...classes go by super quick. ...we*

have a tutorial prior to our class. ...from 3:00 to 4:30. Uh, my class starts at

4:40, and it's Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays.

One of her classmates, John, also a participant, further described the program in his story.

Past. Annabel had a very vivid recollection of how she decided to apply to the ECHS and, although it has been substantially edited for length, I believe the following still captures the excitement and apprehension she conveyed during the interview:

Well, I was asking the counselor, 'cause he looked so-so troubled and so worried. And I'm like, "Are you okay? Do you need any help or anything I can help you out?" He's all like, "Well actually, no. I'm just, I have, I have to get all these applications together. ...they're applications for the early college." ...I'm like what ...application? And he's all like, you didn't go to the presentation? I'm all like no. So he started to explain to me a little bit more about the program of uh, how it was for the first generation, ...for low income people families and ...a lot more about the program. I was really interested in it, but ...I just want to try everything, so I'm like can I apply for it or is it too late already? ...I had to write an essay and I had to get my grades. ...I was running around. [LAUGH] ... And my essay was the worst part, oh my goodness. ... I wrote it in printing, printer paper. Handwritten. ...then came the interview about 10 days later, if I'm not mistaken. .... worst feeling in the world. [LAUGH] That was my first interview ever. So I was so worried. ...What are they gonna ask me? Do I look okay? Do I smell bad? ... It was in the library and it was like a little sitting area, and I believe it was instructor R[deleted], Ms. M[deleted], they asked a few questions.

> *It was really nice. It was very calm and relaxing and not too much pressure. … I*
>
> *guess you expect the worst when it's really not bad.*

Future. Each of the study's participants had something to share that I did not

anticipate although I had been trying to stay in touch with these students over time. In

this students' case it was the scope of her future plans as well as the new additional

interest she had developed. Here was what Annabel told me about her plans after noting

that she still needed to take a couple more of her basic courses that she did not complete

while at the ECHS:

> *I've been thinking of having a minor in sign language. I'm not sure if I should go*
>
> *for it or not. I'm indecisive, but I'm pretty sure I think I might go for it. Um, last*
>
> *semester I had a… Intro to Sign I, or Sign Language I, and …I got a whole*
>
> *different perspective of the deaf community. …'cause they are discriminated*
>
> *when it shouldn't be like that. …I think I might get a minor in sign language.*
>
> > *The bachelors right now with the biomedical program, that's a four year*
> >
> > *plan …my goal right now is just to get through the biomedical program, my short*
> >
> > *goal, but my actual dream is to be an OB/GYN… That's what I really want. I*
> >
> > *know it's not gonna be easy, but also nothing comes easy. You have to work for*
> >
> > *what you want. …Persistence and responsibility.*

When I reflected on my perception of this student when she first joined the ECHS family

in Fall 2008, I realized now how low my expectations were of her compared to her own

expectations as shared in the interview. As an education professional, I am ashamed to

admit how much I allowed labels to influence me. Her maturity and ability to be

employed while enrolled in a rigorous four-year degree program should be commended and applauded.

John's Story

Introduction to the participant. Another of the students interviewed, John, was chosen because he had been willing as a student to approach me or other staff when he believed that there were activities or processes that he or his peers felt needed to be changed. John was a leader on the campus and in the activities in which he participated. I watched him mature a great deal during in the three years I was his principal. John comes from another modest income family with good attendance, few discipline issues and solid grades. When he was selected as a participant I still thought he was taking courses toward an engineering degree; however, at the time of this study he had also joined the biomedical science program in which Annabel was enrolled and told me that he was now considering becoming a physician.

Present. John described his present college status and the accelerated biomedical science program he was enrolled in as a freshman/junior (italics added for clarity):

I'm currently a full-time biomedical science student. …by credits, I'm a junior, …that's what I'm doing in school. I'm actually gonna start working this week. I'm gonna be a sales associate at a clothing store. And I'm looking forward to it. It's my first job.

Well, the [biomedical science] program is not set as a traditional pathway goes, …classes last about a month each during the semester. So I'm currently taking six classes. …the coursework for it is a little bit heavy, but …I enjoy it because it's not traditional. In the biology department, one would take Biology I,

Biology II, and then Biology III [LAUGH] ...then Genetics, and here, I already

took Genetics, Immunology, [and] Physiology. ...a lot of courses I wouldn't have

taken maybe until my junior or senior year if I were in the regular biology

department. ...the program really helps you prepare for what you want to do with

your life.

John continued talking about the program and the mentor he selected to help guide him:

Actually, I got to choose him, ...and I chose, uh, the dean of the college. He

always asks the why, the how questions, and I chose him because I think he would

help me out. ...He's a busy man, but ...whenever I have a question, I can ask him

through email or something.

It was great to learn that the program had a mentoring component knowing that these

students do not have parents who can guide them through the complex higher education

pathway—especially towards success in a medical program. I was also very impressed

that this 18-year-old high school graduate had the confidence and foresight to choose the

dean as a mentor and be able to tap into his expertise.

Past. When asked to speak about his decision to apply to and enroll in the ECHS,

John talked about his attraction to the opportunity to get started on his college education

as soon as possible.

Well, I just, honestly, I just thought regular high school experience wasn't going

to be rigorous enough. I thought the other college experience would be suitable

for what I wanted, which was a college education. ...and I wanted to start my

undergraduate studies as soon as possible.

One of the other reasons John was selected as a possible participant was because, in the first six weeks of his freshman year at the ECHS, he convinced his mother and I that the ECHS was not the place for him and we allowed him to return to his zoned comprehensive high school. I asked him to tell me what he remembered about leaving and why he decided to return to the ECHS.

> *Yes. ...my freshman year, I left the school for about two or three days, and once I got to the regular high school, I immediately decided that wasn't for me. ...as I went through the classes, [in] one class, a professor didn't show up for both days I was there. In another class, they were behind in comparison to the early college by about a month and a half.*

Future. I reminded John that the last time we had talked about his choice of future careers he had planned on pursuing a degree related to computers and engineering. This is how he storied his change in majors:

> *When I first started at [XECHS], ...I don't know how many times I changed my major ...I went to business and then engineering, and finally science. I always knew I liked science, but I just never really thought about actually being able to go to medical school. Well, actually just one day I said, "Why not?" And science is a field I enjoy, I enjoy the most, so... I mean, why wouldn't I be able to go? Hopefully I'll be in medical school once I graduate.*

Further conversation actually led to a clarification that what he really wanted to do was find ways to bring together his interest in computers, engineering, and biology. He shared how he was "saving" some of his scholarship funds so that he can take additional calculus during the summer. He was concerned about how he could afford medical

school, but was stretching his Greater Texas Foundation Scholarship funds as far as he was able and starting a part-time job to help save for paying for books and additional classes.

Aphrodite's Story

Introduction to the participant. This alumnus of the Class of 2012 was selected from among the students that are not currently enrolled in college that are still living and working in the area of the study. This young woman was very academically able and capable of being an excellent student, but did not always take care of her academics first while enrolled at the ECHS. At times, she was mature well beyond her years in helping her mother and younger brother through difficult situations while still being a regular teenager at other times. She was the first in her immediate family to go to college and was seen by other family members as a role model based on what she has already accomplished. She did not want to attend college in Texas, "I'm not staying in Texas. That was the first thing I told my mom that as soon as I got the opportunity I was going to leave Texas."

Present. Although Aphrodite had accumulated over 60 hours of college credit, she did not get to depart to begin her studies at her choice of out-of-state university. Although she was accepted by three New York area universities and offered some scholarships, none offered sufficient support to pay her to live on and take classes. She was taking the year of this study off from college to build up her savings and help at home. This was the way Aphrodite described her present situation (italics added for clarity):

I currently am working at [restaurant name]. I'm waiting to start school.

Q: So right now you're working trying to get money for school or…?

A: School and just, well …helping out my mom, 'cause she needs my help, that's why I couldn't go off to school right away.

…I still need to finish pay[ing] for the deposit [for the university dorm]. And I'm halfway there. … my mom was …supposed to move with me, but now she's like changing her mind. …that makes it hard.

Aphrodite admitted there were some difficult family situations she was dealing with, but did not want to go into any details here. She continued:

…working here… I go out a lot more than I used to, you know, especially now that I can put gas in the truck and …take it whenever I want. …financially it helps a lot, not just emotionally …it's a big help. …people who have money or who don't know the value of a dollar, won't ever know what it feels like. They won't ever know.

I mean, I'm struggling now, you know, and …we aren't, you know, middle class and it's so much more harder [sic] for us… I'm struggling right now between staying home with my mom and taking care of her, and helping her raise my little brother, rather than to going off to college. And you know, it's made it easier, I mean it's still nagging at my mind, you know, but it's made it much more easier knowing that I do have college hours, knowing that I do know how to do it [go to college], I do know how to approach it, …I do know how to get everything started. …I'd rather have that than to not have anything.

Like a number of her classmates with whom I have stayed in touch and two of those interviewed, she was very reluctant to take out student loans. She spoke more

about her situation and about how she was trying to decide what to do about going to

school on the East Coast:

> *Well I'm actually, I'm actually looking into it, I'm not going to lie, because of the*
>
> *fact that I am going to a private university and …it's out of state so it's very*
>
> *expensive. Like I think for one year it was like 50,000… That's a lot… I want to*
>
> *get well informed of it first, and see… if it's actually worth taking out the loan…*
>
> *but a lot of my friends, they don't even want to risk it for messing up their credit*
>
> *score and later it will affect them in later life.*

It would be hard for me to criticize a student's difficult decision to put college on hold

rather than going into debt even though I know staying out makes it more likely they will

not complete college. I have made the same decision in my past. I believe it is important

to understand that she realized it was likely she would not have over 60 college hours at

this point in her academic career if she had gone to a comprehensive high school.

Past. When asked to describe how she ended up attending the ECHS, Aphrodite

spoke about her dreams for her future as a middle school student:

> *Well because …I've always wanted to get into Harvard, that was my main goal,*
>
> *that was always been the whole one thing I wanted to do. …I wanted to be a*
>
> *lawyer, and …I know how hard it is to get into Harvard, and I know that it was*
>
> *going to take something you know, to give me a push, or something that would*
>
> *make me standout of the group. … when I heard of [the ECHS], I mean, an 18*
>
> *year old with an Associates, that stands out, or even with, you know, as much*
>
> *college credit as I gain. And so I knew that would help me standout you know,*

...what an average, you know, high school student wouldn't have. So that was the main reason.

