3-16-2018

The Experience of Middle-School Males in the Ambassadors of Compassion Mentoring Program: A Phenomenological Study

Ryan Phelan
rphelan15@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/edd

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

THE EXPERIENCE OF MIDDLE-SCHOOL MALES IN THE AMBASSADORS OF

COMPASSION MENTORING PROGRAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

BY

Ryan Phelan

FACULTY RESEARCH COMMITTEE:

Chair: Patrick Allen, Ph.D.

Members: Terry Huffman, Ph.D.

Gary Sehorn, Ed.D.

Presented to Doctor of Education Program

And the School of Education, George Fox University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

March 16, 2018

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

"THE EXPERIENCE OF MIDDLE-SCHOOL MALES IN THE AMBASSADORS OF COMPASSION MENTORING PROGRAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY," a Doctoral research project prepared by RYAN PHELAN in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:

3/15/18 *Patrick Allen*   Committee Chair

Date   Patrick Allen, PhD   Professor of Education

3/15/18 *Terry Huffman*

Date   Terry Huffman, PhD   Professor of Education

3/15/18 *Gary Sehorn*

Date   Gary Sehorn, EdD   Associate Professor of Education

Table of Contents

Abstract

More than ever before, students are being raised in families without both sets of parents and are coming to school without the skills needed to be successful. This has led to a high failure rate, and missing a number of school days is causing other students to enter high school underprepared. This phenomenological study will focus on answering the question: "After completing the Ambassadors of Compassion mentoring program, how did mentees describe their experiences?" This phenomenological study looked closely at 5 eighth-grade boys who were involved in a mentoring program. The mentor program, *Ambassadors of Compassion*, was led by a trained mentor ("Ambassadors of Compassion," 2017). Reports were drafted from interviews with the group in the program and detailed field notes through two observations conducted toward the end of the program.

Four themes emerged from the research: Taking initiative in their own lives, students care deeply about their grades, Ambassadors of Compassion was a venue where trust was established, and skills learned could translate to all different backgrounds. These themes were consistent with the norms expected of both the mentee and the mentor, the purpose behind the mentoring of students, and mentor program successes. As a result of conducting this study, a number of suggestions were formulated to make the Ambassador of Compassion program more successful. If these are followed, the relationship between the mentor and the mentee may well be strengthened, with the mentee gaining optimum guidance while taking part in the program.

Acknowledgements

I have always wanted to continue my education in hopes of one day obtaining my doctorate. With a career that has kept me busy and a young family that demands much of my time, I did not think it was a possibility. I am beyond grateful to have found George Fox University. They understood the constraints that I had upon me and the professors were always so quick to encourage and help me to obtain my goal. To all the George Fox professors I want to say a heartfelt "Thank you!" To my chair, Patrick, I could not have asked for someone better to go down this path with. You have been fantastic to work with. Your encouragement and humor truly helped me. I wish you all the best in retirement. Also, I want to extend a special thank you to my committee members who offered helpful advice and wise counsel.

I would like to thank the good Lord for sustaining me through this process. Although a doctorate is important and definitely has value, at the end of the day it is just a piece of paper with some extra initials at the end of my name. My value comes from the Lord. I am his and the free gift of salvation that has been granted to me means more to me then this dissertation ever could. Thank you, Lord. May you continue to do a work in me. I need you each and every day.

Brooke, you are my rock. I love you more than you will ever know. Being married to you is nothing less than a sweet gift from the Lord. You are everything I want to be. You are my hero and the most influential person that has ever been in my life. To my kids, Sullivan and Callaghan, you two have my heart. Daddy loves you and I am thankful and humbled that I get to be your father. Thank you also to my parents and sister for helping take care of my family many times when I needed to attend class. It meant a lot to me that you gave up part of your summers to help me.

Cathy, thank you for taking precious time away from your family to help edit my drafts. Time and time again I would call on you and you would always deliver. Thank you for your patience and effort in helping me.

Lastly, thank you to all of the students I have had the privilege of working with throughout my years in education. It is because of you that I write. It is because of you that I study. It is because of you that I want to be better.

Chapter One: Introduction

High-school teenagers today are growing up not knowing how to deal with stressors, and as a repercussion they are engaging in unhealthy and dangerous activities that negatively impact their lives, both inside and outside the classroom (Lampley & Johnson, 2010; Simões & Alarcão, 2014). As a high-school administrator, I frequently encounter students who lack the coping skills to deal effectively with the stresses of the teenage years.

I first met a student named Nick when he was a ninth-grader at an alternative high school. He lacked the interpersonal coping skills to resolve a situation without fighting or belittling other students. His dad was in prison and his mom was working hard to make ends meet. It was a travesty that he was never taught or modeled appropriate skills at home. His lack of coping skills, particularly patience, understanding, and communication, were displayed on an almost daily basis. And sadly, there are dozens of "Nicks" that I encounter each week in my work as a high school principal.

Recently, a mentoring program entitled "Ambassadors of Compassion" (AOC) has begun in area schools. The program is built around supplying students with the proper coping skills to effectively get through life. Because of this experience with Nick and others, I conducted a phenomological study of the lived experiences of five male students who participated in a middle-school AOC mentoring program to gain some insight from their experiences and to develop more effective strategies for schools to assist students during these stressful times.

This study examined the experiences of a group of five middle-school males who participated in the Ambassadors of Compassion program, a program designed to build success in teens to help equip them for life's stressors ("Ambassadors of Compassion," 2017). Stressors such as school work, sports, family drama, and personal relationships persistently take a toll on

many middle schoolers today. I examined the participants' perceptions about how the program

assisted them, or conversely did not equip them for both their current life stage and for entering

high school. In this phenomenological study, I examined the Ambassadors of Compassion

program from the middle-school students' point of view as they looked back on the previous

semester. I interviewed each of the five mentees, and observed two mentoring sessions in total.

New experiences at school can contribute to the stress high-school teens feel. Many areas

of life change for students during high school (Rumberger, 1987). From open-campus lunches to

being on campus with over a thousand students, high school is a different setting than middle

school. High school is also the time when males and females begin to bond like never before

(Van Ryzin, 2014). The pressure of a first date and the hurt of a breakup are the types of events

that truly begin to mold and shape teenagers. Later, preparing for college or career is also a

source of stress (Leyton-Armakan, Lawrence, Deutsch, Lee Williams, & Henneberger, 2012).

Students struggle with what college to attend, how to afford it, what living away from family will

entail, and what jobs will be available to them if they graduate or if they do not attend college at

all.

Problems at home can also add stress for students. When students have family problems

and are unable to manage their responses while at school, administrators see an increase in

referrals and a decrease in attendance (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Many questions beg for

answers: Has the family lost its way? Is there a massive disparity in the number of students who

come from broken homes or single-parent households? Are fathers or mothers absent, and at the

same rates? Might it be that students, specifically young boys, are not being taught the

fundamental coping skills for dealing with life? Certainly, fathers, or significant male figures,

can be a positive or negative influence on young boys, and a negative home life can be

detrimental to the success of many students at school (Herrera, DuBois, & Baldwin Grossman, 2012).

Many high-school students today seem to lack the skills necessary to cope with their stress. During my fifteen years in education, I have noticed a major shift among students. More and more, students are trying to escape or avoid their stressors instead of attempting to resolve them directly. At first, I attributed this behavior to laziness. However, I have come to believe that students are not being taught effective strategies to deal with stress. Thus, it is not that they are unwilling to deal with these stressors; rather they lack the necessary life skills to do so.

Without the proper coping skills, more and more students are turning to substance abuse. In fact, drug overdose among teenagers is at an all-time high. Many young people are turning to drugs, taking unnecessary and damaging risks to mask the loneliness and cope with the pressures they experience. In the last two years, our school district has faced two suicides. Both students were reported drug users, and both were dealing with depression. These incidents motivated me to understand this phenomenon with the hope of developing some supportive and preventative strategies in my own school setting.

What can be done at the middle-school level to benefit these young students and prevent such tragic outcomes? Could effective adult mentors help students develop the needed life skills to make a smoother transition to high school? I attempted to address these questions through this study. Students in a neighboring district, Raymond Junior High School, participated in a mentoring group called Ambassadors of Compassion (AOC). The purpose of this study was to hear the varying viewpoints from select middle-school males involved in the mentoring program, and to ascertain from their own experiences what they gained from the program. In addition, they were asked about the aspects of the program that they deemed helpful, and what aspects were

not. With the information gained, I hope to offer some insights to help strengthen the program

for the future.

Mentoring groups vary in their methods and approach when dealing with students

(Gettings & Wilson, 2014). An abundance of research supports the need for mentoring, if done

effectively (Pryce, 2012; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001), and mentoring efforts are on the rise

(Johnson, 2007). Mentoring groups are being established to help prevent many of the pitfalls

and obstacles that young people face (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002). Mentorship

programs may help bridge the gap between middle school and high school, providing the life

skills and coping behaviors that many students lack. If this study can be used to strengthen

existing programs and help other districts incorporate new mentorship programs, I will have

made a worthwhile contribution.

Statement of the Problem

Many students in high school are unprepared for the stressors that come along with

secondary education. It is evident that some students are not being taught or modeled

appropriate skills at home to deal with real-life stressful situations. Mentoring programs can be a

key to teaching these traits to students before they reach high school. When mentor programs

are successfully executed, studies show that participants are not only more likely to complete

high school and go to college, but also more likely to graduate from college and live a productive

life (Jones, 2010). However, there is a dearth of information about how middle schoolers

actually experience such mentoring programs.

Purpose of the Study

This purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of five junior-high males

who participated in the Ambassadors of Compassion mentoring program. AOC is designed to

help equip students for life's stressors ("Ambassadors of Compassion," 2017). I examined the participants' experiences in the program and how the program assisted or, conversely, did not equip them for both their current life stage and for entering high school. In this phenomenological study, I examined the Ambassadors of Compassion program from the middle-school students' point of view as they looked back on the previous semester. I interviewed each of the five mentees individually, and observed two mentoring sessions.

Research Questions

This is a phenomenological research study, describing the experiences in mentorship programs that have led students to achieve more success as they enter high school. I conducted personal interviews with the students in a mentor group at Raymond Junior High School (pseudonym). The design and purpose of this study was to identify how selected male students described their lived experience in the mentor program, and what aspects of the program were reported as helpful or unhelpful. The study and data collection process was guided by one main research question and three sub-questions.

After completing the Ambassadors of Compassion mentoring program, how did students describe their experiences?

1. What mentoring experiences (or stories) stood out as most significant/meaningful in preparing them for the middle-to-high-school transition?

2. What coping/success strategies were identified as most useful for the middle-to-high school transition?

Definition of Terms

Ambassadors of Compassion: Mentorship program that brings wisdom and expertise learned by leaders and influencers to equip youth with success and the personal leadership skills to navigate

life's inevitable challenges to be successful. It teaches young men and women critical life skills

("Ambassadors of Compassion," 2017).

Middle School: Schooling between elementary and high school with the average age of eleven

(Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012).

Mentee: One who receives guidance or coaching from a more experienced person (Ravitch,

2010).

Mentor: A trusted counselor or guide who is usually more experienced and knowledgeable in life

(Ravitch, 2010).

Significance of the Study

   Participants in this phenomenological study were interviewed to find out what qualities

were learned in the AOC program that may lead to more success in high school, while also

looking into what the program did well and in which areas it could improve. As it stands, there

is quite a bit of information on mentoring at both the middle-school and high-school levels, but

the perspectives of students involved in these programs, particularly in middle school, are

limited. This research study adds to the mentor program literature and provides insight into the

experiences of the AOC mentorship program from the student perspective. Hopefully, this study

also provides additional testimonial evidence that more mentor programs are needed at the

middle-school level.

Limitations and Delimitations

   This phenomenological study yielded insight into the Ambassadors of Compassion

program from the point of view of middle-school-aged males. The primary limitation is that I

my findings are not generalizable to other middle-school males or other general populations.

Also, even though I limited the amount of time between the completion of the program and the

time that I interviewed the mentees to decrease the chances of the mentee forgetting or remembering facts incorrectly, the accuracy of the interviewees' is a limitation. Another limitation is that I am the principal of the comprehensive high school that these boys will later attend. Due to my profession and my position, I may have influenced the responses from the mentees. I was mindful of this power disparity and was sensitive to it as I posed the interview questions. I worked diligently to alleviate the concern that I was in any way evaluating them. Still, the impact of my position may have limited student responses.

Guide questions were used when interviewing the boys. The method by which these questions were selected was a delimitation of this study. The questions were open ended, and follow-up questions were utilized so that the mentees could expand on their answers, and if necessary, I could seek clarification. The major delimitation was the selection of the group. The boys, all the same age and from one specific area in California, were selected by the site principal from those who have recently completed the program. Even with these limitations and delimitations, it is my hope that this study will provide insight and understanding that assist local school leaders and others who were concerned about these important issues and tasked with developing strategies and programs to support middle-schoolers as they transitioned to high school.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to summarize research on middle-school mentoring groups in school settings. Mentoring has been around since the beginning of time. Since there was no formal schooling, the task of mentoring usually fell to the families of children. In New Testament times, Jesus mentored his disciples on acts of humility and forgiveness that they would, in turn, mentor others. In John 20:21, *The Bible* states that Jesus mentored his disciples because he knew that soon a day would come when he would no longer be with them and they needed to advance his teachings. Since that time, we have continued to see acts of wisdom and skill passed on to a next generation through the vehicle of mentoring. Mentoring can occur in a natural setting, such as a father mentoring his son, and can also be introduced and implemented more systematically. Thus, the concept of mentoring is wide-spread.