She continued speaking about what she did to try to get into the ECHS:

...as soon as I heard about it I was so excited, I didn't even think twice, I started working on the application right away. ...I prayed and prayed, ...I got my English teacher, ...[to] help me with my essays...

Future. Aphrodite had changed her dream a bit since middle school when she thought she wanted to go to Harvard University to become a lawyer. Her current plan at the time of the study was to join the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She described her rationale for changing her mind:

I want to be an FBI agent, what I ultimately want, its always going to stay in law, ...not going to go away from that but ... I want to be outside and I don't want to be stuck in an office. I want to travel a lot.

She was considering joining the military because she believed that the combination of college and military experience could help her start her law enforcement career with the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a FBI agent without being a city law enforcement officer first (which she considered starting at the bottom).

...the thing about it is that I don't want to start from the very bottom, you know, like I was actually thinking about joining the Marines to get, to gain military experience and then from there, ...hopefully start out ...like midway through, and work myself up from there. 'Cause with the college... and military experience it's easier to get into an FBI position.

When I met with Aphrodite for the follow-up interview, she clarified what she meant about what she wants to do (or rather not to do), "[I] don't want the restrictions, limitations… be at a national level…broader sense of things. …don't want to be cop then detective then FBI agent… some people take years to even get into the FBI."

Summary

This chapter presented the stories of myself as the researcher and the participants of the study by sharing stories of the present, past and plans for the future. The next chapter contains the re-storying of these stories around the Core Principles of the Early College High School model and the research questions developed from the questions posed by myself, the researcher. In the re-storying, the narrative threads that were found tying the stories together were organized around the ECHS five Core Principles as stated by the Jobs For the Future and then these threads were woven together to develop the themes around the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

STORIES RE-STORYED

Introduction

The story constellation narrative inquiry approach used in this dissertation

required me to "re-story" the narratives of the participants and of myself using

burrowing, broadening, and re-storying techniques to reveal the threads and describe the

themes that bring the research into focus. By using both burrowing and broadening, this

chapter will continue to share additional perspectives of the participants and myself to

further clarify the impact of the ECHS on the participants and others. The re-storying

was used to re-tell the parts of the stories that support or exemplify the threads and

themes.

Re-storying the Stories Around the ECHS Core Principles

The following sections re-story the stories from the prior chapter and introduction

using the ECHS Core Principles as stated by the Jobs For The Future Early College High

School Initiative. As the researcher, I also included examples of how the ECHS campus

involved in this study implemented the Core Principles along with insights from other

ECHS researchers.

Core Principle 1: Early colleges are committed to serving students

underrepresented in higher education. According to the Texas Education Agency

(TEA) Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report for the ECHS for 2008-

2009, the first class was composed of 99 students who were 99% Hispanic, 97%

economically disadvantaged (eligible for free/reduced lunch), 6% Limited English

Proficient (LEP), and 21% At-Risk (based on at least one of the TEA criteria) (AEIS,

2009). In a Texas High School Project (THSP) grant report submitted in 2009, it was

noted that over 90% of the students were self-reported as the first in their family to get to

graduate from college. All of the students interviewed for this study were to be the first

in their immediate families to graduate with four-year degrees and, in at least one case,

were already the first of their immediate family to graduate from high school.

Some of the Class of 2012 students had parents or siblings who had started

college, but self-reported that no immediate family members had completed college when

they enrolled at the campus. In fact, one of the interesting side effects of the "free"

college for the students was that it allowed a few of the parents to return to college

themselves or helped free up funds for other siblings to attend. Aphrodite describes how

her older brother recently had a conversation with her about wanting to start college

himself:

> *… as funny as it may sound, my older brother, now he wants to go to college.*
>
> *…when he was living here he was, I was trying to get him into [college], you*
>
> *know, and … one day he comes up to me and he's like, I feel bad. I'm like, why?*
>
> *He's like, because you're my little sister and you showed me … how it's supposed*
>
> *to be done, you know. I was supposed to be the one that shows you, but you're*
>
> *the one that showed me…*

Aphrodite spoke to me about how touched she was that her older brother apologized for

not being a better role model and praised her for being a role model for her younger

brother.

Recruiting the students from the targeted group has been an on-going challenge

for ECHS campuses around Texas based on conversations held at ECHS principal

gatherings and conferences I attended between 2008 and 2011. The ECHS students get recruited when they are in Grade 8 and it is a significant mind shift for students who are at-risk of dropping out to make the commitment to not only stay in school, but go to school where they are told they must take harder classes and do more (not less) homework. One of the strategies used to recruit these students is to promote the opportunity to get six years of school out of the way in only four years and the added "attraction" that they should find the classes "challenging" instead of "slow" or "boring."

It was my personal experience that the best way to get students interested was to allow current students to put together a video about the school and then have potential students learn about the challenges and opportunities from current students. A couple of the alumni told me they are ready to volunteer to recruit as well. When I asked the participants about what they thought the ECHS could do to get more students to enroll in the ECHS, the most common response was to tell them to "do it." Further probing brought out the following recommendation from John, "I would just tell them that anything is possible, and if they really want to start their own college education as soon as possible, the early college experience is definitely worth it." "It's well worth [it] you know, …it's the advantage … you gain from it is so much bigger than what you don't get from it," is what Aphrodite wanted to tell potential students.

Another challenge experienced in recruiting students for the ECHS was the persistent pre-conceived notion of campus administrators, teachers, and counselors that these schools are or should be for only the gifted and talented students. Part of the reason for this appeared to be based on the idea that only gifted and talented students are capable of compressing six years of education into only four years. This notion also seems to

persist because of the resistance of staff to believing that struggling learners can be accelerated to readiness. Another reason for the resistance to promote the opportunity for at-risk students was the belief that the program should be for students who are already successful at accelerated courses such as pre-Advanced Placement classes. I had numerous discussions with campus and district staff about allowing the students to begin and remain in the pre-Advanced Placement courses when they do not have or maintain at least a "B" average in the course.

Core Principle 1, narrative thread 1: College preparation opportunity. This thread came out by asking the participants to "Look back on your decision to become a student at the ECHS and tell me why you recall deciding to apply." Three of the study participants talked about recruiting students by students and one volunteered to continue to do so as an alumnus. All spoke about telling students about the campus and making the candidates aware that they would really have to *study*. Since these participating alumni were the first class (the "guinea pig class" as noted by John in his interview), they came to the ECHS without hearing from other students about the experience and did not know what they were getting themselves into. Ruby and Annabel both reported that it was mostly due to the influence of a counselor along with teachers that they decided to enroll in the ECHS so they could be in a college preparatory setting. John said he applied because he "thought regular high school experience wasn't going to be rigorous enough. …I wanted to start my undergraduate studies as soon as possible." Aphrodite told of how she "wanted to get into Harvard, …I know how hard it is to get into Harvard, and I know that it was going to take something …that would make me standout of the group."

While there was attrition from the ECHS campus as students decided that the challenge was not for them or other situations interfered with the ability of a student to continue in the school, even those students have been heard to tell new candidates that it was a worthwhile endeavor. I believe Annabel stated the best rationale for choosing the ECHS when friends tried to convince her to leave:

I see my friends that went to the high school and they're like "why don't you come over here?" "Just get out of that program." "It's not helping you do anything." "You're just wasting your time in academics." "Come on." … "We have everything over here." "We're your friends." "How are you gonna leave us here?"

And it was so tempting, …like a kid, and telling him not to eat that piece of cake. It was so tempting, but then …are they really gonna be with me throughout all my life? I mean, I'm not saying that I don't want them in my life … but I thought in the future … what if for some reason I can't continue my studies? …at least I have something.

There were several students who left the ECHS (as did John) and returned. Similar to the story of John, Martin Valdez reported an anecdote from one of the participants in her study about a student who had to leave the ECHS and found her classes were boring and too slow after the ECHS coursework (2009). One of the more vivid memories I have was of one student who left the ECHS for a couple of weeks and then skipped his classes at the comprehensive high school to walk to the ECHS and ask to re-enroll. Unfortunately, I was not able to schedule this student as a participant. I am sure his story would have been a very interesting one.

This thread was not unique to this dissertation study. Dissertations by Farrell (2009), Munoz (2011) and Brenner (2012) are a few of the ECHS related studies that help to highlight the opportunity thread. Program evaluations such as those conducted of the ECHS Initiative (AIR & SRI, 2006; Berger et al., 2010) also found this opportunity was the draw for students to enroll in the ECHS campuses. This should be expected since this is one of the main goals and purposes of the ECHS Initiative.

Core Principle 1, narrative thread 2: Missed sports and music electives. Another challenge the campus encountered in recruiting and enrolling students was the "un-recruiting" by music directors and athletic coaches. As students who were great in these areas, but were not necessarily the best academically agreed to attend the ECHS, staff found during the summer programs that these adults were contacting the students or having the members of the organizations contact the students to convince them to come to the comprehensive schools instead. It was disheartening to believe that fellow educators would consider denying these students the opportunity to have an opportunity to attain two years of free college education so they could be in band or choir or football instead. Many ECHS campuses now work out the logistics to allow the students to attempt to participate in the electives at their "zoned" comprehensive campus while still attending the ECHS. Based on conversations in the past with other ECHS principals, most students find doing this very difficult and find they must choose one or the other.

When the participants were asked, "In reflecting again on your participation, is there anything you wish would have been different about your ECHS experiences*?"* they all discussed missing elective courses including band, choir, and various athletic activities. Annabel admits missing sports: "I would have really liked… sports. For me,

sports was [sic] the number one thing in school. When I was in middle school, the only

reason I passed was to be able to play." Ruby missed choir, but knew others also missed

sports, "…I think there would have been like a little space there for like a choir or like

maybe… somebody else would say sports, maybe they could have want sports."

Aphrodite said, "what I told a lot of people is like, well yeah, would you rather be playing

sports now and then have to like, you know, make up for all this time later [referring to

the college hours]." This attitude was also found in the dissertation study conducted by

Brenner (2012) with North Texas ECHS students and noted as a challenge to enrollment

in the study conducted by Carter (2012) conducted with ECHS campuses in Ohio.

Like the campuses in North Carolina in the study by Hall (2008), the ECHS here

created or implemented a large variety of clubs and informal sports activities to help

address the need for students to have these opportunities. The faculty and staff went out

of their way to establish organizations to entice as many students as possible into being

involved in some extra-curricular activity. The campus offered (and still offers) students

the opportunity to participate in FIRST Robotics, theatrical and musical performances,

culture-related activities (musical, dance, and travel activities), and more. In addition,

once the students were in their junior year of high school and full time college students

they began participating in the intra-mural basketball and soccer competitions at the

university -- sometimes with just the ECHS students, but also on mixed teams with

"regular" college students as they became engaged in the university culture. The ECHS

students were given the opportunity to perform with college groups such as the folkloric

dance group and be disc jockeys at the university. Several of the ECHS students

performed in musical groups while attending the ECHS and were still performing at the

time of this study, determined not to give up on their musical aspirations while still going to college pursuing non-music degrees.

Core Principle 1, narrative thread 3: "It's worth it." A third narrative thread emerged when the participants were asked "Is there anything else you would like to share with students who are considering applying to an ECHS?" Annabel thought recruiters needed to remind students that, "it will help you a lot and you would be so advanced in life compared to other students that are probably your age that are probably applying at any type of university or college." Ruby recommended that students be told:

> *You're gonna have to study a lot. And maybe to tell us in your, like in your first two years, really learn all the skills you really need to learn because whenever you're in college, it's going to be different. ...but it's worth it because you're gonna get an education and-and you're gonna get a good job and you're gonna learn a lot of new things.*

John echoed part of what Ruby said and recommended telling potential students how "anything is possible" and getting to "start college through the ECHS was worth it." Aphrodite was adamant that attending the ECHS was worth it, "To definitely do it."

Core Principle 2: Early colleges are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success. In the case of the ECHS campus that I opened, the funds from the initial grants to assist with startup costs were not actually received until after the university and district had already invested over a million dollars in facilities and staffing. Even with the strong commitment with the partnership, the startup would have been difficult to conduct without the strong financial support and

oversight the campus received through the Texas High School Project and its funders. Sustainability is one of the major challenges faced by all ECHS campuses because some of the financial benefits accrue to the individual student or family rather than to the organizations directly.

The campus has continued to remain operational since the ending of the external funding sources and, in fact, the district and university have collaborated to build the campus on the university grounds that opened in August 2012. The outcomes to date for the students have been strong enough that the local university has agreed to continue to be the higher education partner. This was significant because the university must waive tuition and fees for the courses taken by the ECHS students. The Hoffman and Vargas ECHS guide (2010) for policy makers produced by Jobs For the Future and the Berger et al. (2010) program evaluation both noted the challenge to the ECHS model of limited funding or lack of the additional costs per pupil associated with provide the college course opportunities. I am reminded of the television advertisements that specify all of the costs of doing an activity, but note the experience was "priceless" and I believe this applies to the ECHS opportunity for students.

Core Principle 2, narrative thread 1: Importance of collaboration. From the very beginning of the partnership, the Institute of Higher Education (IHE) staff, district staff, and campus staff continued to work together in the planning and implementation of the ECHS. There was continuous collaboration between the entities and the liaison position from the IHE partner was actively involved with the campus and students on a weekly basis. Other ECHS researchers noted that a lack of collaboration can be a serious challenge to the success and viability for the ECHS model implementation. Based on

studies conducted by Langley (2009), McAdams (2010), Heidemann (2010), and Carter (2012), if the partnership between the ECHS and the IHE does not communicate or collaborate effectively then the implementation can struggle or even fail. The Texas Education Agency considers the partnership collaboration to be of such importance that five of the sixteen ECHS criteria focus on this principle and there are three that specifically address the collaboration component (see Appendix B for these criteria).

One of the components unique to this ECHS was the partnering IHE's Title V grant beginning in Fall 2010. The ECHS did not have to hire and organize a mentoring and tutoring program because the opportunity came along at just the right time for the first few classes of the ECHS students to be involved in the grants program. When they were seniors, some students in the Class of 2012 were eligible as full-time college students to be hired as mentors and tutors to the ECHS and other college freshmen in the Title V cohorts.

Core Principle 3: Early colleges and their higher education partners and community jointly develop an integrated academic program so all students earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion. The district and university staff continued to work diligently over the years to ensure students had the opportunity to earn up to 60 hours of college credit while completing the high school course requirements leading towards at least a Recommended Graduation Plan. An article in the local paper about the campus (verified by campus staff) shows 34 of the 89 graduates of the campus attaining an Associate Degree from the IHE partnering organization prior to them graduating from the ECHS (Morton, 2012). In conversations with students at the graduation ceremonies and in other contexts, I have been told by

several other students (who did not graduate with an Associate degree) that they attained around 60 hours, but missed attaining the degree by a course or two. Based on unpublished information provided by the university Title V grant staff, the average number of completed course hours for the 89 students that were enrolled was over 45 hours with an average course completion rate of 82%.

This performance can be compared with the Jobs For the Future national data posted on their website in March 2013 that the students graduating from an ECHS are now averaging 36 college credits and 23% earned an associate degree by the time they complete high school. A quick comparison shows that the ECHS students in this study were averaging significantly more college credits or hours and the ECHS had about 40% of the students graduate from college with an associate degree before they graduated from high school.

Core Principal 3, narrative thread 1: Real college. This narrative thread emerged most clearly based on the following interview prompts: "What do you recall as some of the most important lessons you learned or experiences you had as an ECHS student?" and "What ECHS activities made the most difference in helping prepare you to be a college student?" This thread broke down into the early experiences during the first two years around the Friday afternoon activities and the second two years of actual college attendance.

Ruby, in addressing the college class aspect, told me, "11th grade, when we came here. …we were actually taking a class with a college professor." Aphrodite addressed the difference between dual enrollment classes offered at the regular high schools and being in actual college courses:

So, I have a friend who took …courses, and then he went to [IHE] and he's like, it's totally different. I'm like, yeah, it is different. You know, it's not the same when the teachers come in 'cause you're still surrounded by people who think like you do.

This thread also came through in Core Principle 5 as participants shared their belief in the ECHS model. John and other participants did express the hope that more students could have the opportunity to experience college while in high school. The program evaluation of the ECHS Initiative conducted by Berger et al. (2010) emphasized that the "evidence thus far is that high schools can be created where all students are prepared for and most receive early experiences in college" (p. 346).

Core Principal 3, narrative thread 2: Read and study. This narrative thread also emerged based on the following interview prompts: "What do you recall as some of the most important lessons you learned or experiences you had as an ECHS student?" and "What ECHS activities made the most difference in helping prepare you to be a college student?" Ruby defined this as getting "hard assignments," and being encouraged by her ECHS English teacher to "read a lot." Annabel credited her Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and English classes as preparing her. She spoke about how the AVID course helped her better organize her studying, "Because I am an organized person, but AVID taught me a whole different level and a whole different way of organization, as in academically," while she credited her English class for challenging her, "Because I don't think I've ever had a class that hard in my life." She actually said that college is "…a lot easier that what that class was…"

John (rather sheepishly because of the way he fought doing Cornell notes when in his AVID classes) shared how, "I tried to share that with other people sometimes. For example, even in my math class, I would take Cornell notes and they came in handy." Aphrodite echoed John in explaining, "I learned …taking notes--that actually paid off. Although I didn't like the way we had to write it [referring to the Cornell note format] but …the note taking part, that helped me, and I was being more organized with that." Annabel recalled:

> *I would have the AVID binder. …it really helped, even if it was kind of pokey.*
> *…especially now since I really see where we had to keep all our papers. …So I*
> *had already kept them and …I was able to do my midterm and not be having to*
> *ask anyone else."*

The main AVID strategies implemented campus-wide were the Cornell note format, the WICR activities, the AVID binder and peer tutorials.

Aphrodite described how she had to go from taking it easy in middle school to actually being engaged in classes at the ECHS:

> *before I could…, miss school for a whole week, come back take the test and I*
> *would ace it. And now I …have to study, I actually had to take notes, … I was*
> *really bad at taking notes … usually I read something and remember it, but there*
> *was times where I actually had to take notes and I had to reread the same thing I*
> *had already read.*

Ruby, when prompted by me, as the researcher, more clearly to describe what she meant by really *reading and studying* provided this example:

Sometimes reading involves doing practice problems. ...for example is for my

chemistry. [Instructors]... do teach us a lot of concepts and definitions, concepts,

but the test is going to have more problems. So, by reading, I mean going into the

chapter and reading the concepts but then looking at all the examples, the

practice problems, and doing it by myself. Practicing problems, on my own and

trying... to understand them and ...how they got to that point and why. And for

genetics is as well I have to read the-the concepts and, um, I have to read

concepts and definitions and the history behind what we, what we're doing right

now. And, um, understand how they did certain experiment, because we're gonna

be asked about that on the test.

Conley tells us "Many students enter college with strong academic knowledge and skills,

but struggle nevertheless. The reason, in many instances, is that they did not necessarily

develop the self-management skills…" (2010, p. 72). This was borne out by many

involved in the ECHS and one that the ECHS continues to seek a better, more effective

way to get students to the understanding of what it takes to succeed in college that Ruby

and Aphrodite now have.

Core Principle 4: Early colleges engage all students in a comprehensive

support system that develops academic and social skills, as well as the behaviors and

conditions necessary for college completion. This was one of the more challenging of

the core principles to implement and the one that focused the most on the educational

theories that needed to be implemented. Student responses were acquired by the two

prompts: "How prepared academically do you believe you are now to complete a four-

year degree?" and "How prepared socially do you believe you are now to complete a four-year degree?"

The Jobs For the Future support and other organizations brought in through the Texas High School Project and the campus focused on many of the instructional strategies that have shown significant promise for successful learning, especially for at-risk and/or second language learners. The main strategies implemented by the ECHS teachers were organized around the "Common Instructional Framework." In addition, the following strategies were included as being the "what works" for the population of students that attended the ECHS: differentiated instruction, sheltered instruction, and the AVID program skills. The entire high school content-based faculty was also trained in the College Board® professional development for pre-Advanced Placement and/or Advanced Placement.

The university worked closely with the ECHS to provide on campus activities for the students when they were freshmen and sophomores. Almost every Friday the entire student body boarded buses to travel to the university for activities that included sports, their college credit physical fitness class, leadership activities, presentations by faculty and program staff, and the opportunity to take, and if needed retake, their college entrance exams. The assigned liaison at the university was very instrumental in arranging these weekly activities.

Once the ECHS had juniors attending the university as full-time students, the IHE's Title V grant was a critical component for providing the "comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills, as well as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion." The grant program provided small group mentoring

done by college students along with tutorials guided by successful college students who actually attended most of the classes alongside the ECHS students. The program also provided support by conducting multiple sessions for the ECHS students on relationships—both personal and academic. The grant provided a full-time counselor in addition to the students' access to the regular IHE academic advisors.