The United States has spent billions of dollars over the last fifty years hoping to influence the lives of disadvantaged youth—with mixed results (Walker, 2007). Over the years, many presidents have made mentorship a priority both by budgeting funds for these efforts, and by personally promoting it. For example, in 2008, President Obama went as far as to appear in a public-service campaign asking citizens across the United States to "be the change" by mentoring youth (Elliott, 2008). Before that, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, which in large part also championed mentoring (Weaver, 2004).

Even with mentoring on the rise, fewer and fewer studies focus on group mentoring. Many of the largest and most effective mentorship programs, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS), rely heavily on one-on-one mentoring ("Big Brothers Big Sisters of America," 2016). With a growing number of youth needing to be mentored, the 1:1 model is unrealistic. There

simply are not enough mentors to go around, particularly so since most of the time mentors are volunteers with limited spare time. The cost of mentoring curricula is also on the rise (Wheeler, Keller, & DuBois, 2010). When you factor in the time needed to do an adequate job and the surplus of youth needing this service, and it is easy to see why group mentoring may end up becoming the new norm (Rhodes & Dubois, 2004). In fact, there is such a shortage of male mentors that female mentors are becoming more and more involved in the mentoring of young males (Kanchewa, Rhodes, Schwartz, & Olsho, 2014).

Studies involving mentorship in general have shown favorable results (Coller & Kuo, 2014), but studies that look at mentoring in a school setting, particularly a middle-school setting, are few (McQuillin, Strait, Smith, & Ingram, 2015) and vary in results (Coffman, 2009). More and more studies show that the middle-school years are vital for their level of success as students in high school (Schnautz, 2014). In general, research suggests that most school-based mentorship programs are geared toward students who are deemed "at-risk." This term denotes students who have been retained a grade level, have poor attendance, exhibit behavioral problems, suffer from substance abuse, have experienced pregnancy, or exhibit low achievement in the classroom (Lampley & Johnson, 2010). At-risk students need extra attention and guidance to succeed in school (Coffman, 2009). Many adolescents today may not qualify under the at-risk umbrella but have needs that could be met through mentoring nonetheless.

At times, it is the child in the middle who most needs guidance (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). That is, the average student, who is not at risk and who does not have scores at the top of his or her class, may need the most assistance. Solid guidance has been shown to have a tremendous impact with this type of student (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995).

This literature review examines three themes. The first theme consists of the dynamics between the mentor and the mentees, namely the norms that are expected of both parties. Research suggests that most mentors are volunteers with little formal training (Poteat, Shockley, & Allen, 2009; Pryce & Keller, 2013). The second theme explores the purposes behind mentoring students, and the third and final theme of this literature review examines mentor program successes. Common traits of mentor programs are identified that have remained effective over time. If new mentorship programs distinguish the successes and failures of other programs, they may be more likely to succeed, specifically by avoiding negative attributes of failed programs.

The databases used for this literature review were accessed through the George Fox University library, with guidance from the George Fox University education library liaison. All searches were refined to studies done after 1985 and only full-text, peer-edited material was used. Google Scholar, ERIC, and EBSCO were the databases researched for relevant information. Search terms used with the most success were *junior high, middle school, students, mentor, mentoring, mentees, and mentors.*

Mentor and Student Dynamics

In the first theme of the literature review, two subthemes remained consistent throughout the review of articles, books, dissertations, and journals: a) mentors need to have an open mind, and b) mentors and mentees must share a respectful atmosphere. Since mentors and mentees are usually different in age and most likely from different generations, and they may be from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, it is vital that the mentor be able to relate to the mentees. The youth of today have similar issues to the youth of yesterday, but they are also dealing with issues that did not exist in past generations (Pryce & Keller, 2013). Mentors must

be empathetic as mentees learn to share their hearts with the group. Even though the mentor may

not have experienced much of what the mentees will speak about, they must be able to offer

guidance and assistance.

And in communities that have a high ethnic-minority population, a successful mentor

must understand the various cultures enough to avoid offending or showing disrespect to

mentees who have different cultural backgrounds from his or her own (Diversi & Mecham,

2005; Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016). How can a Caucasian male gain credibility and

respect with students of other ethnicities? What would these relationships look like? Would

both sides feel uneasy about opening up? What strategies have mentors used in the past to help

break the barriers? These and other such questions can lead to tensions that must be considered

before beginning a mentoring program (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). In what follows, studies

regarding mentoring with an open mind and sharing a respectful atmosphere will be examined.

Mentors Having an Open Mind

There is a very real rift that exists between some middle-school students and adults.

Middle- school students are often labeled as immature and incapable of making good decisions

(Wentzel, 1998). This impression may or may not be true, but mentorship at such a critical age

by someone who gives students the freedom to voice their thoughts and concerns is crucial

(Rhodes, Bogat, Roffman, Edelman, & Galasso, 2002). It takes a special person to assume the

responsibility of being a mentor, and many would argue that it is a truly special person who takes

on the responsibility of mentoring junior-high students. It is easy for many of us to remember

college or even high school, but middle school seems like a distant memory. Our brains and

bodies have long since endured the days of middle school. Yet, middle school is truly a turning

point in the development of children. The young adolescents make many new decisions that

allow them to start coming into their own. Cognitive and character skills begin to take shape (Heckman & Kautz, 2013). The mentor must understand that views of these middle-school age adolescents may change suddenly in these sessions as personal opinions. It is key for the mentor to approach these sessions with a sense of acknowledgement that middle-school students are constantly changing emotionally and developmentally (Weinberger, 1992). The mentor should practice active listening before offering advice, which could easily be deemed as judgment, as these adolescents figure out what they truly believe and want (Pryce, Silverthorn, Sanchez, & DuBois, 2010).

The mentor must establish a relationship that is sound and not judgmental because evidence suggests that a failed mentor/mentee relationship can be extremely detrimental (Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012a). Certainly, a mentor who volunteers to engage mentees hopes to make a positive impact on their lives. However, if not done properly, the results can be catastrophic. Having the mentor and the mentee think similarly is not important if the mentor has an open mind. In fact, current research suggests that the matching of mentors with mentees who share similar values does not always equate to successful relationships or outcomes (Herrera et al., 2012). One would assume that selecting groups based on commonalities could be beneficial, and in truth, it very well may be. However, current studies are not drawing a strong enough correlation between sharing similar values and having a more productive mentoring group. It is worth noting that the research behind this relationship is limited. It could be that many times similarities are hidden in group work. Much more research has been done in the area of commonalities in 1:1 mentoring groups. In either case, it is fairly safe to say that the mentee need not share the same likes and dislikes or even the same value system in order to appreciate the input from the mentor (Larson, 2006).

In order for mentors to see true growth in the mentees, the relationship between the two needs to be directed by the mentee (Lindt & Blair, 2017; Strobel, Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McGlaughlin, 2008). That is, the mentee must feel so comfortable that they are willing to share their thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment. The mentees should control the flow of the conversation and the direction it takes. That is not to say that the mentor should not set parameters for the conversation. Qualitative studies exist that insist parameters be discussed and agreed upon as social norms during the first few meetings, then agreed upon as a group, and finally accepted by both the mentor and mentees (Johnson, 2007; Lindt & Blair, 2017).

The quality of care that the mentor gives to the mentees will help to bring down barriers (Lakind, Atkins, & Eddy, 2016). For instance, studies show that African-American and Hispanic youth are much more skeptical than their Caucasian peers regarding relevance, accuracy, and unbiased reporting in the curriculum taught in a school (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Rumberger, 1987). In today's culture, the media dominates the minds of children and adults alike. Social media are quick to show protests of groups who feel that they have been wronged or ignored (S. Schwartz et al., 2014). Many times, these protests have an underlying theme of racism. This makes it all the more important for the mentor to break down the barriers by listening first and speaking second.

Trust must be established before the curriculum can be taught. Trust cannot be established until time is spent with the mentees and they feel that they are not being judged. Through this relationship-building and commitment, the mentees will begin to acknowledge that different views are not always wrong. They may not always agree with other views, but those views should always be respected. The key to this transition of trust is the care and concern of

the mentor (Anastasia, Skinner, & Mundhenk, 2012; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, &

Valentine, 2011).

Mentor and Mentees Sharing a Respectful Atmosphere

Similarly, a respectful atmosphere shared by both parties will create an optimal learning

environment where real growth and change can occur (Weinberger, 1992). The idea of

confidentiality should be one of the first concerns to be addressed by the group. When trust is

broken and confidentiality is lost, it will take a long time to rebuild that trust, if it can be rebuilt

at all (Weinberger, 1992). Students will be more apt to speak openly if they know that what they

share will be respected and kept confidential. There are certainly mandates that the mentor must

follow, but those mandates, if addressed to the students initially, should not be a reason that

confidentiality is lost. Such mandates would include all the reasons why the mentor may need to

call Child Protective Services or other authorities (Núñez, Rosário, Vallejo, & González-Pienda,

2013).

The attitude both parties bring to the sessions is contagious. Qualitative studies note the

great impact a positive presence can have on the success of mentorship (Johnson, 2007; Karcher,

2005). A respectful atmosphere stays intact if the attitudes and actions by both mentor and

mentee remain positive. That does not mean that tough material will not transition emotions

from being very upbeat to being seriously downcast. These emotions obviously can change the

atmosphere of a mentoring session and should be expected. However, if possible, all parties

need to manage their emotions so that one individual does not completely dominate another

(Frels et al., 2013).

Another key to keeping this idea of respect in the forefront is to constantly be in contact.

Many mentor groups meet only once or twice a week for an hour at a time (Bernstein, Dun

Rappaport, Olsho, Hunt, & Levin, 2009), which makes it difficult to create a culture that is understood by all with such infrequent and short visits. A high attendance rate for both parties and communication during the week through drop-in lunches, phone messages, and emails all help to keep a culture of understanding and connection strong (Karcher, 2005; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006; Worley & Naresh, 2014). A respectful environment can be formed only through time and practice, so the group may have to think creatively to achieve the proper learning environment in the shortest time.

When considering the optimal learning environment for both the mentor and mentees, the ratio of mentor to mentees is important. The research that does exist on group mentoring favors avoiding large groups as they tend to lack control, discourage intimacy, and create an environment in which respect and openness are difficult to create (Johnson, 2007; Lampley & Johnson, 2010). Room size and flow are also important. A room that is too large can feel cold and uninviting, and a room that is too small may feel claustrophobic. The group works best when they are all together and can see each other's eyes, which helps to create a sense of respect (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Mentors can expect respect only if they are willing to give mentees the same courtesy. Mentors must consistently model active listening (Lindt & Blair, 2017) and give others the courtesy of finishing their thoughts before offering suggestions or advice or sharing their own stories. If students feel that they will constantly be cut off or rushed, then they may be slow to openly share (Strobel et al., 2008). A respectful environment is imperative to creating mentoring sessions that allow adolescents to feel comfortable in the growing process. In middle school, students are uneasy about so many things and many are still unsure of who they are or what they

believe. An environment that is lacking in respect will threaten the growth of confidence in these young boys and girls.

Summary of First Theme: Mentor and Student Dynamics

The literature in general is very positive with regard to mentorship. However, studies and research on mentoring groups that are not 1:1 in nature were difficult to find , and some serious gaps exist with respect to group mentoring done in formal settings, such as schools (Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012a). The literature is also lacking regarding how to create successful mentoring groups, and most of the studies come from a small number of researchers. (Here you also need to summarize the two sub themes you identified above.)

Mentor Program Successes

Many qualitative studies give general support to the importance of mentorship in middle school and high school (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Karcher, 2005; Rhodes & Dubois, 2004). It is prudent when establishing new mentoring programs to research what has worked in similar settings. This section of the literature review discusses common traits found in successful mentoring groups. When implementing a new program, mentoring groups commonly use Dr. Susan Weinberger's "How to Start a Student Mentor Program." Weinberger is a world-renowned expert in the field of mentorship ("Our founder," n.d.). She argues that the steps to creating a mentor program begin with recruitment and screening, followed by orientation and training, matching and responsibility, weekly sessions, evaluations, and year-end celebrations (Weinberger, 1992). Weinberger provides a helpful framework but fails to integrate pieces of what we know from previous successful programs identified and discussed in the next paragraph (Anastasia et al., 2012; Rhodes & Dubois, 2004).

This portion of research will discuss what the research reveals about successful mentor programs: a) strategies used in successful programs, b) trends seen in successful programs, and c) mentor best practices. By doing so, relevant information can supplement Weinberger's suggestions while focusing on the details of what other mentors and programs have found to be effective. These suggestions, in conjunction with Weinberger's broad themes, may help mentors establish their programs by providing quality instruction and detailed steps. Certainly, not all mentor programs are created equal. Mentoring programs vary in intention, but solid mentoring programs share much of the same framework that Weinberger addresses. These ideas include keeping the needs of the mentee as the highest priority and continual training as a key factor for the mentor (Weinberger, 1992).

Strategies Used To Create Successful Mentoring Dynamics

In reviewing both mentor groups and 1:1 programs, many strategies for creating successful mentoring dynamics were similar. For example, the need to develop sound rapport between the mentee and mentor and to establish expected norms is prominent. Weinberger points out that even when the groups use sound curricula and follow the appropriate processes, without some underlying points of emphasis the group may not operate at optimal functionality (Weinberger, 1992). Most mentor groups meet a broad scope of needs for their adolescent mentees. Some programs strictly focus on academics or behavior, but most of the time mentor groups are set up to address a mix of the two (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). In fact, the most successful mentoring groups address both academics and behavior components (Lampley & Johnson, 2010).

Although a curriculum is usually already in place, when creating a new mentoring group, local cultures and traditions need to be recognized to avoid offending or disregarding the beliefs

or lifestyle of the adolescent ("Big Brothers Big Sisters of America," 2016). Therefore, the

mentor should make minor alterations to the curriculum to account for the clientele but not take

away from the focus of the program (Sánchez, Colón-Torres, Feuer, Roundfield, & Berardi,

2014). The mentor should take active steps to discover local traditions and norms in order to

understand the people and location before group meetings begin.

　　　　When meetings do begin, the mentor must lay out a clear structure and guidelines so that

the program objectives are apparent (Anastasia et al., 2012). Self-monitoring by the mentees and

ongoing support from the mentor help the group to establish trustworthiness and pride in the

process. Groups that lack planning and have open-ended sessions without a clear objective tend

to experience the least success—both behaviorally and academically (Rhodes & Dubois, 2004).

Trends

　　　　The literature published about middle-school mentorship programs reveals three

prominent trends. I will compare the trends that pertain to middle-school planned group

mentorship programs to those of 1:1 mentoring in junior highs as well as to group and 1:1

programs at the secondary level. Whether at the middle-school or high-school level, the trends

are similar. While the most significant outcomes are achieved by 1:1 mentoring programs, group

mentoring programs also show significant results—and with a much greater distribution of

available resources.

　　　　The first trend is that at-risk students benefit from mentoring in a variety of ways;

however, these students say that their academic focus changes the most. A major study of Big

Brothers Big Sisters of America showed researchers that at-risk students involved in mentoring

completed 17.8 years of education while students without a mentor completed only 15.8 years of

education (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). This result differs from mentoring groups in

general, which will be described below. Scholars agree that because at-risk students have the most ground to make up in academics, the result is more apparent for this group (Anastasia et al., 2012; Coffman, 2009). Additionally, at-risk students tend to improve their grades first in order to participate in more activities (Lindt & Blair, 2017). A mentor would be wise to acknowledge these tendencies of at-risk adolescents before beginning.

Second, females indicate that they tend to form stronger bonds with their mentors than their male counterparts (Bernstein et al., 2009; Brewer & Carroll, 2010; Zand et al., 2009). A major study by Brewer and Carroll (2010) also points out that females who have been mentored are significantly more likely to help those in need, and to become mentors themselves. Even when identical strategies were employed, male and female mentees held different perceptions of the program and varied in program outcomes (Kanchewa et al., 2014).

A third trend is the similarities in the areas that mentors hoped to improve in the school setting: attendance, disciplinary referrals, and grades (Karcher, 2005; Schnautz, 2014). Of the three areas, student attendance has been shown to improve the most after completing these programs (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Wheeler et al., 2010). Due to the importance of attendance to both academic performance and school finances, mentors could use this information to persuade administrators who are hesitant to establish mentorship programs at school sites (Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012a).

Mentor Best Practices

As mentioned in the first theme of this literature review, mentors assume a heavy responsibility when leading a mentoring group. Mentors have the great privilege of helping to change the course of the mentee's life for the better, but they can also make it worse (Wood &

Mayo-Wilson, 2012a). In the final part of this second theme, I will review the practices that have been utilized by successful mentors.

By almost any measure, successful mentor programs feature mentors who are comfortable hearing and evaluating stories that are different from their own (Leyton-Armakan et al., 2012). Mentors must understand their own shortcomings when dealing with troublesome circumstances in a group setting (Pryce & Keller, 2013). In order to best serve others, mentors must first understand themselves.

Consistency is also important for both the mentor and the mentee. Mentors have commented time and time again that each new session builds upon the last, and that each year improvements and adjustments are made to make the program more and more effective. In a large-scale study by David Dubois and Jean Rhodes, they concluded that the best practices in mentoring are always changing but the consistency of both the mentor and mentee are unchanging (Rhodes & Dubois, 2004). They further state that trust can be established only over time and when two or more individuals commit to the same cause (Rhodes & Dubois, 2004).

Finally, mentors who have led successful programs received ongoing training (Lampley & Johnson, 2010). With the growing popularity of mentoring groups, more and more mentoring studies are taking place. And with this constant stream of new research on mentoring programs now available, mentors must constantly work to keep up with new trends, strategies, and practices that have proven to be valuable (Jekielek et al., 2002). In doing so, their mentor groups will surely benefit.

Summary of Second Theme: Mentor Program Successes

Successful mentor programs share many common characteristics, even though these programs vary in their focus and in their group structure. Although the programs are much different in makeup, successful mentoring programs share common elements such as strategies used, trends seen, and practices employed. Mentors should study these elements during training prior to beginning their sessions.

The most successful mentoring groups try to improve the lives of the mentees in multiple ways (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). Although it is certainly appropriate to follow an established and proven curriculum, the mentor must consider the cultures and values of the mentees before employing them ("Big Brothers Big Sisters of America," 2016). When sessions do occur, mentors should establish and maintain proper guidelines and procedures.

The literature concerning successful mentoring programs identified several consistent themes. The academic work of at-risk students' improves with mentoring (Coffman, 2009), and better academics may drive better behavior. Girls have noted that they bond very closely with their mentors (Brewer & Carroll, 2010). This close bond has led to continuing and strengthening their relationship even after mentoring sessions have concluded. Of the three areas that mentors focus on in a school setting, most mentees note that class attendance improved the most (Karcher, 2005). However, this differs with the at-risk subgroup. Initially, this subgroup saw an improvement in grades.

In addition, researchers agree that mentors must be comfortable in a group setting when leading a group, and must stay committed to the group throughout the program (Leyton-Armakan et al., 2012; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Also, training for the mentors must be

consistent and ongoing because new research findings may change how we understand mentoring and the methods that are in practice today.

Benefits of Mentoring

The third and final theme of this literature review will explore the academic and social benefits of mentorship programs for middle-school students. Although there are mentoring groups that focus either on academics or social behavior, most take a broad aim in the hope that they can affect both (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2007).

Over the years, mentorship programs have helped individuals of all ages better themselves (Schunk & Mullen, 2013). Most programs are tailored to address the needs of a specific population. Mentorship programs for middle-school students are no different. Junior high is the bridge that connects elementary school with high school. It is a time of turbulent change, and at the same time, the students' values and opinions start to take shape and be grounded (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; McQuillin et al., 2015). The values learned in a mentor program can help shape this transformation and ease the transition.

Most middle schools require students to change classrooms throughout the day. Students must adjust to interacting with many different teachers as well as different students in their classes. The demands on middle-school students begin to increase with all the new choices and options available to them, and complicate their lives (Lampley & Johnson, 2010; Rusk et al., 2013). Schnautz reports that mentoring programs have helped middle schoolers with these transitions and new responsibilities in a variety of positive ways (2014), so what are the academic and social benefits for middle-school group mentoring initiatives?

Academic Benefits

Junior high can be a time when students lack purpose. Students have noted that high-school graduation is far enough away that they feel as if they have time to get their academics corrected after middle school (Schnautz, 2014). Mentors do note a decline in the sense of urgency about academics with middle schoolers. Many students simply do not recognize the importance of academics (Lampley & Johnson, 2010), failing to see the purpose for their studies. And to complicate matters even more, to date there is no clear consensus about what would provide this sense of purpose for middle schoolers, although many mentoring programs promote this as a hoped-for outcome (Hannah, 2017).

Whether or not mentoring programs are able to help students gain a sense of academic purpose, many qualitative studies have shown that students report that mentoring has helped to foster academic improvement (Lampley & Johnson, 2010; Poteat et al., 2009; Pryce, 2012). Many times, school begins to take on a more central focus in their daily lives (Coffman, 2009). As noted earlier, at-risk students have the most dramatic increase in academic gains after completing their mentorship programs (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). Many students state that after completing a program, they have a higher appreciation for their academics (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001).

Some mentees have mentioned that their grades improved—not because their teachers were any better or that the academic climate had improved, but rather because their attitude about school improved (Lindt & Blair, 2017). Mentoring has brought clarity for many students regarding how good grades can help shape their future (Karcher, 2009).

Mentoring sessions have also been shown to help model and reinforce strategies used in classrooms (Weaver, 2004). For example, many mentoring groups employ joint activities and

guided instruction, which are common in classrooms today. By conversing with each other, the students increased their cognitive functioning (S. E. O. Schwartz, Rhodes, Spencer, & Grossman, 2013). This key outcome of group mentoring does not exist as richly or deeply in 1:1 mentoring groups since dialogue is limited to just two members.

Mentoring has also been shown to improve classroom attendance. Qualitative studies show that mentees often point to improved classroom attendance as a major outcome and point of pride for them (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Wheeler et al., 2010). In addition, students report that their concentration in class is better, and they are more physically present as well (Karcher, 2005). This is hopeful since many of these students have previously been brought before the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) for poor attendance. And in another study, students who completed mentoring programs reported that they missed less school, making it easier to learn (Converse & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2008).

Social Benefits

For students in mentoring groups, academic performance improves first, and improvement in their social behavior follows (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). The change in social behavior comes as the mentees are taught about social constructs by both the mentor and other mentees in the group (Frels et al., 2013). Interpersonal relationships and social adjustment take place over time as the mentor models valuable social constructs (Wentzel, 1998).

If conducted properly, mentoring groups allow students to speak openly and honestly without fear of being judged or mocked. By opening up, mentees begin to establish a framework of laws and norms, learning from fellow mentees as well as the mentor (Nation, Keener, Wandersman, & DuBois, 2005; Sánchez et al., 2014). Some mentees begin to understand and

respect ways that are different from their own and are able to communicate in new, constructive ways.

Learning how to speak and behave with peers and staff members can prove to be vital for middle-school students. Many times, disagreements take place between adolescents simply because they lack the ability to communicate effectively. Once learned, these communication skills have the potential to improve many facets of school for participants. Healthy relationships with peers as well as staff members enable students to succeed throughout their school years—and beyond (Carlisle, 2011).

Like an athletics team or Associated Student Body (ASB) club, mentoring groups give students a sense of identity and purpose (Frels et al., 2013). Mentoring groups also allow mentees to be a part of something bigger than themselves—something positive (Weinberger, 1992). Many students involved in mentoring programs, specifically at-risk students, are not involved in activities in which compromise and group decision making are modeled or viewed as positive. Many times this sense of belonging is found only through gangs or other groups with negative associations (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). All human beings crave a sense of belonging, and middle-school students are no exception. Mentoring groups can provide a sense of belonging in a positive environment that may not otherwise exist (Eby et al., 2008).

Mentoring groups allow students to contemplate where they see themselves in the future. Middle-school students must learn how to achieve goals that seem far-removed from their daily routine. High school is still in the future for them, and college and career aspirations can seem like a lifetime away. Many programs include goal setting as part of the curriculum, assisting mentees to develop a plan to attain their goals (Lindt & Blair, 2017; Wentzel, 1998). Mentees are sometimes asked to plot out the steps to both short-term and long-term goals ("Big Brothers

Big Sisters of America," 2016). Students who have taken mentoring courses state that sharing goals with one another is a powerful and formative activity that strengthens and encourages them to achieve those goals (Wentzel, 1998).

Summary of Third Theme: Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring programs primarily help mentees by improving their academic motivation and social behavior. Although some programs focus on a specific aspect such as academics or behavior, most mentoring programs have a general goal to improve multiple areas. Students share that their academics generally benefitted before their social behavior improved (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001), and that their relationships with both staff and students alike have improved (Carlisle, 2011).

Mentoring has been shown to improve both academics and social behavior, thus giving students a higher chance of experiencing academic success (Karcher, 2008). The skills needed for success in school and in life are not a given at birth; high character and a work ethic must be learned, and can be developed through instruction and modeling—activities that are key aspects of group mentoring (Heckman & Kautz, 2013).

Overall Summary

From this review of the literature, three overarching themes were identified. The first theme focused on the dynamics between the mentor and the mentees. Two subsections emerged for this theme: a) mentors having an open mind, and b) mentors and mentees sharing a respectful atmosphere. The second theme dealt with mentor program successes—mentor programs that produced positive results and looked specifically at success factors for these programs. The third and final theme focused on the benefits and intended outcomes for mentoring students. Mentoring programs primarily help mentees to improve their academic skill level and social

behavior. It is of note that there are few studies that report on a students' lived experiences in a group mentoring programs, and particularly so for the middle-school age group. This study identified and examined the experiences of a selected group of middle schoolers who participated in the Ambassadors of Compassion mentoring program before transitioning to high school, with the desire to add to our understanding of how group mentoring programs work and offer suggestions for improvement to allow greater impact on the lives of these students—and those who will follow in their footsteps.

Chapter Three: Methodology

High-school teens today experience far more stress than previous generations, and as a consequence of these stressors, many modern teenagers are engaging in unhealthy and dangerous activities that negatively impact their lives—inside and outside the classroom (Lampley & Johnson, 2010; Simões & Alarcão, 2014). As an administrator, I regularly interact with students who lack the coping skills to manage the many stressors of teenage life. Because of what I have witnessed, I conducted a phenomenological study on the experience of five male students who had just participated in a middle-school mentoring program.