The students were enrolled in an AVID course all four years. The campus was fortunate to have district and grant support for this because other ECHS that did not have the funding had to design their own curricula to offer this vital component in helping this population become college ready. The course was taught by teachers who were trained in implementing instructional practices designed to support students' academic success. The classes became more focused on investigating careers, learning about college life, applying to colleges and applying for scholarships. Many of the components that were included in the four years of this program have been found to be important in the work of Conley (2005).

Core Principle 4, narrative thread 1: Rigorous high school coursework. As was noted in the responses of the students for Core Principle 3, it was not so much the content that students recall as preparing them for their college classes as the level of difficulty of the content that made the difference in helping them to be prepared to complete college. All of the participants referenced their English coursework and several noted that it was harder than some of the college courses they took. John mentioned the "projects in English, projects in history every single week almost, …In English, I had the book talks." The ECHS English teachers became notorious for their very creative and extensive book report projects. Annabel described the presentations as:

I didn't know I could read a book in such an amount of time, explain it to the whole class and make them understand and not be bored. …I'm a very creative person and I love to show it, and that's how it helps me being able to read, to explain, to take notes of something you're reading, but at the same time summarizing everything and not writing a whole other chapter of it, making it small and getting the most important details out of it and getting out what the-what the author really wants you to know…

Two of the participants referenced both their English and their mathematics classes in high school, again for the rigor rather than the specific math skills. John talked about the expectation for Cornell notes, "even in my math class, …I would take Cornell notes and they came in handy." Berger et al. (2010) described some of the variety of supports provided by ECHS campuses in the latest published evaluation of the ECHS Initiative.

Core Principle 4, narrative thread 2: Working with others. Working with others was derived as a thread from participants' responses to the Interview prompt regarding: "What do you recall as some of the most important lessons you learned…" and "How prepared socially do you believe you are now to complete a four-year degree?" All of the participants at some point in the interviews ended up talking about learning to work and study with other students.

Aphrodite, although not currently in college, spoke to how now she has the confidence to work with others although she started out afraid to admit she was high school student taking college classes with "real" college students (italics added for clarity):

I remember the first time …I had my first [class where] I was the only [ECHS]

student, I panicked and I hated going to that class, and as it went along, it got

better, you know, everybody …didn't look at me as …somebody who didn't belong

there. I mean, everybody's just worried … getting it together and learning the

material and …getting into groups.

She went on to describe to me how now she is not afraid to approach strangers, teachers,

or students for assistance or conversation.

John believed that the Title V tutorials helped him the most, "Those tutorials, …I

learned to work with people I don't get along with." He goes on to say, "…that helped

me develop some social skills because I'm not always gonna work with people I get

along with or are friends with."

Ruby described how the students used the AVID classroom to work together to

study for and to relax from the pressures of the college courses they were taking (italics

added for clarity):

Some of us went there to …study or get together …with other classmates and

study or talk about what I didn't understand and what to …[practice]. …we used

to get like on the board and then like one of us would …explain to …the others,

…so we could all learn. So that was good. I liked it because it was a place where

…we could all come back …and practice and… do things. Sometimes [to] relax a

little. Sometimes I miss it. …yesterday I was talking to one of my other

classmates from [ECHS], and we were saying how lonely we feel now that we

don't have an AVID… classroom.

Ruby was not the only one of the participants to express the loss of the AVID classroom as a location that was where the students could always go to find others to work and study with anytime of the day on the IHE campus. Now that the new facility is open, the current students have space at the ECHS campus to study, but the graduates are not able to take advantage of it because it was just set up for the current high school students.

Two of the students, during the interviews, brought out an interesting aspect of how they worked with other college students who are not from the ECHS. Ruby and John both spoke with me about self-describing their college status as a freshman when with other college freshmen and as a sophomore or junior when studying with other sophomores or juniors who were not graduates of the ECHS. The positioning of themselves in a study group based on the college "status" of the group was not storied in the prior chapter because it was not one of the strategies ever addressed in the opening of the ECHS or through the ECHS Core Principles. John described his process in the following way, "for example, I was in my Chem. II class, and that's …a sophomore class. So for that class… I'm a sophomore. That's what I said. And uh, and [for my biomedical] classes, I say, "Oh, I'm a junior." This phenomenon was one I did not encounter in the ECHS literature I researched either as the principal or for this dissertation study.

Core Principle 4, narrative thread 3: Time on campus. Here the narrative thread has been limited to the freshman and sophomore year activities. Ruby, talking about the Friday sessions, "it helped us become… more familiar with the campus and it was really… helpful whenever we were here actually in our 11th … and 12th grade." John also addressed this thread, "Well, like I said, coming here every single Friday, …that helped

me get a feel of what it would be like …with regards to schoolwork." Aphrodite, in talking about what the ECHS experiences that regular high school students have, "they don't get to say …well I went to [college trip] and I did this, and I did that. No they don't get to say that, we do. ...we actually went to [IHE] rather than a [IHE] teacher coming to us. We went to [IHE] and we experienced that [college].

The narrative thread of taking actual college courses has been placed under Core Principle 3 although the experiences, according to the students, were also part of the overall support of students getting to college. The studies conducted around some of the initial implementations of the ECHS model of the impact of having students on campus was so persuasive that the Texas ECHS Designation required campuses address this opportunity very specifically in their application. This will also be the biggest challenge for any comprehensive high school attempting to implement the ECHS model.

Core Principal 4, narrative thread 4: Time management. This additional narrative thread emerged primarily from the prompt: "What do you recall as some of the most important lessons you learned or experiences you had as an ECHS student?" Annabel put it very succinctly in her interview, "Not to procrastinate." John went into a bit more detail about what he learned, "I learned to make uh, schedules and prioritize with regards to what comes first with school, family, um, and I really had to keep track of what I was studying what day."

Aphrodite spoke about her better understanding about the in-class versus out-of-class time needed to be successful in class, "for an hour class, you have to study three hours and at first I didn't believe it, you know, people would say it and now I do realize that it's true."

Time management is certainly still one of the personal challenges faced by me. The literature on procrastination and the number of students who end up not finishing their dissertations makes it clear that even for many college students at the doctoral level, this may be the biggest challenge faced. Locke (2011) reported procrastination as a significant issue with the Latinas in her study conducted at an ECHS in central Texas. A recent study conducted by McDonald and Ferrell (2012) on ECHS student learning experiences identified management of time as one the subthemes. A National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching study conducted by Barnett reported that higher grade point averages were related to abilities to plan schoolwork, timely completion of homework, and location to study without distractions (Barnett, 2006).

Core Principle 5: Early colleges and their higher education and community partners work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement. It was and continues to be my sincere hope that the information collected and shared in this dissertation will hearten others to take up the flag for the early college movement. During the three years that I served as the principal for the ECHS in this study, the campus encouraged university, district, and community members to come see what was occurring on the campus every day. The Steering Committee for the ECHS had membership representing stakeholders from all of these groups and the quarterly meetings were critical in helping to ensure that stakeholders were informed about the on-going successes and challenges experienced by the campus. The meeting agendas were filled with data on student performance, activities students were participating in and accomplishments at different competitions.

Core Principle 5, narrative thread number 1: Impact on family. Participants were presented with the opportunity to share comments around the following question: "Is there anything else you would like to share with organizations trying to decide if they should open an ECHS? In response, all of the alumni and I wanted to thank those who made the ECHS possible. The response of John was typical, "well, my mom …doesn't really have to help me with a lot of money. …in scholarships, in financial aid, well, she's happy about that." However, I believe it was important to share how the impact of the funding of this ECHS went beyond the financial support of just the actual students attending the campus. The research of Hartwell indicated that students did not believe as strongly as administrators did the importance of the financial reasons for enrolling in an ECHS (Hartwell, 2009). I have included here several of the stories from the participants that provided descriptions of different ways attending the ECHS affected their families and other individuals.

Aphrodite spoke to me about how proud her parents and family from as far away as the East Coast and Mexico were of her getting over 60 hours of college credit before she turned 19 years old. Interestingly, Aphrodite admitted she was surprised to learn that not only her immediate family, but also her extended family had taken pride in her accomplishments at the ECHS (italics added for clarity):

> *Regardless of the fact that I… didn't get my Associates, it still made them very proud. …it's amazing how many people I have actually, you know, impacted… And it's motivated others… to actually go back to school or… actually think about going to college.*

She told me that she found this surprising because she initially only thought going to the school would only directly affect her. Annabel described not only the pride her family already shows of her accomplishments at her young age, but speaks about how, "It has made one of my family members, not regret, but say, 'Why can't I have that dedication that you had? That persistence that you have.' "

Ruby had a different story she shared about the impact of the ECHS on her family. She wanted to share a recent event that occurred in her home full of young siblings and cousins (italics added for clarity):

Well yesterday, my little cousin, he's nine, and ...my brother, he's 10, and we're around the kitchen and I was washing the dishes and my brother comes and he says, ...it was in eighth grade when you got the scholarship, right? And then I said, "What do you mean? By scholarship you mean going to [ECHS] and actually getting to your state of college?" And then he said, "Yes. It's 'cause I don't know what the ... what scholarship is, but you got it in eighth grade." [LAUGH] I'm like, "No, I got the scholarship, ...when I got out of high school." ...they know that there's things like [the ECHS], that they pay for college, and then you, when you get out of college, you can get scholarships. They are 10 years old and they're learning about this. ...it's something good for the family because it's coming from a background where my parents did not go to college and ...didn't get an education.

It was certainly not a typical conversation to expect to hear in a kitchen between elementary age students. Valdez reminds us, "Working-class parents must, therefore, depend much more on both teachers and schools. They cannot serve in the role of co-

teachers" (1996, p. 39). Working at the district level, I know how many different activities are targeted in the district to help children and families understand different aspects of the process for going to college. I have been attempting to figure out how to turn Ruby's recollection into an advertisement for our district instructional television program to use when informing students about applying for scholarships.

Much more has been written about the impact of families on students than about the impact of the ECHS on the students' families. McDonald and Ferrell (2012) described faculty getting to know families, Locke (2011) described the challenges Latinas encountered with juggling family priorities and academic rigor, and an evaluation sponsored by the Gates Foundation described the family engagement of the students with their academics (Berger et al., 2010).

Core Principle 5, narrative thread number 2: Thanks, and please support us. Participants were presented with the opportunity to share comments around the following question: "Is there anything else you would like to share with organizations trying to decide if they should open an ECHS? In response, the participants wanted to thank those that had already funded the opportunities that they were taking advantage of and wanted the ECHS campus to continue. The response of Ruby was, "Well, I see that for the students that took, that really took advantage, … I see that we are very prepared. …I think it's a good investment…" Aphrodite wanted funders to provide continued support even if not all students took full advantage of the opportunity.