This study examined the experiences of a group of young men who went through the Ambassadors of Compassion program. How do the participants perceive that the program assisted, or conversely, did not assist them to be better equipped for life in middle school and then in high school? In this phenomenological study, I examined the experience of the Ambassadors of Compassion program from the students' point of view as they look back on their semester of participation in the program.

The study and data collection process were guided by one main research question and two sub-questions. They were:

After completing the Ambassadors of Compassion mentoring program, how do students describe their experiences?

1. What mentoring experiences (or stories) stood out as most significant/meaningful in preparing them for the middle-to-high-school transition?

2. What coping/success strategies do they identify as most useful for the middle-to-high school transition?

Student interviews were conducted to give the mentees an opportunity to share their personal experiences in the program. The questions were formed in such a way as to allow the mentee to communicate his thoughts about his participation in the AOC program. Asking questions that were open-ended allowed me to follow up on intriguing issues that arose, while giving me the ability to clarify what the students meant with a particular answer (Cameron, 2012).

Setting

The student population for this study came from an AOC group who attend Raymond Junior High School (pseudonym). Raymond Junior High School is located in central California. The middle school is a public institution with approximately 420 students. Raymond Junior High School is part of a K-8 district that serves approximately 2,100 students. The school services 210 students in seventh grade and 210 students in eighth grade. Raymond Junior High School is the only middle school in town and feeds into the only comprehensive high school in the same town. Raymond Junior High School is made up of approximately 62% Hispanic students, 33% White, and 5% Black and Asian students. At Raymond Junior High School, 6.2% of the population are identified as English Language Learners (EL), and 9.2% of the students have been identified as learning disabled.

Many students at Raymond are second-, third-, or even fourth-generation students in this particular school district. However, Raymond was built in the early 1990s, with the first graduating class in 1994. The students are known in the community to be courteous and kind. I was part of the first generation of my family to attend the school district where Raymond is located. In fact, I was the first student-body president of the first graduating class of Raymond. Raymond looks much different today than when I went to school there, with several building

additions and mature landscaping covering the school grounds. The community fully supports

Raymond, and the partnership between the school and the town continues to be strong.

Raymond is located in a prime area in California, a city surrounded by fertile farmland.

The town is quaint and relatively safe. As a child, I can remember when the first traffic light was

installed and the first fast-food restaurant, McDonald's, was constructed. It was commonplace

for young kids to be allowed to travel by themselves throughout the town. The city is also

adjacent to a major highway, which is one of many features that draw people to our town. The

town was first established in the late 1800s when the Central Pacific Railroad put down railroad

tracks and built a train station.

In the last 25 years, the town has changed dramatically. Although still a prime location,

the "secret" has gotten out and the town has more than doubled in size. Fast-food restaurants

abound and several additional traffic lights have been installed. Although it is not big enough to

host many large commercial businesses, the town is on the cusp of another drastic change. With

the influx of new housing developments, it is estimated that the population will reach 20,000

residents in the next decade.

The administrative team at Raymond Junior High School consists of a principal, a

learning director, and an academic counselor. There are approximately 25 full-time credentialed

teachers with 10 classified staff members making up office staff, custodial crew, instructional

aids, and food service. Roughly 70% of staff members at Raymond Junior High School live in

the town, while the remaining 30% commute a distance of 30 minutes or less.

Raymond Junior High offers a typical list of core classes expected for middle-school

students. They also offer several elective selections such as woodshop, band, choir,

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Mathematics/Engineering and Science

Achievement (MESA), and leadership. Raymond offers more electives than many similar-sized

schools in California. The school is forward thinking and always looking to improve.

Raymond also has a list of courses offered through the Valley Regional Occupational

Program (VROP). VROP was established through the Department of Education to offer high-

quality career technical education to those who may not have adequate access to it ("Valley

Regional Occupational Program," 2017). The classes offered are broadcasting, digital

photography, Red Cross/first aide, babysitting, firefighting, agriculture, and video production.

VROP mostly serves high schools. Raymond is one of the few middle schools in the area that

offer VROP.

Participants

High-school freshmen experience so much change in their young lives. Many times,

students are unable to navigate this change with the skills or savvy they need to succeed, and it is

evident that many are not being taught these skills and values at home. This study examined five

junior-high students who participated in the AOC mentoring program, identifying and examining

what they have learned in the program that would help them build the skills and work ethic

necessary to have a more advantageous freshman year.

This was a phenomenological study, focusing on what students report that they have

gained from AOC—in their own words. AOC groups are relatively small; most groups are

between three and ten students, making for a more intimate and comfortable setting

("Ambassadors of Compassion," 2017). Groups are gender specific and are led by a mentor of

the same gender. Since AOC already has determined the make-up of the groups, a random-

selection process was of little value. AOC groups are diverse. The young men that were placed

into groups came from different ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and also had varied academic and athletic statuses.

Raymond had five male groups meeting in a semester, so I choose a group whose participants have been in AOC the entire semester and have completed the entire curriculum. The group met the following criteria to be chosen by the principal: to have completed the entire AOC curriculum in the same group, to have all mentees agree to speak with me and answer the questions asked to the best of their knowledge, to have a parent or guardian sign the consent form, and to have the mentees agree to participate in the study.

Mentoring Program

Ambassadors of Compassion (AOC) is a mentoring program that revolves around giving youth the opportunity to personally examine and "experience" life ready principles in a small group discussion led by a team coach ("Ambassadors of Compassion," 2017). The principles learned in AOC are designed for the group members to learn how to take responsibility in their own lives. The format is structured around a fifteen-week curriculum that requires an hour a week meeting.

Research Design

This is a phenomenological study, describing the lived experiences of five male students who reported the positive and negative factors in a mentorship programs that helped them to be more successful as they prepare to enter high school. Phenomenology was chosen because it allowed students to voice their perceptions from their own point of view and to better understand the world around them (Van Manen, 2014). I wanted to find out if AOC could help more middle-school students with their transition to high school. The research was exploratory in nature, and allowed me the opportunity to gain insight from the mentees as to the aspects of the

program that helped them build more skills for their transition to high school. Phenomenological studies allow people to become more aware of who they are and what they just experienced (Van Manen, 2014). This approach allowed me to truly discover the program from the students' point of view.

Data Collection

In this phenomenological study, data collection was taken through personal interviews of the five mentees along with two observations of the mentoring group sessions. I conducted the observations as a non-active member. I sat in the back of the room and took detailed field notes on important statements made by the mentees as well as descriptions of body language. The open-ended questions were framed to allow the students to elaborate on their experience, in addition to allowing me to follow up with specific questions (see Appendix A). The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes during the school day. This was intentionally done to minimize interference with classroom instruction time. The interviews took place in an agreed-upon setting determined by the site principal. (This setting is described in more detail in Chapter 4.) The setting allowed the participant to speak openly but was not private. The interview was held with the door open and allowed the mentee a clear sight of the door or window in order to allow them to feel more comfortable. All the interviews were recorded using a digital device. A phone was not used to record the students. The interview audio recording was transcribed off-site. Once all the interviews were transcribed, I coded the students' responses using a three-step process.

The interview questions (see Appendix A) were designed to draw out more information from the main research question, which asks students about the qualities and strategies they learned in AOC that would help them become more successful in school. The first question

focused on the general thoughts of the students regarding Ambassadors of Compassion. I asked them to tell me about their experience in the program. Second, I wanted to know about the qualities they feel they gained from the program. What qualities did they learn to make them more resilient and why do they think that is so? Third, it was beneficial to know their favorite part of the program and their least favorite parts, and their reasoning for those opinions. Fourth, I wanted to give students the opportunity to tell me what AOC could do even better to build their skills. Sometimes kids know exactly what needs to happen to address their population, and I wanted to give them the opportunity to do so. Last, I wanted to know whether the students believed that having completed AOC, they are better able to transition to high school—and if so, how. These five areas helped me gain an understanding of the AOC program from the students' perspective—and specifically how it did or did not build the skills necessary for middle-school students entering high school.

The interview questions were field tested to determine whether any adjustments needed to be made. A middle-school aged student not participating in the study was identified and interviewed. I asked for feedback from the student to see if the questions were understandable, and if any part of the interview process made him uncomfortable. This added reliability to the questions and the interview process.

Data Analysis

When the interviews were complete, the audio recordings were transcribed off-site. This was the first step toward proper analysis of the data. Once the data was transcribed, I identified emerging themes that revealed how AOC helped or did not help build the skills necessary for the middle-school students to prepare for high school.

There were three main steps that I used to code the data and distinguish common themes: initial coding, focused coding, and thematic coding. These steps were used to help me organize the data into categories and themes (Creswell, 2013).

First, the data needed to go through an initial coding process. In order for me to properly categorize the data, I needed to know as much about the data as possible. I did not transcribe the data myself, so it was imperative that I read the data over and over to become familiar with it. By immersing myself in the data, I was able to discern general patterns that exist from interview to interview (Creswell, 2013). These patterns allowed me to observe underlying themes and main topics.

Focused coding was the second step in the data analysis (Creswell, 2013). After reviewing the interviews, I identified themes that seemed to be significant from each interview. This allowed me to see what themes surfaced across the interviews. In vivo codes were used to code categories. Creswell (2013) states that in vivo codes are exact words used by the subjects and that approximately five categories should be identified for each theme. I analyzed the categories and themes repeatedly until they could be dissected to create subcategories (Creswell, 2013).

The final step in data analysis, thematic coding, could not take place until after the categories and themes were identified. During that process, I worked to understand how the themes were interconnected (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) states that thematic coding allows me to move from multiple themes to a more manageable number. I anticipated that between three and five themes would emerge from the analysis, each with three to five in vivo codes.

Research Ethics

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at George Fox University reviewed and approved my study before I moved forward with any data collection to be sure that students and staff were adequately protected (see Appendix E). When approval was given, I sought permission from the school site (see Appendix B), parents or guardians (see Appendix C), and the participants themselves (see Appendix C). I also sought permission from Dave Hannah, founder of Ambassadors of Compassion, for permission to use their name (see Appendix D).

Raymond Junior High School is the only middle school in a small town of approximately 14,000 people. Although I am an administrator in the same city, I do not work in the same district. I was rarely on campus at Raymond Junior High School; this distance provided a natural barrier to alleviate bias. It was important to note, however, that I could have been familiar with some of the students and their families. The community in which this study was conducted is my hometown. I desired to see the students in this community obtain help in dealing with the complex issues faced by teens today.

Permission for the study was requested via email from the administration at both the site and district levels. All parties signed a letter of cooperation (see Appendix B). I also met personally with the site principal to discuss the process. I carefully constructed an informed-consent letter that requested consent from the parents or guardians of the minors (see Appendix C), giving them a general idea of the purpose of my study (Creswell, 2013). Once the potential research subjects had been identified, I asked for informed assent from each of them. The name of the school was changed as well as the names of the five males I observed and interviewed to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all mentees and mentors.

All audio recordings were stored in a locked fireproof file cabinet. All word processing was done on a password-protected, personal computer. When the study is complete, information that can be destroyed will be destroyed after a three-year waiting period.

Role of the Researcher

I am a doctoral student at George Fox University, and this research is the final step in my program. Although I am not the principal at Raymond Junior High School, I am the principal at the comprehensive high school into which Raymond feeds. I chose this topic in part to determine whether our incoming freshmen could benefit from a more robust mentoring strategy. If they could, it would be valuable to implement even more mentoring programs at the middle school to smooth the students' transition to high school. Since I grew up in this town and had served as the high-school principal, I had strong ties to both schools and desired to see both institutions succeed. I wanted the students to feel comfortable during the interviews, having no fear of future judgment from me as their next principal. I did my best to create a safe environment where students could openly discuss their experiences.

I was not naive to the fact that the town that I grew up in is not the same town that it is today; it has changed. I hoped that the interviews and the themes that emerged would ultimately be beneficial to me as an educator in order to put students in the best position possible to be successful as they enter high school.

Timeline

The timeline for this research project started in the summer of 2017 with my precis. It was approved in August of 2017, and my proposal was approved in early October 2017. When the proposal was accepted, I sought IRB approval, and was granted permission by IRB in mid-October 2017. After appropriate permissions from the district, the parents of the subjects, and the

subjects themselves were obtained, I concluded the five interviews and two observations by December 20, 2017. Data analysis was concluded by January 2018 with the completion of chapters four and five of my dissertation by the end of February 2018, which will allow me to defend my dissertation by the end of March 2018.

Potential Contributions to the Field of Education

This phenomenological study provided the opportunity to learn about the impact that a mentoring group may have on middle-school students as they transition to high school. The insights that emerge from this study can be shared with school districts to help them establish or alter the way they utilize mentoring groups. The review of literature showed a dearth of studies involving the group mentoring of middle-school students. This study allowed for some middle-school students' perspectives to be heard and shared.

The purpose of this study was to identify the lived experiences of middle school students in a group mentoring program, and to assess whether group mentoring could help students develop the skills needed to be successful in high school. If mentoring does help and more programs are established, my hope is that we may be able to decrease the number of drop-outs and increase the number of students who make better life choices during their high-school years. As such, this research may be instructive to a large number of educational practitioners, even though the results are clearly not generalizable. At the end of the day, if this study, in a small way, could impact the high school where I serve as principal (and the community where I live), it will be worth all the time and effort.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

This study examined the lived experiences of a group of five middle-school males who participated in the Ambassadors of Compassion program, a program designed to build success in teens to help equip them for life's stressors ("Ambassadors of Compassion," 2017). I examined the participants' perceptions about how the program assisted or, conversely, did not equip them for both their current life stage and for entering high school. In this phenomenological study, I evaluated the Ambassadors of Compassion program from the middle-school students' point of view as they looked back on their participation during the previous semester. I interviewed each of the five mentees personally, and observed two mentoring sessions in total in which all five were present. The interviews took place in a counseling room at Raymond Junior High School (pseudonym). The room was a quasi-physical education classroom with all the smells associated with physical education. It was cold room both in appearance and temperature. It took a while for the heater to do its job so the beginning interviews were quite chilly. The room had stackable chairs and folding tables that could be used for classroom instruction. The door was left open and classified and certificated staff were close by during the interviews. This environment created privacy for myself and the interviewee, yet it allowed both of us the added security of knowing that we were not in isolation. The interviews were informal and pleasant, and from what I could tell, all interviewees had a positive experience in sharing their story. The group observations took place in a classroom. I sat towards the back of the room and was not an active participant. I placed myself opposite of the mentor to avoid being the focus of the mentees.

Chapter four will begin with the two observations that preceded the student interviews. The observations gave me insight into the mentoring group. This allowed the student interviews

to have much more clarity as I had already seen the group meeting take place on two separate occasions.

Profiles of Participants in the Study

The five students who were interviewed in this study all came from Raymond Junior High School. They were all male and all in the eighth grade. Pseudonyms were used in lieu of their real names. The participants all came from different backgrounds. Some of the participants had done well in school, while others were in fear of not being promoted. Participants also came from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Two of the boys were Hispanic, one was African American, one was Indian, and one was Caucasian. Strictly by chance, these ethnicities represent the most common in Raymond's school district. The mentoring group maxed out at ten participants, so interviewing five of them allowed me to feel like I could gain an accurate portrayal. This phenomenological study focused on the Ambassadors of Compassion program from the perspective of the students. This study did not focus on the backgrounds of the participants, thus information given about each student is limited.

Student one: Mandeep.

Mandeep is a 14-year-old Indian male who has lived his whole life in the community in which Raymond Junior High (pseudonym) resides. His family is wealthy and both parents are successful. He is a straight A student who plans to become a brain surgeon. He will be attending the local high school next year.

Student two: Miguel.

Miguel is a 14-year-old Hispanic male who has lived in Raymond's school district his entire life. He is a 3.5 GPA student who is heavily involved in the band. He comes from a large

family. His father puts in long hours at work. At this point of his life he is unsure about what he wants to do when he grows up. Miguel plans to attend the local high school next year.

Student three: Qian.

Qian is a 14-year-old African American male who moved back to Raymond's school district from Colorado over the summer. Qian has split time growing up between his parents. As a younger boy, he lived in Raymond's school district but has also spent time in many other school districts. Qian comes from a family that is poor and struggles to pay their bills. He plans to attend the local high school next year.

Student four: Bobby.

Bobby is a 14-year-old White male who is a "C" average student. He has spent his entire life in Raymond's school district and plans to attend the local high school next year. He is worried about being allowed to attend the promotion ceremony for Raymond, however. He came from a typical family in which he had two siblings and his parents both worked blue collar jobs.

Student five: Ivan.

Ivan is a 14-year-old Hispanic male who has a GPA below 2.0. His attendance is quite sporadic with several unexcused absences and truancies. His home life isn't the best either with constant conflict. He has always attended the same school district and plans to attend the local high school next year. His family is very poor.

Observation 1

"Bocephus, how you doing, man?" This was my first encounter with the Ambassadors of Compassion mentoring group that I was to observe. I showed up early, being sure to place myself in the room away from the group. The last thing I wanted to be was a distraction. The

room was large. I looked around and saw several band instruments scattered around the room surrounded by a multitude of easels. There weren't any tables and the chairs were stacked on the side.

The door was open and there was a slight breeze. I noticed on my walk to the room that students walking around Raymond Middle School were dressed in all sorts of different ways. It was a typical mid-October day in Central California where the weather was confused. There was still the hangover from the summer but the leaves were telling us the fall was beginning. The student attire matched the weather. Some were in jeans and a sweatshirt while others were in board shorts and a t-shirt.

The mentor had given a nickname to all of the mentees and Bocephus was one. The student nicknamed Bocephus smiled in such a way that I could tell that there had already been a bond formed between the two. Similar greetings were given to the other mentees as they entered the door. One by one they plopped down on the floor in a half circle. One student was so relaxed that he laid down on his stomach.

Ten boys composed this mentor group. From their varying appearances, I assumed the mentees came from all different backgrounds. Five of the boys were Hispanic, four were Caucasian, and one was African American. In comparison to the demographics of the school, this breakdown seemed very accurate. All of the boys were cordial with one another.

At the beginning of the lesson, the members of the mentor group took turns reading a passage out of their Ambassador of Compassion Handbook. One of the students forgot to bring his handbook, so he read from his partner's book. The reading for the week was focused on the term *expectations*. Students read about what expectations were and also brainstormed about unrealistic expectations and how those could be troublesome. Examples of unrealistic

expectations were given. One example given was having an unrealistic expectation of running a sub-four-minute mile.

Next, students were asked to volunteer and read their expectations to the group. Some students spoke about getting good grades, while others spoke about going to college. One mentee even stated that he wanted to "land" a girlfriend. The mentor then asked the students to fill out their "call to action." The "call to action" was a section in each unit where students could reflect on what they just discussed and convert their discussion into a plan of action. Basically, it was a plan for how mentees were going to achieve their goals. If a mentee had an expectation of going to college, then their call to action could state that they would get good grades in high school by studying and trying hard in school.

The mentor was able to have a culminating talk at the end where he discussed trials that could come up when trying to achieve their goals. The examples of a baseball player hitting .300, which meant that he failed seven out of ten times, was used. He also spoke about Thomas Edison's many failures before inventing the light bulb. The mentee was trying to show that failures happen to all of us but that doesn't mean that we should give up.

During the initial readings, the mentoring group seemed to be very quiet and respectful. As the session continued, the group became more and more talkative. At the end of the session, five of the mentees were lying down on their stomachs. The group seemed to be relaxed and they seemed to truly enjoy this once-a-week meeting.

Observation 2

The weather had definitely turned before my second observation. It was a cloudy day that had rain on the horizon. I happened to walk into the main office at the same time as the mentor whose group I would be observing. We exchanged pleasantries, signed into the office,

and walked together across campus to the same band room that they utilized every week. The

door was locked so we found a custodian to open it for us. The custodian was very kind and

gracious by not only unlocking the door for us, but by also holding the door open for us.

I assumed my normal position in back of the room. This time, there wasn't a single chair

already out for me to sit on; all the chairs were stacked up on the side of the room. I found the

chair towers, grabbed one, and set it by my belongings. Soon after, and as luck would have it,

Bocephus was the first to enter the room. The mentor was quick to notice, "Bocephus, how are

you doing man?" The two of them spoke about how the day was going before Bocephus

sprawled out on the floor next to his mentor. Another student soon entered. A few minutes went

by. The obvious noise and rush of students entering their next class had ended and yet only two

students were ready. One of the students mentioned that there was a field trip to Catalina Island,

so there might be a few group members away. This reminded Bocephus that he needed to leave

early for soccer as well. Shortly after that exchange two more group members walked in,

making it a total of four. The ethnic breakdown was similar to the first observation. There were

two Hispanics, one Caucasian, and one African-American.

The lesson presented centered on responsibility. Students read out loud a brief

introduction to responsibility before answering a question posed by the mentor. The question

was, "Have you ever blamed anyone else for your own choices?" The mentees took turns going

around the room speaking about situations that have occurred in their own lives when they didn't

take ownership of what they did wrong. It was interesting to see how open these students were

so early into the lesson on responsibility. I hadn't observed such instant openness during my

first visit. It could be that only half of the mentees were in attendance, so they could be more

vocal because fewer members were there to speak.

The talk took a turn when the group began to discuss how sometimes decisions are made because it "feels good." Examples were given, such as stealing and cheating on a test. The conclusion was drawn that sometimes immediate satisfaction is not worth the consequences that come with it. The mentor explained a real-life example of a situation that occurred during his youth. His older sister took the mentor and some friends on a joy ride in a vehicle before she had her license. They were involved in a car wreck and the police were called.

A phrase was used by the mentor to get the mentees to see how who they hang out with and what is important to them would be summarized with their actions. He stated, "What the mind dwells up, the body acts upon." Mentees spoke about how they treat others and who they hung out with would ultimately impact their own lives.

Finally, students worked on their action plans, how they could start taking more responsibility in their lives. Students shared out loud after their action plans were written. Students spoke about taking responsibility at home, with homework, with their role in the family, and with their interaction with siblings. The bell to signal the end of school came while the students were wrapping up the sharing of their action plans. The mentees said goodbye to the mentor, and they went on their way.

Thematic Overview

Five students shared with me their experience with the Ambassadors of Compassion program. They shared stories of how AOC impacted their own lives. The following four themes emerged from the data gathered through their experiences and will be utilized to narrate their stories in the program: (a) students in the AOC program learned how to take initiative in their own lives; (b) although students have different expectations for themselves, students care deeply about their grades; (c) many students lack friends they can trust and were encouraged that the AOC group offered that; and (d) students come from all different types of family dynamics, but the skills learned in AOC could translate to all of them. This section will allow the students to use their own words to tell of their experiences in Ambassadors of Compassion, illustrating the themes that emerged.

Theme one: Students in the AOC program learned how to take initiative in their own lives.

When speaking with students about their experiences in Ambassadors of Compassion, it became clear that learning how to take initiative in their own lives had the biggest impact on them. Many of the students shared examples of how they began to use initiative in all areas of their lives. The students also shared examples of specific times the mentor spoke of initiative and the details that were given to them. Students spoke about how a lack of initiative previously led to trouble in certain areas of their lives. Conversely, they also shared how initiative has led to changes that are evident. Mandeep shared:

Um, I think in the program, the time that was the most helpful was the parts on initiative. Because that part, you don't have to wait for others to do something, you take the first

step most of the time. It can be done anywhere but I am now seeing what I can do in my

own community.

The time I had with Mandeep allowed me to hear about his goals of wanting to be a brain

surgeon. The only way for him to accomplish this goal was by taking initiative in his own life.

The discussions with his mentor allowed him to see areas of his own life where he could apply

this principle.

Miguel's story mirrored Mandeep's in many ways. He spoke about the lessons on

initiative and how it would help him both in academics but also in his home life. Miguel stated,

Well, I have even begun to use initiative in band class. I really want to be first chair

because right now I'm second chair and the only way that I can see that happening is for

me to practice more at home instead of only playing my instrument when I have class.

Miguel went on to speak about how concentrating more on his studies and focusing more

when he gets to high school will allow him more opportunities in college. He believes that

taking initiative and the skills learned on how to do so were important in his AOC sessions.

Qian says he has begun to use initiative when organizing his binder. Qian shared:

I really have always had trouble with my backpack and binder. I don't even know where

my work is most of the time. By the time I find the assignment I already received a zero.

So, um, if I take initiative, then I will put my stuff away in the right sections where I can

find them the next day.

He went on to talk about how he probably won't go through the promotion ceremony but

graduating from high school is really important to him. When I asked what would be the

difference between junior high and high school, Qian stated, "From the beginning, I want to stay

organized. I'm not going to wait to be told."

Bobby's view point on initiative was similar to Qian's. Bobby believes that he hasn't put this into practice many times before being part of the Ambassadors of Compassion mentorship group. Bobby shared:

> I usually always used to wait to do something until I was told. So, yeah, then sometimes it was too late. So now I have begun doing stuff before being told to do it and it has been much better.

Bobby went on to share that he was mostly an average student who gets mostly "C" letter grades. He thinks that if he took initiative more he could raise up his grades and has already begun the process of doing so.

Ivan's responses were a bit vague in the area of initiative, and used "responsibility" interchangeably with initiative. He knew that he should take initiative but had generic responses on what he is doing differently now. Ivan states, "Responsibility helped me because now I won't, um, yeah, it helps me reach my expectations." He went on to state that he has struggled specifically in math and he thinks it is just too hard for him. When prodded on how much he worked at it, he responded, "Sometimes I just give up instead of asking for help. I know I need to ask more."

Theme Two: Although students have different expectations for themselves, they all care deeply about their grades.

Every student I interviewed was keenly aware of their grades and how grades can impact their future. They all worried about their grades but some had much different expectations of themselves and their grades. Students shared why they care about their grades and what the ultimate goal was for improving, or maintaining their current grades.

Mandeep is a straight A student who loves to learn. Although he mentioned how AOC spoke about trying your best in school, Mandeep believes that he was already doing so. Mandeep explains:

> I try really hard in school. Some subjects require me to study more than others but it is important to me to not get any B's. I want to be a valedictorian and know that it will require me taking school very seriously. AOC actually took me out of an elective class I enjoyed so sometimes that was hard but I also liked how AOC emphasized school.

Mandeep went on to say that he wants to become a brain surgeon and knows that he will have to get into a really good school. He knows that the only way that will happen is getting good grades and scores in high school.

Miguel is also a student who takes his studies very seriously. He says that the Ambassadors of Compassion program allowed him to see that he is on the right track in this area. Miguel states, "I don't understand why some of my friends don't take school seriously. I like school and I like to learn. I'm going to continue to try my hardest in school and my group is going to try hard too." Miguel's only class that he believes he struggles in is band. He really wants to be first chair but is currently second chair.