> *To definitely do it, I mean I know sometimes you know, we had students who*
> *didn't take the full you know, like they didn't take advantage of it, but there was*

many more students who did take advantage of it… Just that it's awesome. I

mean, it's just there's so much you know, to say, it's just, not just the money…

The awareness that not all ECHS students, especially at-risk students, are successful was brought out in the Berger et al. (2010) study as a national challenge.

John wanted to make sure that the funding organizations know that what they have already done is very important, but he was also frustrated, as Ruby was, that college scholarships do not actually cover all of their expenses. Annabel thought the best way to help potential supporters to understand the importance was by saying:

This program opened a lot of doors for myself and for others because financially

speaking, my parents would not be able to provide all these things for me, even

though I guess I would apply for financial aid or scholarships and I probably

would get the help, but it would not be as easy. Um, with this program, I saw,

especially 'cause we're low income, um, I saw that it is possible … I think if I

would ever become, I guess not wealthy, but able to um, keep, take care of myself

or the family I have, …I would totally start a-a scholarship program for people

with low income or with me that-that want to study and be something...

One of the ECHS students was quoted in a newspaper article at the beginning of his junior year of high school that was also his freshman year of college as stating, "Two free years of college is really great," he said. "It's like a jump start on the future. Everything's working out. There's been a few problems, but that's with my social life. ... With the small classes, I'm getting the attention I need, plus the friends I make here makes it really worth it" (Long, 2010).

Core Principle 5, narrative thread number 3: ECHS experiences needed for all.
Another thread came out of the following question: "Is there anything else you would like
to share with organizations trying to decide if they should open an ECHS? Aphrodite
was concerned that more high school students do not have the opportunity to have
courses taught by real college professors in the college setting:

> *And then going to a regular high school, I have a bunch of friends who do have*
>
> *college credit, you know, going to a normal high school, but they don't have the*
>
> *same experiences we did. They don't have the same views of it as we did, they*
>
> *just see it as something that caused them more, you know, more work and*
>
> *probably even brought their grades down. … it's not the same when the teachers*
>
> *come in 'cause you're still surrounded by people who think like you do, … but*
>
> *going to a university, there's a broad spectrum of people who think differently,*
>
> *who have so many ideas, and you actually realize how …brilliant people can be.*

Moreover, the following is an excerpt of the conversation between John and me around
much the same thinking:

> John: *I personally think every high school should be an early college high*
>
> *school. That would be… pretty tough, but …maybe dividing the schools*
>
> *into I don't know, I don't know what the word is…*
>
> Q: *But you're trying to say they all need to have the rigor, the relationships*
>
> *with strong teachers?*
>
> John: *Yes.*
>
> Q: *The classwork that challenges them to learn how to study?*

John: *That's what, yeah, that's what we had in the early college, and I think*

every single high school should have that. …I mean that's, maybe that's

why kids don't really realize the importance [of college], because I know

that a lot of kids in other high schools don't have that. …when I was in

regular high school for about two or three days, I didn't feel that.

The introduction to the *Texas College Readiness Standards* written by David Conley reminded us that, "Over the past decade, Texas has focused on assuring its students are prepared for a changing and increasingly complex future. …However, …Texas trails other states in preparing and sending students on to post-secondary education" (Education Policy Improvement Center, 2008, p. 3).

All of the participants in the study, alumni and researcher (myself) alike, were concerned that more students be able to experience more rigorous instruction in high school and more opportunities for acquiring college course experiences while still in high school. Smith, Fischetti, Fort, Gurley, and Kelly (2012) published a study that again advocates that school districts with low-performing high schools consider the following from the ECHS model, "creating new small high schools, converting an existing high school into smaller schools, and adopting some of the principles of the three Rs -- relationships, rigor, and relevance—of small high schools" (p. 392).

Re-storying the Stories Around the Research Questions

Twelve interview questions were developed to use as the basis for collecting the stories of the participating alumni from the Class of 2012. In the prior section of this chapter, I have drawn several threads from the case studies to help illustrate how the ECHS in the study addressed the ECHS model Core Principles. In the rest of this

chapter, I will attempt to draw these threads together to develop common themes around the research questions.

Research Question One: What elements of the ECHS caused student to enroll based on the personal recollections of former students? The narrative threads that came together to address this question included the college preparation opportunity and "It's worth it" (despite leaving friends) from Core Principle 1 which counter the negative thread of "no music or sports." The overall theme that comes from these threads is that the participants, their families, and their teachers or counselors, all believe that the opportunity to attain college credit while still enrolled in the high school was the best reason to enroll in the ECHS. Ongaga (2010) reported students in his study said parents were the main reason for them enrolling in the ECHS; however, this was not found as the main reason in my study. The study conducted by Aviles-Reyes reminds us about the financial opportunity that is true for students from low socio-economic family backgrounds, "For many students and parents, the opportunity to earn up to sixty college credit hours free of charge is a highly motivating factor" (2007, p. 38). Harper's study conducted in 2012 also found that the financial impact for families was important. I know from personal conversations during my time as principal that saving the family money was very important from the perspectives of the parents. However, although students talked about the money in other parts of their interviews, this was not a thread that came out as one of their reasons for enrolling, but rather as one of the impacts on their families.

The theme of opportunity for the participants was more focused, at least as they recalled over four years later, as the college attending opportunity. This opportunity

theme comes through whether viewed from the desire of John to "start my undergraduate studies as soon as possible" or the determination of Aphrodite to "standout of the group" when applying to Harvard University or the belief of Ruby that it "sounded like a fun and interesting… experience going to… a high school that will prepare us for college" (and finding out she got a school laptop as well) or the response of Annabel to her "friends" that wanted her to get out of the program, "I thought in the future … what if for some reason I can't continue my studies? …at least I have something."

The response of Aphrodite worked for some students as she told me, "what I told a lot of people is like, well yeah, would you rather be playing sports now and then have to like, you know, make up for all this time later [referring to the college hours]." The faculty and staff of the ECHS *were* concerned about the negative thread of "no music or sports" and as all of the participants shared at some point in the interview, tried to address this by offering an amazing range of sports and music related activities. The overall success for this is best stated, I believe by Annabel:

> *I believe …when we had drama club or dance club, it was like goodness, should I*
>
> *go to dance or should I do my homework? [LAUGH] But I mean, we would find*
>
> *the time to do both… school was so important, and the teachers were always*
>
> *persistent so that's good. [LAUGH] Always keep up that motivation.*

The negative thread was pulled from participants' responses to the following question, "In reflecting on your participation, is there anything you wish would have been different about your ECHS experience? Sports and music were the areas that students wished to change; however, as Annabel said is speaking about competitive sports, "…let's be honest. In an early college, we don't have time to be doing sports" echoing Aphrodite's

statement included above about getting more from her studies than she would from sports.

Research Question #2: What are students' beliefs about how well the ECHS prepared them for college? All of the participants agreed that the ECHS prepared them for college. The threads here come from the following interview questions: "How prepared academically do you believe you are now to complete a four-year degree?" and How prepared socially do you believe you are now to complete a four-year degree?" The threads that came from the responses of the participants to these questions and during the follow-up interviews were categorized under Core Principle 1, "it's worth it"

The participant who is not enrolled does not fault the ECHS preparation for her not being in college nor have any of the other students who are not currently enrolled in college who I have encountered (not as part of this study, but in what is shared with me as their ex-principal when seen at local businesses). In her own words, Aphrodite said, "Well, very prepared, I mean, better prepared than I would've been, because now I actually know what teachers look for, I know what it takes…" even though she is not currently enrolled.

The research reported in other dissertations also supported the stories of the participants in this study. The study conducted by Roberts (2007) on student engagement reported that, "data indicate that ECHS policies and practices positively influence student engagement" (p. 113) and provides evidence that students performed better than non-at-risk peers on academic measures. Parker (2011) found that the "results for the combined perception of benefits, were statistically significant among the three geographic regions; Mountains, Coastal plains, and Piedmont" (p. iii). The 2011 dissertation study by Locke

described some frustration with the preparation by the particular ECHS by the Latinas in her study, but this seemed more the exception than the norm (Locke, 2011). "The findings of self-efficacy and motivation showed the ECHS program has been successful in graduating minority students with college aspirations and the confidence necessary for a college environment" according to the recent study by Harper (2012, p. 142).

Research Question #3: What instructional strategies/activities had the most impact on preparing students for college from the personal perspectives of former students? The narrative threads that came together to answer this question ended up being real college and learning how to "read and study" from Core Principle 3 and the threads of rigorous high school coursework and time management from Principle 4. These threads developed into two themes. One theme around the college experience of taking courses with actual professors in the college setting and the second around the "soft" skills described by David Conley (2005) in *College Knowledge: What It Really Takes for Students to Succeed and What We Can Do to Get Them Ready.*

I believe that Annabel described the both themes when she told me about her friends that are starting college now:

> *…I see them struggling at [the IHE] or at any type of place… "I already registered for my classes." … And I'm like, "Oh, you just do this and you do this." She's like, "How do you know so much?" I'm like, "Remember? I'm that girl I didn't go to the parties because I was studying and going to early college?" Yeah. [LAUGH] So I see the plus in it.*

A couple of the dissertation studies conducted provided additional evidence of students' perspectives of what makes a difference. Healy (2009) reported, "Student

interview comments demonstrated changes at the end of their first term of ECHS in their study habits and their ownership of their school efforts" (p. v). Saltarelli (2008) conducted a study that did find a "statistically significant inverse relationship between early college credit and time to graduation" (p. 71). The study by Barnett published in 2006 found, "two skills were associated with both higher college GPAs and numbers of college credits earned—ability to use the library and ability to take good notes" (Barnett, para. 1). The dissertation study by Cerrone (2012) conducted in Ohio also had students report they learned through their ECHS to "keep classes as their top priority, rather than social aspects and partying" (p. 186).

Research Question #4: What campus activities made a significant difference in preparing students for college from the personal perspectives of former students? The narrative threads that came together to address this research questions ended up being the time spent on campus as freshmen and sophomores (Friday activities), the events that they had the opportunity to participate in (like leadership events), and working with others (including through tutorials/mentoring). These threads can be pulled together under the theme of academic and social preparation for college. Ruby described the benefits of the campus Friday activities as they, "… helped us become… more familiar with the campus." John spoke about the activities this way, "coming here every single Friday, …that helped me get a feel of what it would be like." Ruby goes on the talk about the social aspect, "like making friends with my classmates, because we can study together, we can support each other and we can have fun sometimes." While most of the participants did not recall many of the specifics of these activities, they speak of them

providing students with opportunities to meet faculty and staff, learn how to navigate the campus and get to know their peers better.