Qian is a student who has really struggled in school. He is aware of his struggles and is also aware of why he has struggled in the past. His grades aren't great and he fears not being able to go through the promotion ceremony. When asked if this bothered him, Qian responded, "Yes. I really want to walk with my friends. My grades suck and I know this. I need to try harder because my mom can't help me at home. My mentor gave me suggestions on what I should try." When questioned on what examples were given to him, Qian said, "Like asking teachers for help and staying organized." Qian thinks that these are areas he can really work on.

Bobby is a student who seems to just coast through school. He is an average student and is ok with that. As long as he doesn't fail a class he is fine with whatever grade he gets. Bobby shared this example:

Some kids work so hard to get straight As. I would rather, yeah, just have fun. I like learning but I also don't want to spend every night doing homework. Ambassadors of Compassion showed me that I was taking too many, like, shortcuts. I can see how this is true.

Bobby's main goal with his grades is to walk at promotion. His grades must improve a bit for this to happen. It will be interesting to see how Bobby does this coming semester.

Ivan is failing almost all of his classes. His attendance is bad and his study habits appear to be worse. Ivan states, "I have always had bad, like, grades. I know that I can do better but I just never have. When I hung out with my group I could tell that I wanted to get them higher. I learned from other group members what I could, you know, do." Ivan knows that he will not be walking at promotion because of his GPA. However, he thinks his grades will improve. Ivan states, "High school is next year. I need to do better."

Theme Three: Many students lack friends they can trust and were encouraged that the AOC group offered that possibility.

Interestingly enough, students all felt comfortable in their Ambassadors of Compassion group. Most of the students stated to me that they don't trust many people but their AOC group established the camaraderie and trust early on. This was beneficial to the group as a whole because students felt safe opening up.

Mandeep is the type of student who has a small inner circle. Academically, he seems elite and that causes him to have few friends. I asked Mandeep about his comfortableness in the group and he responded with the following:

> I don't have many secrets and live a pretty simple life. There wouldn't be a whole lot for me to talk about that would be sensitive information. But I could see others saying things that I could tell was hard for them. That allowed me to tell them it was ok and to help them out with it.

Mandeep also says that the AOC group has allowed friendships to be built even outside of the group. He says that it is neat to look across the classroom and know that a member of your group is in there.

> Miguel's story is much the same as Mandeep's. He states:

> It was really neat knowing that what was said in the room was not going to leave the room…. kind of like Vegas. The group also allowed me to know things about classmates that I would have never ever known. It definitely gave me more perspective into their life.

> He says that he didn't have trouble opening up but was quick to admit that he doesn't have a lot of things to share in his life that would embarrass him.

> Qian was a student who definitely has trust issues. He has bounced back and forth between family members and from state to state. He states, "My family has troubles so I try not to get in the way. It was nice to be able to say things to guys I could trust. I really liked that." Qian also shared that it took a while for him to get involved in the group even though the mentor established trust early on. "After I saw others sharing week after week, I, um, tried it out too. It was cool."

Out of the students interviewed, Bobby was the student who didn't say much about trust. Bobby stated, "I just listened most of the time. Some guys really opened up." He said he learned a lot from others student trials but didn't really get into details on his own life inside or outside of school. "I really didn't have much to say," Bobby responded.

Ivan's reflection on trust was much like Qian's. Ivan comes from a large family and they have fallen on hard financial times. "It was cool how the group felt like they could tell each other stuff. We all came from different backgrounds but in the end, like, we are the same," Ivan says. Ivan also mentioned that he wishes he could open up to his mom at home as well but doesn't want to make things worse for her.

Theme Four: Students come from all different types of family dynamics, but the skills learned in AOC could translate to all of them.

The five students interviewed came from all walks of life. Some came from families who were successful and where money was not an issue. Others came from families who are very poor and tend to move around a lot. However, the skills learned in Ambassadors of Compassion seemed to be applicable in every family, rich or poor, black or white.

Mandeep comes from a successful family. He didn't have much to say about AOC and how it has helped him out at home. He did, however, state the following, "Cleaning my room helps my mom so I have done that more." Mandeep also stated that his family expects him to do well, so there are high expectations for him. Thus far, he has had little trouble living up to his parents' expectations for him.

Miguel's dad works a lot so he tries to help his mom out around the house. Ambassadors of Compassion gave him insight on what he could do around the home to be more helpful. He states:

My mom has a lot on her plate. She has to raise us and does, like, the cooking and stuff…. all of our laundry too. Instead of sitting on the couch, I try and get up to help now. That makes my mom happy.

Miguel also told me that he helps more often now with his brothers and sisters and with yard work so his dad can relax more at home. "My dad works hard. He deserves some rest," Miguel says.

Qian and Ivan share similar experiences at home. They come from families who are poor and the two have grown accustomed to a lot of turmoil. Qian says, "There is just a lot of yelling all the time. I've tried things I have learned like helping around the house and speaking quietly so others won't raise their voice, and at times it has been ok." Ivan shared a similar thought, "Everyone in my family seems stressed and most the time it is about rent. I try to think of things to do around the house to help out so there will be less arguing. My AOC group went over lots of stuff that I could do to help my mom out." Both students come from families where arguments are common and both seem to be looking for ways to reduce the amount of fighting.

Bobby has begun to do more yardwork for his family at home. Just like his studies, he has to be pushed to help out around the house. He says, "I'm lazy; I know that. When the weekend comes I just want to relax by like, sleeping in and stuff. But I also know that it is the weekend for my family too, so I should help them out." He said that he really never thought about some of this stuff before the AOC program and is hoping that the help at home and in the yard will be helpful to his family.

Summary

The five students I interviewed gave a variety of responses to my questions regarding their time in Ambassadors of Compassion. Taking initiative and not waiting until the last minute

proved to be the main takeaway. Student attitudes about grades and what grades can do for them, even if the expectations were quite different, was also a topic that students felt Ambassadors of Compassion influenced. Trust and being able to open up was of great value to the group members. Finally, although family dynamics varied among the mentees, AOC had an impact on their home lives. Chapter Five provides additional details and analysis of the results of this phenomenological study as well as implications and recommendations for further research.

Chapter Five: Discussions and Conclusion

This phenomenological research study was conducted to describe the lived experience of five middle school students regarding the positive and negative factors in a mentorship program that have has led students to achieve more success as they enter high school. After coding the data, the following themes emerged: (a) students in the AOC program learned how to take initiative in their own lives; (b) although students have different expectations for themselves, students care deeply about their grades; (c) many students lack friends they can trust and were encouraged that the AOC group offered that; and (d) students come from all different types of family dynamics, but the skills learned in AOC could translate to all of them. The following section will review the findings from each interview question.

Discussion of the Findings

Interview question one: "Tell me about a time that you remember that you felt was most helpful to you? Why?"

The five students who participated in the Ambassadors of Compassion program that I interviewed had a variety of responses of how AOC would help them achieve success as they prepare to enter high school. However, three responses emerged from the first question. The responses given were also aligned with research that states what top mentoring programs tend to achieve (Anastasia et al., 2012).

The most common response from the students was that AOC has taught them to take initiative on tasks. The students were quick to point out that there were times in their lives when they failed because they did not step forward to do the right thing. Examples of initiative were given such as picking up trash without being told to and getting ahead on homework assignments. Students also gave examples of how they can take more initiative at home. Some

of the students had home troubles that could be helped by this new skill. From helping their mom start dinner, to taking out the trash, to doing yardwork, students stated that initiative can start at home.

The second response given about what was helpful from the program was the need for personal responsibility that was reinforced. Students mentioned that they needed to take more ownership of their lives and their surroundings. A direct application that was mentioned was their schoolwork and how their grade mark was a reflection of effort. Straight As may not be possible, but maximizing their potential in class can only occur when students take responsibility over their work (Wentzel, 1998). It was interesting to note that students felt that their grades improved after the section on responsibility had been taught. Students even took the concept further in that they are responsible not just for their grades but to communicate directly to teachers about any issues or questions they have.

The third response given was that the program helped the students learn how to become leaders. Students stated that they could be leaders in all different areas of life. "Leading by example" was a term used frequently. Students felt that they didn't have to sit back and wait for another to do the right thing but they could be the one to take the first step. One student also mentioned that having a lot of followers isn't as important as doing the right thing in regards to leadership.

Interview question two: "Tell me about a time when you were most encouraged in the program. Explain."

This question got most of the students to smile as they could look back to recite some memories of how the program has encouraged them. All students recited a positive response

with very little hesitation. It was interesting to see how the program has impacted students in different areas of their life.

The first and most common response was how good they felt when they went out and started helping people. The gratifying response that students felt internally was something that was new to most of them. Students also felt surprised that helping someone could bring more joy than receiving the same type of gift in return. Research suggests that giving to others can increase one's own self esteem in mentoring groups (Lakind, Eddy, & Zell, 2014). Although they were encouraged to go out and help others, students commented that it felt so good that they wanted to continue to do it.

The ability for the group members to form a bond to be able to trust each other that what was said in the room was private was the second most common response given. Notably, the ability to trust others seeped into responses of other questions as well. All different types of male students were brought into an AOC group, and the brotherhood that was formed was special to the students. Students believed, without a doubt, that when they left the classroom everything would be left confidential. That was rare for these students. It was a surprise that complete strangers could be trusted more than some of their best friends. This ability allowed them to truly open up in their group sessions. Opening up and trust in confidentiality are key elements to successful mentoring groups (Pryce, 2012). The mentor fostered a trusting environment by having the group sit in a circle. The mentor also circled back to the norms that were set early on which included confidentiality and respecting each other's privacy. The nicknames given made the group feel even more comfortable in the group setting.

The final comment and how students felt the most encouraged related to their family dynamic at home. Students felt that they could start to see a shift in their home life by applying

some of the tactics that were learned in Ambassadors of Compassion. They also felt that they were beginning to see the appropriate times at home to help a situation or even a conversation that was occurring. They were eager to see if what they learned would have lasting implications at home. Many students who have the most success in mentoring programs are those who do not have the proper structure at home (Herrera et al., 2012).

Interview question three: "Tell me about a time when you were frustrated in the meetings."

There were two responses given regarding how students felt frustrated in AOC meetings. It is important to note that the issues that arose were not "deal breakers" for the students. They felt as if these were very minor but issues nonetheless.

The first response was that Ambassadors of Compassion pulled the students out of another class to take part in the program. Granted, elective classes were the classes that they were missing, and the class met only once a week for an hour; but it was an hour missed each week for an entire semester. Students mentioned that this led to more stress and homework at times. They also mentioned that there were times something important was being taught in their elective class or a fun project was about to start, but they still had to go to AOC. This led them to enter AOC at times without the proper attitude.

The second response was that sometimes the questions asked were too complex. Students felt that at times their mentor had to explain what the question meant. Along those same lines, students felt that they had to think too much for some of the questions asked. Students were hesitant to state that this was one of their struggles within the program. Many mentor programs have tailored curriculum where questions and assignments fit the group's intended age ("Big Brothers Big Sisters of America," 2016).

Interview question four: "Can you tell me about a time when you felt really stressed in the program? Did the mentoring help you talk about and help you deal with them?"

The five students who were interviewed had only two different responses to this question. This was also the question that I found that they elaborated more on. It was telling how much both of these topics trouble junior-high students. Although the responses aren't related, they both stirred up plenty of emotion within the students. It was also interesting to see how AOC helped contribute to how the issue was dealt with.

The first response given was the stress to get good grades put students under. This type of stress was explained under different circumstances but it is still the same stressor. For example, some students stated that getting straight A's was important to them, while others stated that they just wanted to go through the promotion ceremony. These expectations are light years away from each other but in each case, grades were the stressor. Sometimes the stress of getting "good" grades was put on them by their parents, while other times it was an intrinsic motivation. Students mentioned that Ambassadors of Compassion helped them by learning how to be responsible, even responsibility in organization. By being organized students felt that they had a better grasp on their work. They also mentioned that the learned trait of advocating for themselves was helpful in reaching out to teachers for help. An increase in overall grades is common in successful mentoring programs (Portwood, Ayers, Kinnison, Waris, & Wise, 2005).

The second response given about stress was in relation to family dynamics at home. A few students reported that the past semester was tough at home. Verbal altercations as well as disrespect were witnessed many times. When speaking about this stressor, students spoke a little more quietly and had more emotion behind it. I could tell this was troubling them. AOC helped them to take initiative in helping do more things around the house, which may have led to fewer

unnecessary arguments. Students also noted that they interjected in some of the conversations to help solve the issue at hand by using their problem-solving skill.

Interview question five: "What coping strategies did you develop as a result of the mentoring sessions?"

There were three responses regarding the coping strategies learned in the Ambassadors of Compassion program. These strategies may seem simple to the reader but it seemed as if many of the students that I interviewed grew up without knowing about them or about what they truly meant.

The first coping strategy mentioned was taking responsibility. The examples used by the students all related to school or home, such as being prepared for class the next day and completing chores at home in a timely manner. Some of the students even went a bit deeper, such as asking a teacher how they could do better in class or asking one of their parents how they could help out more around the house.

The second coping strategy mentioned was learning how to properly communicate. Eye contact and tone of voice were both mentioned as good methods in communicating. Timing in communication and when to refrain from communicating at all were also learned. Students mentioned that communicating properly could help alleviate many troubles that could arise later. An honest and open communication style is lacking among many youth today, and mentoring groups have tried to help fill that void (Van Ryzin, 2014).

Lastly, students noted specific coping strategies such as breathing techniques and thinking. Students talked about how deep breaths could calm down their anger, and how thinking and waiting were positive ways to reflect on thoughts and emotions before responding.

Students mentioned that many times they got in trouble or did a disservice to themselves by acting out or speaking before properly thinking a situation through.

Implications

The observations and interviews with the students allowed me to think not only about ways we could improve the mentoring sessions but also about where and how we could add mentoring to other areas of schooling. The students gave helpful insight into what worked in the program and what they saw as frustrations. Following are the ideas I have as a result of these observations and interviews.

According to the five participants that I interviewed, the Ambassadors of Compassion program not only helped them at school—but also at home. Because of the benefit of a better home life, I thought about ways we could incorporate this program in different cities that feed into our high school. Three different counties feed into our school, and some of these schools are located in communities that are rural and poor but have programs that cater to kids. With the right mentors, it would be quite easy to run an AOC program there. These communities have many students who are deemed "at-risk." These students tend to respond quite well to mentoring programs (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). Because of a lack of alternate activities in these communities, I would think the turnout would be high. The program could even be run on the weekend. With the benefit that parents see at home, they may even encourage their kids to attend.

Since Ambassadors of Compassion helped them academically, it would seem beneficial to have the program open to freshmen as they are just beginning their high-school experience. Most mentoring groups, including Ambassadors of Compassion, seem to benefit students in the classroom (Portwood et al., 2005). If students' organizational skills and classroom effort are

improved by this program, then it would seem to make sense that we should offer it to student as early as we can in high school. Conversely, if such programs were offered in grade school, the students might find more success in middle school as well.

The aversion to missing class, albeit an elective, came across clearly in the interviews. Some adjustments the program could make are to have the class on the afternoon of their early-release professional development days or during lunch. If missing class time was not necessary, perhaps more students would want to attend. Another idea was to have the class as part of the elective class. This would take some strategic planning by the teacher and administration, but if it could be an actual part of class, the students would not be missing out on anything else. These same thoughts and ideas came to me on how I can run AOC classes on my campus. The curriculum is different but the set-up and ideas are the same. There is a separate set of concerns at the high-school level, but I think we could learn from the feedback of these students, even if they are in middle school. The loss of class time is definitely a deterrent to adding mentoring programs by administrators (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

The other suggestion from the students was that some of the questions were too deep and complicated. I also saw this during my observations as the mentor was asked to clarify the question more than once. I plan to go back in my field notes to notate what these questions were and why the students were confused, with the intent to share with the Ambassador of Compassion staff. I also plan to get feedback from the mentor, since he was in every session, while I was only in two.

Funding is important for mentor groups and it is many times a deterrent to the addition of more groups (Walker, 2007). The community in which Raymond is located is blessed in that a local resident was kind enough to fund the program for two years. The idea was that after two

years the community or school district would see the benefits of the program and find a way to

fund it. In saying that, schools across California have been looking for ways to trim their

budgets amidst rising retirement costs that districts are being asked to cover. It would be

difficult at this time to ask the school to cover another additional cost. I need to make my

experience known to the district superintendent and board so that they can see how vital such

programs are. I also need to bring in as many key stakeholders from the community to show

them all the ways that this program can benefit the community. Losing this program to budget

concerns may become a possibility in the near future. A plan for funding primarily through the

community needs to be set in motion in the coming months.

Finally, I learned so much from the opportunity to sit down and talk with these students.

Although I am around students all the time, being able to speak with them one-on-one with

probing questions was quite new to me. Because they each have different members, every group

in AOC and every other mentor group has a different dynamic (Schunk & Mullen, 2013). It

would be helpful to occasionally sit down with various group members in subsequent years to

see if the observations from this study are still valid. It would also give me a chance to build

relationships with more students before they enter high school.

Personal Reflections

The dissertation process was a huge learning experience for me. The culminating prize

of a dissertation feels wonderful but the true joy came to me in from the research process. The

process involved many long days and nights that have led me to where I am today. I have

learned so much about Raymond Middle School and the Ambassadors of Compassion program.

This has led me to have key conversations with stakeholders at all levels: elementary, middle,

and high school. I have begun to think outside the box to find ways to have more mentoring

groups on the high-school campus that I lead but also to find ways to utilize these mentoring groups before these students even reach high school.

I am in my fifteenth year in K-12 education. I have held many roles in this field. I taught for eight years at both the middle-school and high-school levels. I have also served in administration in the areas of athletics, being an assistant principal, being a principal at a continuation and independent study school, and now as a principal at a comprehensive high-school campus. Throughout my years in education, I have always had a keen interest in mentoring. In some of my past roles, I have even served as a mentor, without having the formality of curricula or objectives.

I was surprised by how much the program caused the students to be more proactive, showing initiative both at home and at school. This is the generation that has the mystique of being lazy and wanting instant gratification in whatever they are doing. The result of these students participating in the mentor program and learning what it means to take initiative and what it means to work hard for something meaningful was encouraging for me to see.

This program has also allowed me to form many opportunities and connections with adults and students alike that I heretofore would never had the chance to do. I now know five students coming to my school next year. The relationships that have been built will allow all of us to connect much earlier in the process than what is normal in their high-school experience. Since I also observed two mentoring sessions, I know the names of the five other group members. Although I never had the chance to interview them, I was able to watch how they interacted and what was important to them. I may be able to use this knowledge to help these students in various situations next year when they are in high school. Lastly, this study allowed me the opportunity to speak with the principal and learning director at Raymond Middle School

in a different capacity than I had before. We have a stronger relationship today and have since

called each other for advice much earlier in situations than we used to.

Raymond Middle School has many great qualities about it. Most of the staff has been

there for many years and most know the culture of the surrounding community extremely well.

With Raymond being in a different district than the high school I lead, often we do not have the

opportunity to communicate and collaborate on what skills our high-school students need to have

strengthened earlier in their education. Now, I not only have built stronger relationships, I also

know exactly how this program has impacted some students, even if that knowledge is on a small

scale.

I believe that I am a better person, both personally and professionally, because of this

dissertation process. Because of this process and the fact that the culminating activities came

while I was in my first year as principal at a new school, I had no choice but to narrow down my

priorities—personally and professionally. I did my best to avoid affecting my relationship with

my wife and kids. While I believe that part was successful, it definitely was not without trial and

error. It also allowed me to distinguish the necessities from the other issues at work. After the

program, I will no doubt take on more at work, but now I know how to juggle more

responsibilities with more time and energy.

Recommendations for Further Research

If I were to conduct another study on the impact of Ambassadors of Compassion, I would

conduct a quantitative using a much larger sample size. I would gather information from

multiple junior highs across the United States to see if the themes from my study would

generalize to a much larger population. I was able to see how it impacted a middle school on a

small scale, so a larger, quantitative study would be very interesting. Furthermore, a follow-up

in a year or two with the same students concerning how AOC and the skills learned have continued to help them throughout high school would be beneficial and interesting.

The next logical step with the research that has been conducted would be to take it to other middle schools where AOC is operating and to use the same questions for females who just finished the program. I would like to see how responses to the same questions differ from students in a different context or from a different gender. The school's AOC practices would be analyzed to see what is the same and what is different, and hopefully it would lead to more permanent best practices for Ambassadors of Compassion in middle schools.

Something that would also benefit this study would be to wait a few months after AOC groups have concluded before interviewing the students. In that way, they would be able to relate how AOC has helped them without the results having to be so immediate. A qualitative study could easily be done after the third quarter of middle school to see how AOC groups conducted during the first semester have influenced them. With some space between the end of the program and student interviews, we may gain more insight into what was truly impactful about the program, allowing more detailed information about how AOC has transformed students.

Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of a group of five junior-high males who participated in the Ambassadors of Compassion program. I examined the participants' lived experiences in the program and how the program assisted or, conversely, did not equip them for both their current life stage and for entering high school. In this phenomenological study, I evaluated the Ambassadors of Compassion program from the middle school students' point of view as they looked back on the previous semester. After collecting the data and analyzing it, I

was able to better understand the AOC program from the perspective of middle-school males. This information will allow me to speak with the AOC representatives about what their program is doing well and what their program might reevaluate.

The findings of this phenomenological study show me that Ambassadors of Compassion is influential in the lives of middle-school males. The impact it has on them is fairly immediate. I would like to see an expansion of the programs to reach more middle-school-aged kids before they enter high school. It was clear not only that AOC affected students at school but that the program impacted their home lives as well.

This study has also influenced my opinion of AOC groups at the school where I lead. I plan to have more groups on campus to benefit our student body. I will also continue to advocate for more AOC groups at middle schools and community groups. Ultimately, I believe that the more Ambassadors of Compassion groups we have, the more the students in my community will find success.

References

Ambassadors of Compassion. (2017). Retrieved December 12, 2016, from

    http://ambassadorsofcompassion.com/

Anastasia, T. T., Skinner, R. L., & Mundhenk, S. E. (2012). Youth mentoring: Program and

    mentor best practices. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, *104*(2), 38–44.

Balfanz, R., & Legters, N. (2004). Locating the dropout crisis. *Center for Research on the*

    Education of Students Placed at Risk, (70), 49.

Bernstein, L., Dun Rappaport, C., Olsho, L., Hunt, D., & Levin, M. (2009). *Impact evaluation of*

    the U.S. Department of Education's student mentoring program: Final report (NCEE 2009-

    4047). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional

    Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. (2016). Retrieved April 12, 2016, from

    http://www.bbbs.org/

Brewer, C., & Carroll, J. (2010). Half of the equation: Social interest and self-efficacy levels

    among high school volunteer peer mentors vs. their nonmentor peers. *Journal of School*

    Counseling, *8*(23), 1–29. Retrieved from (EJ895896)

Cameron, J. (2012). *Canaries reflect on the mine: Dropouts' stories of schooling*. Charlotte, NC:

    Information Age.

Carlisle, M. (2011). Healthy relationships and building developmental assets in middle school

    students. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *3*(34), 18–32.

Coffman, M. (2009). *Teacher mentoring as an intervention with at-risk students. (Unpublished*

    master's thesis). Texas A & M University.

Coller, R. J., & Kuo, A. A. (2014). Youth development through mentorship: A Los Angeles

school-based mentorship program among Latino children. *Journal of Community Health*, *39*(2), 316–321. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-013-9762-1

Converse, N., & Lignugaris-Kraft, B. (2009). Evaluation of a school-based mentoring program for at-risk middle school youth. *Remedial and Special Education*, *30*(1), 33–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932507314023

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research ethics*. (L. Habib, Ed.) (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Diversi, M., & Mecham, C. (2005). Latino(a) students and Caucasian mentors in a rural after-school program: Towards empowering adult-youth relationships. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *33*(1), 31–40. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20034

DuBois, D. L., Holloway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *30*(2), 157–197. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014628810714

DuBois, D. L., Portillo, N., Rhodes, J. E., Silverthorn, N., & Valentine, J. C. (2011). How effective are mentoring programs for youth? A systematic assessment of the evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, *12*(2), 57–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100611414806

DuBois, D. L., & Silverthorn, N. (2005). Natural mentoring relationships and adolescent health: Evidence from a national study. *American Journal of Public Health*, *95*(3), 518–524. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2003.031476

Eby, L. T., Allen, T. D., Evans, S. C., Ng, T., & DuBois, D. L. (2008). Does mentoring matter? A multidisciplinary meta-analysis comparing mentored and non-mentored individuals. [Author manuscript]., Retrieved from NIH Public Access, 454(1), 42-54.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2007.04.005

Elliott, S. (2008, December 18). Obama's stamp of approval, prepresidential. *New York Times*, p. B5.

Frels, R., Onwuegbuzie, A., Bustamante, R., Garza, Y., Nelson, J., Nichter, M., & Soto Leggett, E. (2013). Purposes and approaches of selected mentors in school-based mentoring: A collective case study. *Psychology in the Schools*, *50*(6), 618–633. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21697

Gettings, P., & Wilson, S. (2014). Examining commitment and relational maintenance in formal youth mentoring relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *31*(8), 1–27.

Grossman, J. B., & Rhodes, J. E. (2002). The test of time: Predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring relationships. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *30*(2), 199–219. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014680827552

Heckman, J., & Kautz, T. (2013). Fostering and measuring skills: Interventions that improve character and cognition. *NBER Working Paper Series*. Retrieved from http://www.nber.org/papers/w19656

Herrera, C., DuBois, D. L., & Baldwin Grossman, J. (2012). *The role of risk: Mentoring experiences and outcomes for youth with varying risk profiles*. New York, NY: A Public/Private Ventures project distributed by MDRC.

Jekielek, S., Moore, K., Hair, E., & Scarupa, H. (2002). Mentoring: A promising strategy for youth development. *Child Trends Research Brief*, (November).

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1999). Making cooperative learning work. *Theory Into Practice*, *38*(2), 67–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849909543834

Johnson, K. (2007). *Mentoring at-risk youth: A case study of an intervention for academic*

achievement with middle school aged students. (Doctoral dissertation). East Tennessee State University.

Kanchewa, S., Rhodes, J., Schwartz, S., & Olsho, L. (2014). An investigation of same- versus cross-gender matching for boys in formal school-based mentoring programs. *Applied Developmental Science*, *18*(1), 31–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2014.876251

Karcher, M. (2005). The effects of developmental mentoring and high school mentors' attendance on their younger mentees' self-esteem, social skills, and connectedness. *Psychology in the Schools*, *42*(1), 65–77. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20025

Karcher, M. (2008). The cross-age mentoring program: A developmental intervention for promoting students' connectedness across grade levels. *Professional School Counseling*, (December).