A study conducted by Singleton (2011) in North Carolina reported that her data provided three themes: positive interpersonal relationships, college-going behavioral strategies and "access to college courses while still in high school" (pp. iii-iv). Carroll (2006) described the "experiences having most influence on sense-of-self were … school being located on a college campus, advance academic expectations, and peer support structures" (p. 142). The ECHS evaluation published by Berger et al. (2010) found that "One characteristic frequently had a positive relationship to student outcomes… location" (p. 344). The Jobs For the Future, as one of the main organizations supporting the ECHS initiative, provide multiple sources of information that indicate providing students with resources that meet the Core Principles do support college readiness (JFF, 2011; JFF, 2012).

Summary of Stories Re-storied

In both the "pulling" of the narrative threads and in the combining of the threads into themes, the re-storying process of narrative inquiry brought me back to my initial description of education reform being similar to needlepoint. In needlepoint, the picture emerges from the way the threads are stitched through the pattern while on the reverse side of the pattern there can be seen a number of overlapping tangling of the threads. In the re-storying, even when the patterns overlapped, they were created by different colored threads using a variety of stitches. Like needlepoint, progress takes significant time and, as noted by other researchers, the success of the ECHS model over time cannot be measured until more of the students have had the opportunity to graduate with four-year

degrees. I took that a step further in looking towards the success of ECHS students in attaining advanced or post-graduate degrees, thus my rationale again for including pictures of my needlepoint that was still not completed at the time of the study.

Figure 4. Front of needlepoint illustrating desired effect while reverse shows the overlapping tangle of threads that took place in creating the picture on the front. Photos by Roni Louise Rentfro.

In the final chapter of the study, I have provided my version of the story constellation illustration based on Craig's approach (2007b) as illustrated in Figure 1. Unanswered questions are posed with thoughts from participants. I also address the "so what" and future implications based on the study.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCOVERIES AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The problem the study attempted to address was the need for better understandings of the impact on participating alumni of education reform activities that took place as part of the opening of an early college high school in South Texas. More specifically, the problem to be addressed in this study was the lack of studies from South Texas about the understandings around how the ECHS model impacts the learning and engagement of at-risk, minority, first generation to graduate from college students from low socio-economic households, especially from the personal perspectives of the alumni. In collecting the needed information to present these stories, I used narrative inquiry research methodologies, including the storying and re-storying and the story constellation approach (Clandinin, 2000; Craig, 2003; Craig, 2007b).

What do the Stories Tell Us?

The purpose of the study was to document and narrate the beginnings of a South Texas Early College High School from the theoretical, professional, and personal perspectives of myself as the researcher and through stories from participating alumni of the first graduating class of the ECHS. The research questions are re-stated here along with a brief description of the findings related to each question.

What elements of the Early College High School caused students to enroll based on the personal recollections of former students? The main theme that emerged in response to this question was the opportunity to gain college coursework while still in high school. Parents and educators tend to focus on the money saved when this topic is

discussed based on the research; however, for students it is about taking college classes at the college.

What are students' beliefs about how well the Early College High School prepared them for college? All of the participants interviewed were unanimous in their belief that attending the ECHS in this study did prepare them well for continuing towards their four-year college degrees. It should be noted that most of the students were planning to go beyond a four-year degree to attain at least a master if not a doctoral degree at the time they were interviewed.

What instructional strategies/activities had the most impact on preparing students for college from the personal perspectives of former students? The participants in this study did not focus as much on specific instructional strategies used by teachers or activities provided by the campus and university when they discussed what had the most impact. The participants mostly focused on learning how to "read" and study. A group of the Class of 2012 students making presentations to members of the Class of 2013 shared what they believed was the most critical activity needed to be successful in college, "READ, RE-READ, and RE-RE-READ." I believe Ruby stated what they were trying to communicate in her description presented under Core Principle 3, narrative thread 2. When pushed during the initial or follow-up interviews to bring out more specifics, most of the participants described the rigorous coursework they experienced with their high school teachers and the skills they learned through their Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes.

What campus activities made a significant difference in preparing students for college from the personal perspectives of former students? There was more

variation in the answers to this question than to the first three questions posed to the study participants. The answers that were most common here included being able to go to the campus in the first years for various college-readiness and leadership activities, meeting college faculty and staff, learning about various college and career opportunities through their AVID courses, and actually attending college classes taught by college faculty while they were still attending the ECHS.

Findings that affirmed current research about the ECHS model and participants. The stories shared and re-storied confirmed a number of areas that have been found by other research about the implementation of the Early College High School model. Themes that arose from the narrative threads about strategies and activities that participants believed made a difference included (italicized for emphasis):

(1.) *the importance of rigorous high school course work with supportive teachers;*

(2.) *the importance of students taking actual college courses with actual college instructors;*

(3.) *availability of a large variety of academic and social supports including on-campus learning experiences, tutorials, mentoring by successful college students and faculty;*

(4.) *instruction in and support implementing the skills needed to read and study effectively*; and

(5.) *effective time management.*

Findings from this research study aligned with much of the research reviewed from other ECHS-focused dissertations, ECHS program evaluations, and college-readiness skills

such as those described by David Conley (2005). The stories of the participants reinforced for me the critical importance of rigor, relevance and relationships in preparing students for college.

Findings that share new or different information than current literature. A couple of phenomena encountered in the study were not found to any degree in the literature reviewed for this study. First, some of the participants went beyond the importance of college courses with college faculty to include the need to take the courses with students who were not in the ECHS. While this has been discussed during ECHS meetings and conferences, one of the few specific references related to this dealt with the student engagement in the 2007 study by Aviles-Reyes.

Second, while other studies addressed the finding that students may feel under a lot of pressure to perform or feelings that other college students and/or instructors did not accept them, none noted students described themselves as at different levels of college as did several participants in this study. Two of the participants in this study (Ruby and John) admitted to describing themselves as college freshmen when with other freshmen and college sophomores or juniors (which they all were at the time of the study) when with other college juniors.

The ECHS Story Constellation

After pulling all of the threads and themes together, I produced Figure 5 to illustrate the way all of the stories came together and overlapped along with the overlay of the various levels of reform stories. The story of my personal and professional journey formed the center of the structure of the illustration. Linked with my story are the stories of the participating alumni which, when pulled together, formed the stories of the school

centered within the stories of the district. In the story constellation approach as presented

by and based on the research of Cheryl Craig (2007b), I looked at the stories and the way

the education research in the study overlay the stories at the different levels of

organization and the central figures of the study: the participants and myself. In the

following version of the story constellation for this study, I included the stories of the

district and its partnering Institute of Higher Education, stories of general education

reform, and stories of the implementation of the ECHS model that is based on the ECHS
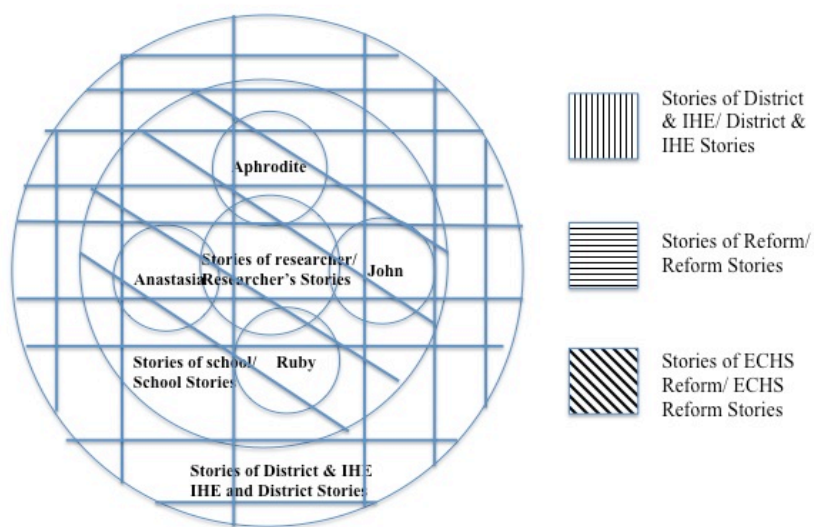
Core Principles.

Figure 5. ECHS story constellation approach constructed from the stories told, re-storying of the stories, and the overlaying the stories of the ECHS reform, the district reform activities, stories from the district and IHE.

What Don't the Stories Tell Us?

As often occurs in research studies, I was left with more unanswered questions than answered questions. The following questions are several of the ones that kept coming to mind as I completed this study:

(1.) *What if more alumni had participated in the study, would the findings be the same?;*

(2.) *Would including parents and/ or teachers as participants have resulted in finding the same, different, or additional threads or themes?;*

(3.) *Would the participants' stories have changed significantly if the study were conducted a year later and participants had had the opportunity to already attain their four-year degrees?;*

(4.) *What do the ECHS students who did not immediately continue in college believe would have helped them to immediately continue to go to college?;*

(5.) *What are the causes for the ECHS students not continuing to take courses immediately following graduation?;*

(6.) *Do students' perceptions of what they believed was effective in this study change after they graduate with four-year degrees?;* and

(7.) *Do students who attain doctoral degrees experience the challenges that have been documented for other first-generation students?*

When John was reviewing the study to help re-story his information and help negotiate the meanings, he asked me if I was going to do the research to answer any of the questions. I asked him if one in particular caught his attention. He and I discussed how there really needs to be a follow-up to see how many of the alumni graduated on the four-

year timeline. I also wonder how their experiences will compare to findings of studies

such as that by Gardner and Holley regarding first-generation students challenges in

attaining doctoral degrees since a number of these ECHS students are hoping to attain

that level of education (Gardner & Holley, 2011). The above questions are only a small

number of the unanswered questions that occurred to me as I looked back over this study

conducted to chronicle the opening of an ECHS from personal and professional

perspectives along with the perspectives shared by a small group of alumni.

Future Impact

In an interview for the local newspaper, I was quoted as saying, "We're hoping

the small learning community atmosphere will make all students successful" (Long,

2008). Until we develop time travel, the true long-term impact of this ECHS on its

participants will remain unknown as of this point in time. I have collected a small

number of stories from participating alumni to create case studies that give us insight into

the impact on these participants and others due to involvement in the opening of this

early college high school as of the time of the study.

As I completed this dissertation study, I re-read the transcripts of the interviews of

the participants and came across the following comment made by Annabel. When I

asked her at the end of the interview, "Is there anything else you would like to share?"

her response to me resonated with a memory from my past. What she told me was, "I

really appreciate all of those moments you shared with us. Very unforgettable.

[LAUGH]. …every little detail, …even a good morning, [makes] a difference" and then

I remembered how important even a little detail or small interaction can truly be.

Many times I have looked at a little yellow note stuck in the spine of the binder holding my master and doctoral degree program paperwork. The message was given to me in 1998 in a card at a celebration after receiving my Master of Science degree. It reads, "Roni, is it time yet to think about a Ph.D.?" The answer to that question, Dr. S., is now, "Yes, well, actually an Ed. D.!"

I also found the following quote from Dewey that I highlighted for one of my doctoral classes in curriculum and instruction a number of years ago:

It is the nature of an experience to have implications which go far beyond what, at first consciously, is noted in it. Bringing these connections or implications to consciousness enhances the meaning of the experience. Any experience, however trivial in its first appearance, is capable of assuming an indefinite richness of significance by extending its range of perceived connections (1916, p. 217).

Yes, little "things" can make a big difference--especially over time. In the case of Dewey, his writings are still making an impact on education and our thinking about education reform almost 100 years later.

John, one of the study participants, told me during his interview, "I personally think every high school should be an early college high school." In probing this statement further during his follow-up interview, John told me he was concerned because, "In the valley, …lot of kids don't take rigorous courses in high school. …when [they] get to college [they] dropout and [are] just working because [college is] so much harder." Over the past several years, attempts to expand the ECHS have increased. Smith et al. (2012) used their study of a North Carolina ECHS to describe the potential impact of these findings for traditional high schools. Key recommendations focused on

implementing components addressing the three Rs—rigor, relationships, and relevance (Smith et al., 2012). Dessoff (2011) reported on the attempts taking place in other South Texas school districts to expand the ECHS opportunities to all students. The district in the study was one of three in the United States that was awarded a five-year grant to research how feasible it is to implement the ECHS model in comprehensive high schools.

I agreed with John that instruction that is more rigorous is crucial to prepare all students for the opportunity to attend college and will be watching the attempts to expand the initiative closely. However, I still believe that the small ECHS on or near a college campus similar to the ECHS model implemented in this study has tremendous potential for successfully impacting its targeted population in ways that may not be achievable in the expanded version at a comprehensive (larger than 600 student) campus.

The journey to complete my doctoral studies has been memorable and provided me with an incredible opportunity to share the stories of some amazing students. I felt it was my duty to try to help other educators and funders see the benefits of believing in students, especially those that are currently underrepresented in colleges. This feeling brought me back to what Kati Haycock, President of The Education Trust, told the audience in South Texas recently, "At the macro level, better and more equal education is not the only answer [to improving economic conditions for families]. But at the individual level, it really is" (Haycock, 2013, slide 12).

"So what," as I have been asked several times recently? My answer was, "only time will tell." We need to return to the question of David Conley, *"Should all students be prepared to go to a four-year or a two-year college?"* As part of his response he noted, "The dilemma… is that a choice is being made about a student's life and future"

(2010, p. 2). The students who were participants in this study believed that the ECHS model did and will continue making a difference for them individually as well as for their families. After sharing a wide variety of statistics, Kati Haycock also reminded her audience, "What schools and colleges do, in other words, is hugely important to our *economy*, our *democracy*, and our *society*" (2013, slide 20).

Early college high schools focus on student achievement beyond the immediate dragons of state and federal accountability. Craig (2004) reminded us in her parting words, "Only through socially responsible action can the fire-breathing capacities of accountability systems be harnessed" (p. 1,254). I believe we must be persistent in finding the means to continue providing opportunities for as many students as possible to experience college while still in high school and attain both the experiences and the skills necessary to be successful in college if they choose to continue their education. I sincerely hope that the information collected and shared in this dissertation will hearten others to push for college readiness opportunities for all students while still supporting this particular model of acceleration into college for students who are at-risk, low socio-economic and/or the first in their family to graduate from college.

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APPENDIX A

TEA ECHS WEBSITE

Announcements

Early College High School Designation Application Timeline

In order to operate as a TEA-approved Early College High School, a district or charter and its partnering institution(s) of higher education must seek and receive Early College High School designation from the Texas Education Agency on behalf of the ECHS campus. Below is a timeline of the ECHS designation process.

March 2012	ECHS Designation Application available Please email laura.gaines@tea.state.tx.us for a copy of the application.
March 21, 2012	Technical Assistance Webinar Applicants may register at: https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/458366250
April 10, 2012	Application Due Date Applications must be received at TEA no later than 5:00 pm on April 10, 2012 in order to be considered for designation as an ECHS in the 2012-2013 school year.
June 1, 2012	Notification of Designation

Purpose

Early College High Schools (ECHS) are innovative high schools located on or in close proximity to a college campus that allow students least likely to attend college an opportunity to earn a high school diploma and 60 college credit hours. Early College High Schools:

- Provide dual credit at no cost to students
- Offer rigorous instruction and accelerated courses
- Provide academic and social support services to help students succeed
- Increase college readiness
- Reduce barriers to college access

ECHS Designation

In spring 2009, TEA implemented a designation process to identify and recognize those schools, whether THSP-funded or locally-funded, that demonstrate adherence to the key components of the ECHS model that make it so successful.

Proven Dropout Prevention Strategies:

The Texas Education Agency focuses state and federal resources on identifying and replicating proven strategies for dropout prevention and recovery. Early College High Schools encourage rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning academic and social skills necessary to complete high school and to prepare them for postsecondary success.

Eligibility

School districts and open enrollment charter schools in partnership with an institution of higher education located on or in close proximity to a college campus

Performance

- Number of Early College High Schools in Texas: 44
- Number of Texas Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (T-STEM) Early College High Schools in Texas: 5
- Of those Early College High Schools that have been in operation long enough to earn state accountability ratings:
- 24 schools are Exemplary
- 7 schools are Recognized
- Students served: 10,000 (estimate Nov. 2010)
- In 2008-2009, over 1,100 ECHS students earned an average of 16 credit hours each.
- These 1,100 students saved approximately $4,000 each or $4.5 million in college tuition.
- In May 2010, 900 students graduated from 11 Early College High Schools – this is the first cohort of ECHS students in Texas.
- These 900 students collectively earned over $5.6 million in college scholarships.
- Of these 900 students, 308 graduates earned an Associate's degree and their high school diploma at the same time.
- In spring 2009, TEA implemented a designation process to identify and recognize those schools, whether THSP-funded or locally implemented, that demonstrate adherence to the key components of the ECHS model that make it so successful.

Findings from the Evaluation of the Texas High School Project: Second Annual Comprehensive Report by SRI, International released December 2010 include:

- ECHS students in 9th grade were twice as likely to meet or exceed TAKS standards in Reading and Math.
- 10th grade ECHS students were 2.3 times more likely to meet or exceed TAKS on all subject areas.
- ECHS students demonstrated a significantly greater likelihood of being promoted to 10th grade than students at comparison schools not implementing ECHS.

Funding Information

- Texas Education Agency Funding (FY2007-2010): $12,110,463
- 24 operating ECHS
- Communities Foundation of Texas Funding (FY2007-2010): $7,710,000
- 10 operating ECHS
- Texas Early College High School Initiative Total: $19,820,463
- Locally funded -- 7 ECHS
- Other TEA or private funding -- 3 ECHS

Awards

Cycle 2, Cycle 3 and Expansion, Small and Rural District Planning, Cycle 4 Grantees (PDF, 56)

Laws and Rules

- General Appropriations Act, Article III, Rider 51, 2009
- Texas Education Code §39.115 and §29.908
- 19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 102 Educational Programs Subchapter GG: Commissioner's Rules Concerning Early College Education Program

Resources

- Dual Credit FAQ (PDF, 203 KB)
- Texas Early College High School (outside source)
- The Early College High School Initiative (outside source)

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APPENDIX B

TEA ECHS DESIGNATION APPLICATION

2012-2013 REQUIREMENTS

2012-2013 REQUIREMENTS:

Required Early College High School Design Elements

The following design elements are the minimum required components that must be demonstrated through this application in order to be designated as an Early College High School.

I. Target Population

1 ☐ The ECHS must serve, or include plans to "scale up" to serve Grades 9 through 12. The ECHS may serve Grades 6, 7, and 8.

2 ☐ The ECHS must target and enroll a majority of students who are at risk of dropping out of school: at-risk students and English Language Learners, as defined by the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), economically disadvantaged students, and first-generation college goers.

II. P-16 Partnership

3 ☐ The ECHS must have a current, signed MOU that defines the partnership between the school district(s) and the IHE(s) and addresses topics including, but not limited to: the ECHS location, the allocation of costs for tuition, fees, textbooks, and student transportation.

4 ☐ Students enrolled in an ECHS course for both college and high school graduation credit shall not be required to pay for tuition, fees, or textbooks. The school district or charter in which the student is enrolled shall pay for tuition, fees, and required textbooks to the extent those charges are not waived by the partner IHE.

5 ☐ The ECHS must be supported by an active partnership between the school district or charter and the IHE, which shall include joint decision-making procedures that allow for the planning and implementation of a coherent program across institutions. The partnership and the MOU must include provisions and processes for collecting, sharing, and reviewing student data to assess the progress of the ECHS.

6 ☐ The partners must develop and maintain a group that meets regularly to address issues of design and sustainability. Membership should include the ECHS principal and individuals with decision-making authority from all partnering districts and IHE(s). The group should meet regularly and once every six months at a minimum (examples: advisory board, steering committee, or coordinating council).

7 ☐ The ECHS must provide opportunities for ECHS teachers and higher-education faculty to collaborate through planning, teaching, and professional development.

III. Curriculum and Academic Rigor

8 ☐ The ECHS must provide a course of study that enables a participating student to receive a high school diploma and either an associate's degree or 60 semester hours toward a baccalaureate degree during grades 9-12. An academic plan must be in place showing how students will progress toward this goal. The academic plan must provide pathways to a baccalaureate degree and must follow the courses and fields of study listed in the Lower Division Academic Course Guide Manual.

9 ☐ The ECHS must administer a Texas Success Initiative college placement exam (such as Texas Higher Education Assessment, Accuplacer, Compass, Asset etc.) to all

incoming 9th-graders to assess college readiness and to enable students to begin college courses based on their performance—as soon as they are able, possibly as early as the 9th grade.

IV. School Design

10 ☐ The ECHS must be an autonomous high school that meets one of the following criteria:

(a)Is located on a college or university campus

(b) Is a stand-alone high school campus *near a college or university campus.