Karcher, M. (2009). Increases in academic connectedness and self-esteem among high school students who serve as cross-age peer mentors. *American School Counselor*, (April), 292–299.

Lakind, D., Atkins, M., & Eddy, M. (2016). Youth mentoring relationships in context: Mentor perceptions of youth, environment, and the mentor role. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *8*(5), 583–592. https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.1474.Replication

Lakind, D., Eddy, J. M., & Zell, A. (2014). Mentoring youth at high risk: The perspectives of professional mentors. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, *43*(6), 705–727.

Lampley, J. H., & Johnson, K. C. (2010). Mentoring at-risk youth: Improving academic achievement in middle school students. *Nonpartisan Education Review*, *6*(1), 1–12.

Larson, R. (2006). Positive youth development, willful adolescents, and mentoring. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *34*(6), 677–689. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20123

Leyton-Armakan, J., Lawrence, E., Deutsch, N., Lee Williams, J., & Henneberger, A. (2012). Effective youth mentors: The relationship between initial characteristics of college women mentors and mentee satisfaction and outcome. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *40*(8), 906–920. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21491

Lindt, S. F., & Blair, C. (2017). Making a difference with at-risk students: The benefits of a mentoring program in middle school. *Middle School Journal*, *48*(1), 34–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2017.1243919

McQuillin, S., Strait, G., Smith, B., & Ingram, A. (2015). Brief instrumental school-based mentoring for first- and second-year middle school students: A randomized evaluation. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *43*(7), 885–899. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21719

Nation, M., Keener, D., Wandersman, A., & DuBois, D. L. (2005). *Applying the principles of prevention: What do prevention practitioners need to know about what works? (Prepared for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Violence Prevention)*. Retrieved from http://www.mentoring.org/old-downloads/mentoring_4.pdf

Núñez, J. C., Rosário, P., Vallejo, G., & González-Pienda, J. A. (2013). A longitudinal assessment of the effectiveness of a school-based mentoring program in middle school. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *38*(1), 11–21.

"Our founder: Dr. Susan G. Weinberger." (n.d.). Retrieved May 2, 2017, from www.mentorconsultinggroup.com/

Portwood, S. G., Ayers, P. M., Kinnison, K. E., Waris, R. G., & Wise, D. L. (2005). YouthFriends: Outcomes from a school-based mentoring program. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, *26*(2), 129–145. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-005-1975-3

Poteat, L. F., Shockley, K. M., & Allen, T. D. (2009). Mentor-protégé commitment fit and

relationship satisfaction in academic mentoring. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *74*(3),

332–337. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.02.003

Pryce, J. (2012). Mentor attunement: An approach to successful school-based mentoring

relationships. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *29*(4), 285–305.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-012-0260-6

Pryce, J., & Keller, T. (2013). Interpersonal tone within school-based youth mentoring

relationships. *Youth & Society*, *45*(1), 98–116. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X11409068

Pryce, J. M., Silverthorn, N., Sanchez, B., & DuBois, D. L. (2010). Girlpower! Strengthening

mentoring relationships through a structured, gender-specific program. *New Directions for

Youth Development*, *2010*(126), 89–105. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.351

Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great american school system*. New York: Basic

Books.

Rhodes, J., Bogat, A., Roffman, J., Edelman, P., & Galasso, L. (2002). Youth mentoring in

perspective: Introduction to the special issue. *American Journal of Community Psychology*,

30(2), 149–155. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014676726644

Rhodes, J., & Dubois, D. (2004). National research agenda for youth mentoring. Alexandria,

VA: MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership.

Rhodes, J., & DuBois, D. (2006). Understanding and facilitating the youth mentoring movement.

Social Policy Report, *XX*(III), 3–11, 13, 15–19.

Rumberger, R. (1987). High school dropouts: A review of issues and evidence. *Review of

Educational Research*, *57*(2), 101–121.

Rusk, N., Larson, R. W., Raffaelli, M., Walker, K., Washington, L., Gutierrez, V., … Perry, S.

C. (2013). Positive youth development in organized programs: How teens learn to manage

emotions. In *Research, applications, and interventions for children and adolescents* (pp. 247–261). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6398-2_15

Sánchez, B., Colón-Torres, Y., Feuer, R., Roundfield, K. E., & Berardi, L. (2014). Race, ethnicity, and culture in mentoring relationships. In D. Dubois & M. Karcher (Eds.), *Handbook of Youth Mentoring* (pp. 145–158). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412996907.n10

Schnautz, B. M. (2014). *The effects of school-based mentoring on student achievement for junior high school students (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3717836).*

Schunk, D. H., & Mullen, C. A. (2013). Toward a conceptual model of mentoring research: Integration with self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychology Review*, *25*(3), 361–389. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-013-9233-3

Schwartz, S. E. O., Rhodes, J. E., Spencer, R., & Grossman, J. B. (2013). Youth initiated mentoring: Investigating a new approach to working with vulnerable adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *52*(1–2), 155–169. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-013-9585-3

Schwartz, S., Rhodes, J., Liang, B., Sánchez, B., Spencer, R., Kremer, S., & Kanchewa, S. (2014). Mentoring in the digital age: Social media use in adult-youth relationships. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *47*(P3), 205–213. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.09.004

Simões, F., & Alarcão, M. (2014). Teachers as school-based mentors for at-risk students: A qualitative study. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, *43*(1), 113–133. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-013-9228-8

Strobel, K., Kirshner, B., O'Donoghue, J., & McGlaughlin, M. (2008). Qualities that attract urban youth to after-school settings and promote continued participation. *Teachers College Record*, *110*(8), 1677–1705.

Swadener, B., & Lubeck, S. (1995). *The social construction of children and families "at risk": An introduction*. State University of New York Press.

Thompson, L. A., & Kelly-Vance, L. (2001). The impact of mentoring on academic achievement of at-risk youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *23*(3), 227–242.

Tierney, J., Grossman, J. B., & Resch, N. (1995). *Making a difference: An impact study of big brothers big sisters. Public/Private Ventures* (1st ed.). Philadelphia.

Valley Regional Occupational Program. (2017). Retrieved from https://www.valleyrop.net

Van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice*. (T. and Francis, Ed.) (3rd ed.). New York: Left Coact Press, Inc.

Van Ryzin, M. J. (2014). Exploring relationships among boys and men: A retrospective, qualitative study of a multi-year community-based group mentoring program. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *44*(September), 349–355. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.07.002

Walker, G. (2007). Mentoring, policy and politics. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

Watson, W., Sealey-Ruiz, Y., & Jackson, I. (2016). Daring to care: The role of culturally relevant care in mentoring Black and Latino male high school students. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *19*(5), 980–1002. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2014.911169

Weaver, P. E. (2004). The culture of teaching and mentoring for compliance. *Childhood Education*, *80*(5), 258–260. https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2004.10522810

Weinberger, S. (1992). *How to start a student mentor program*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta

Kappa Educational Foundation.

Wentzel, K. R. (1998). Social relationships and motivation in middle school: The role of parents, teachers, and peers. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *90*(2), 202–209. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.90.2.202

Wheeler, M. E., Keller, T. E., & DuBois, D. L. (2010). Review of three recent randomized trials of school-based mentoring. *Social Policy Report*, *24*(3), 3–21.

Wood, S., & Mayo-Wilson, E. (2012a). School-based mentoring for adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *22*(3).

Wood, S., & Mayo-Wilson, E. (2012b). School-Based Mentoring for Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *22*(3), 257–269. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731511430836

Worley, J., & Naresh, N. (2014). Heterogeneous peer-tutoring: An intervention that fosters collaborations and empowers learners. *Middle School Journal*, *46*(2), 26–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2014.11461907

Zand, D. H., Thomson, N., Cervantes, R., Espiritu, R., Klagholz, D., LaBlanc, L., & Taylor, A. (2009). The mentor–youth alliance: The role of mentoring relationships in promoting youth competence. *Journal of Adolescence*, *32*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2007.12.006

Appendix A

1. Qualities gained from AOC

    a. Tell me about a time that you remember that you felt was most helpful to you? Why?

    b. Tell me about a time when you were most encouraged in the program. Explain.

2. Student view of negative parts of AOC meetings

    a. Tell me about a time when you were frustrated in the meetings?

    b. Can you tell me about a time when you felt really stressed in the program? Did the mentoring help you talk about and help you deal with them?

3. AOC specific to skill building

    a. What coping strategies did you develop as a result of the mentoring sessions?

Appendix B

███████ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVAL
For Research

September 27, 2017

Dr. Patrick Allen
Professor
George Fox University
414 N Meridian Street, V124
Newberg, OR 97132

This is to inform you that the ████████ Elementary School District has reviewed the project proposal, interview questions, and letter of consent that Ryan Phelan has designed and submitted for his research project. We trust that the confidentiality of teachers, staff and students who will be involved in this study will be maintained and the findings will maintain the anonymity of all participants. We look forward to learning the outcome of Ryan's study and anticipate that the information will help inform Ambassadors of Compassion and our policy makers of the impact of middle school mentoring on the student transition to high school.

The ████████ Elementary School District approves Ryan Phelan to work on this project as outlined in his project proposal.

Sincerely,

████████████████

Assistant Superintendent
████████ Elementary School District

Appendix C

Participant Informed Consent Form: The experience of Ambassadors of Compassion (AOC) on middle-school males

Purpose

I am a doctoral student at George Fox University and my dissertation involves research designed to help Ambassadors of Compassion, administrators, and policy makers understand the experience of Ambassadors of Compassion on middle-school students and how that experience could help the students as they transition to high school. I would like to invite you to participate in a private personal interview so that I can learn more about your experience with Ambassadors of Compassion, and gain insight as to how it may or may not help you as you transition to high school.

Procedure

If you are willing to participate, we will schedule a private personal interview that will take approximately 30–45 minutes. The interview will be held either in your school library or in an available classroom. The questions will be focused on your experience of Ambassadors of Compassion.

Risks and Benefits

You will be asked about your experience as a participant in the Ambassadors of Compassion (AOC) program this past semester. We will keep the conversation focused on the school setting and you can decline to answer questions if you do not feel comfortable sharing some aspects of your experience. Although this study may or may not provide any benefit for you personally since you have successfully completed AOC, I believe your story will help your school improve the services they offer students in the future.

Anonymity

The research study will not use your name or the name of the school. I will not include in this study any information that could be used to identify you. I will use pseudonyms for all of the individuals involved in this study as I construct a profile of your experience that will be used to complete my dissertation. If any data divulges the identity of a participant or the school but is very important for the story, it will be adjusted so that the story is accurate but the data does not sacrifice the anonymity of the individual or the school. All data associated with this study will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet and password-protected computer files. All of these records will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to end your participation at any time.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Dr. Patrick Allen, Professor of Educational Leadership at George Fox University by calling 503-550-7154 or emailing him at pallen@georgefox.edu.

By signing below, you are indicating that you

☐   are informed about the research that is being conducted,

☐   have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study,

☐   agree to allow your anonymous profile to be included in the research project.

Participant

Signed_____

Date_____

Printed Name_____

Guardian of Participant (if Participant is under age 18)

Signed_____

Date_____

Printed Name_____

Appendix D

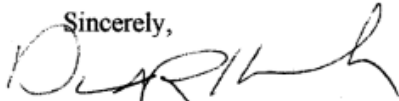**AMBASSADORS OF COMPASSION APPROVAL**
For Research

September 27, 2017

Dr. Patrick Allen
Professor
George Fox University
414 N Meridian Street, V124
Newberg, OR 97132

This is to inform you that the Ambassadors of Compassion has reviewed the project proposal, interview questions, and letter of consent that Ryan Phelan has designed and submitted for his research project. We trust that the confidentiality of teachers, staff and students who will be involved in this study will be maintained and the findings will maintain the anonymity of all participants. However, we agree that Ryan Phelan can use the name, "Ambassadors of Compassion" in his research and dissertation. We look forward to learning the outcome of Ryan's study and anticipate that the information will help inform Ambassadors of Compassion and our policy makers of the impact of junior-high mentoring on the student transition to high school.

Ambassadors of Compassion approves Ryan Phelan to work on this project as outlined in his project proposal.

Sincerely,

Dave Hannah
Founder
Lift Up America
Ambassadors of Compassion

Appendix E

For Committee Use Only

GEORGE FOX UNIERSITY
HSRC INITIAL REVIEW QUSTIONNAIRE

Title: The experience of middle school males in the Ambassadors of Compassion program: A phenomenological study

Principal Researcher(s): Ryan Phelan

Date Application Completed: 10-3-17

(The researcher needs to complete the above information on this page)

COMMITTEE FINDING:

_X_ (1) The proposed research makes adequate provision for safeguarding the health and dignity of the subjects and is therefore approved.

____ (2) Due to the assessment of risk being questionable or being subject to change, the research must be periodically reviewed by the HSRC on a _____ basis throughout the course of the research or until otherwise notified. This requires resubmission of this form, with updated information, for each periodic review.

____ (3) The proposed research evidences some unnecessary risk to participants and therefore must be revised to remedy the following specific area(s) on non-compliance:

_____
____

_____
____

_____
____

_____
____

_____
____

_____ (4) The proposed research contains serious and potentially damaging risks to subjects and is therefore not approved.

Winston Leagsbi   _10/14/17_

Chair or designated member   Date