(c) Is a small learning community within a larger high school that is located *near a college or university campus. The ECHS small learning community must establish ECHS students as a separate cohort and be physically separated from the larger high school with its own teachers, leader, schedule, professional development, budget, and curriculum plan.

*"**Near a college or university campus**" is defined as close enough for district partners to transport students each day for a full-day program. Acceptable daily driving distance may vary based on the size of a district and the service area of the partnering institution(s) of higher education.

11 ☐ The ECHS must be a full-day program (i.e., full day as defined in PEIMS) in which all academic instruction and support services (academic, social, and emotional) are delivered to students at the designated ECHS campus. Students may not travel between two high school campuses in order to receive instruction or support services.

V. Support Structures

12 ☐ The ECHS must build into the program of study strategies and activities that create a distinct college-going culture and enable students to build skills and knowledge for college success (examples: bridge programs, participation in college extracurricular activities, professor review of student work, completing FAFSA, understanding college registration, GPAs, and transcripts).

13 ☐ The ECHS must provide a personalized learning environment, teach academic behaviors, and build into the program of study academic support services that maximize and ensure student success (examples: tutoring, mentoring, Saturday school, self directed learning, individual and group study skills, time management).

14 ☐ The ECHS must build into the program of study social and emotional support services to students (examples: advisory structures, personalized learning communities, individual graduation plans, guidance and counseling).

15 ☐ The ECHS must build into the program of study opportunities for students to have regular access to IHE facilities, resources, and services (examples: access to university faculty; libraries; science labs; technology and writing centers; artistic, cultural, and sports facilities and activities; and extracurricular activities, as appropriate).

16 ☐ The ECHS must demonstrate a commitment to substantial parental and community involvement in activities and use of strategies designed to encourage high school completion and success.

APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON IRB APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

March 25, 2013

Roni Rentfro
c/o Dr. Cheryl Craig
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Roni Rentfro,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "Opening an Early College High School: a Personal Journey of Theory into Practice with Shared Stories" was conducted on March 14, 2013.

At that time, your request for exemption under **Category 2** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Nettie Martinez at 713-743-9204.

Sincerely yours,

Kirstin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **March 1, 2018**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 13350-EX

APPENDIX D

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: Opening An Early College High School: A Personal and Professional Journey of Theory into Practice with Shared Stories

You are being invited to take part in a research project conducted by Roni Louise Rentfro from the Curriculum and Instruction Department in the College of Education at the University of Houston. This project is part of a doctoral dissertation study being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Cheryl Craig.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Taking part in this research project is voluntary and you may refuse to take part or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any research-related questions that make you uncomfortable. Your responses will not have any impact on your standing with the researcher's organization or any related organization.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to share the researcher's experiences in opening an early college high school and collect stories from alumni participants in this endeavor in South Texas and share these stories anonymously for others to have a better understanding of the potential impact of this reform-based academic program. The study will last approximately four months.

PROCEDURES

This study will take place in Brownsville, Texas. You will be one of a maximum of five individuals (subjects) to be asked to participate in the study. The study will consist of personal interviews conducted by the researcher. The initial interview is expected to take approximately 90 minutes at a location of your choice. A follow up 90-minute interview may be conducted to clarify information collected in the initial interview, allow you to review the research text and participate in the negotiating of the meaning of your story. The interviews will focus on the impact on the subject and others as a result of being a student who attended the early college high school.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The identities of all subjects will be held in confidence. You may select a pseudonym to use for the study or one will be selected for you. The list pairing the subject's name to the pseudonym

will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study; however, if you feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview process or until the dissertation is completed, you may ask to stop your participation in the study. You may withdraw from the study even after the second interview if your participation causes you any discomfort.

BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand how attending and graduating from an Early College High School impacts the lives of students and others as well as have a clearer understanding of the benefits of this model.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations; however, no individual subject will be identified.

AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO/VIDEO TAPES

If you consent to take part in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audiotaped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audiotapes can be used for later publication/presentations.

_____ I agree to be audiotaped during the interview.
            _____ I agree that the audiotape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
            _____ I do not agree that the audiotape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
OR

_____ I do not agree to be audiotaped during the interview.

A subject may still participate in the study even if they do not agree to be audio taped during the interview.

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.

2. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.

3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me, as have any potential benefits.

4. I understand the protections in place to safeguard any personally identifiable information related to my participation.

5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Roni Louise Rentfro at 956-371-4155. I may also contact Dr. Cheryl Craig, faculty sponsor, at 713-743-4977.

6. **Any questions regarding my rights as a research subject may be addressed to the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713-743-9204). All research projects that are carried out by Investigators at the University of Houston are governed be requirements of the University and the federal government.**

SIGNATURES

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions to my satisfaction. I give my consent to participate in this study, and have been provided with a copy of this form for my records and in case I have questions as the research progresses.

Study Subject (print name): _____

Signature of Study Subject: _____

Date: _____

I have read this form to the subject and/or the subject has read this form. An explanation of the research was provided and questions from the subject were solicited and answered to the subject's satisfaction. In my judgment, the subject has demonstrated comprehension of the information.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

Opening an Early College High School: A Personal and Professional Journey of
Theory into Practice with Shared Stories
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

You are being asked to participate in a 90-minute initial interview process and a second interview of approximately 60 minutes. During the initial interview, you will be asked to respond around the following questions and prompts. In the second, approximately 90-minute interview, you will have the opportunity to share the research text with the researcher clarifying and negotiating the meaning of your story.

[After completing the Consent process]

You have consented to participate in the research project in writing on the separate consent form. Now we will begin the interview process. If at any time you are uncomfortable, you may stop the interview, stop the recording of the interview, and/or stop participating. If at any time after the interview and prior to the publication of the research you decide you do not want to participate in the study, you may withdraw without any penalty.

I will begin asking the questions and recording your responses at this time.

1. Tell me about what you are currently doing (prompt for currently enrolled in college and/or employed).
2. Look back on your decision to become a student at the ECHS and tell me why you recall deciding to apply.
3. What do you recall as some of the most important lessons you learned or experiences you had as an ECHS student?
4. What ECHS activities made the most difference in helping prepare you to be a college student?
5. How prepared academically do you believe you are now to complete a four-year degree?
6. How prepared socially do you believe you are now to complete a four-year degree?
7. What degree(s) are you pursuing/planning to pursue?
8. What do you see yourself doing in the future?
9. Would you share an example of how being part of the Class of 2012 impacted your family?
10. In reflecting again on your participation, is there anything you wish would have been different about your ECHS experiences?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share with students who are considering applying to an ECHS?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share with organizations trying to decide if they should open an ECHS?

APPENDIX F

TEA AEIS 2011-2012 FOR ECHS IN THE STUDY

STUDENT INFORMATION

		--------Campus--------		Campus		
	Count	Percent		Group	District	State
Total Students:	310	100.0%		58,084	49,593	4,978,120
Students By Grade: Early Childhood Education	0	0.0%		0.0%	0.8%	0.3%
Pre-Kindergarten	0	0.0%		0.0%	6.0%	4.5%
Kindergarten	0	0.0%		0.0%	7.1%	7.6%
Grade 1	0	0.0%		0.0%	8.0%	7.9%
Grade 2	0	0.0%		0.0%	7.8%	7.7%
Grade 3	0	0.0%		0.0%	7.3%	7.6%
Grade 4	0	0.0%		0.0%	7.4%	7.5%
Grade 5	0	0.0%		0.0%	7.6%	7.6%
Grade 6	0	0.0%		0.0%	7.5%	7.5%
Grade 7	0	0.0%		0.0%	7.3%	7.4%
Grade 8	0	0.0%		0.0%	6.9%	7.2%
Grade 9	92	29.7%		28.6%	8.6%	7.9%
Grade 10	65	21.0%		24.9%	6.1%	7.0%
Grade 11	70	22.6%		23.9%	6.4%	6.5%
Grade 12	83	26.8%		22.6%	5.2%	5.9%
Ethnic Distribution: African American	0	0.0%		0.1%	0.1%	12.8%
Hispanic	308	99.4%		99.0%	98.8%	50.8%
White	2	0.6%		0.7%	0.8%	30.5%
American Indian	0	0.0%		0.1%	0.0%	0.4%
Asian	0	0.0%		0.1%	0.3%	3.6%
Pacific Islander	0	0.0%		0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Two or More Races	0	0.0%		0.0%	0.0%	1.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	307	99.0%		88.9%	96.0%	60.4%
Non-Educationally Disadvantaged	3	1.0%		11.1%	4.0%	39.6%
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	2	0.6%		13.5%	31.4%	16.8%
Students w/Disciplinary Placements (2010-11)	0	0.0%		4.5%	1.5%	1.8%
At-Risk	95	30.6%		57.9%	63.5%	45.4%
Mobility (2010-11)	21	8.1%		17.3%	17.1%	17.8%
Number of Students per Teacher	19.5	n/a		14.3	15.0	15.4

STUDENT INFORMATION

		-------Campus-------		Campus		
Graduates (Class of 2011):	Count	Percent		Group	District	State
Total Graduates	0	100.0%		12,839	2,771	290,581
By Ethnicity (incl. Special Ed.):						
African American	0	-		15	3	38,755
Hispanic	0	-		12,707	2,709	127,746
White	0	-		98	48	107,597
American Indian	0	-		5	0	1,430
Asian	0	-		10	11	10,468
Pacific Islander	0	-		2	0	406
Two or More Races	0	-		2	0	4,179
By Graduation Type (incl. Special Ed.):						
Minimum H.S. Program	0	-		1,336	373	57,772
Recommended H.S. Pgm./DAP	0	-		11,503	2,398	232,809
Special Education Graduates	0	-		1,240	318	26,142

CLASS SIZE INFORMATION
(Derived from teacher responsibility records.)

			Campus		
Class Size Averages by Grade and Subject:		Campus	Group	District	State
Elementary: Kindergarten		-	-	20.0	19.4
Grade 1		-	-	19.4	19.4
Grade 2		-	-	19.9	19.3
Grade 3		-	-	24.7	19.4
Grade 4		-	-	26.7	19.6
Grade 5		-	-	30.4	21.8
Grade 6		-	-	21.5	21.0
Mixed Grades		-	20.0	19.6	23.2
Secondary: English/Language Arts		19.3	16.7	19.9	17.3
Foreign Languages		15.0	19.4	19.8	19.0
Mathematics		19.0	18.8	20.9	17.8
Science		19.4	19.4	22.2	19.0
Social Studies		18.8	19.8	22.1	19.5