

PREVIEW

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AN EVALUATION OF A MENTORING PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK GIRLS AT A MIDDLE
SCHOOL LOCATED IN NORTHWEST GEORGIA

by JACQUELINE YVONNE COOK

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate
Faculty of the University of West Georgia in Partial
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SCHOOL LOCATED IN NORTHWEST GEORGIA

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ABSTRACT

JACQUELINE YVONNE COOK: An Evaluation Of A Mentoring Program For At-Risk Girls
At A Middle School Located In Northwest Georgia

(Under the Direction of Dr. Julia Chibbaro)

A summative evaluation was conducted at a middle school located in Northwest Georgia. This evaluation sought to determine the merit of the at-risk girls mentoring program (AGMP) by determining its effectiveness and impact on the participants' social outcomes; development of conflict resolution skills, increase in academic achievement, and increase in school attendance at a middle school located in Northwest Georgia. A review of the current literature reveals current issues faced by at-risk girls as well as research based interventions utilized to meet their diverse needs. This summative evaluation was completed utilizing an objective orientated approach inclusive of a quantitative design collecting data from 11 program mentees. Though the evaluation did not prove to have a statistically significant impact the evaluator utilized results from this evaluation to suggest possible recommendations to the program as it relates to program delivery associated to conflict resolution, academic achievement as determined by GPA, and school attendance.

Keywords: At-Risk Girls, Mentoring, Why Try Program Curriculum, Evaluation, Conflict Resolution, Academic Achievement, Attendance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Academic achievement, attendance, and behavior have been found to be effective in identifying adolescents at-risk for dropping out of schools (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Kurlaender, Reardon, & Jackson, 2008). Moreover, the Every Student Succeed Act of 2015 promotes academic achievement of all students as an integral part of all school program development and School Improvement Plans (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Although academic achievement is at the foreground of development, research found that academic achievement can be impacted by variety of internal and external factors (Mohanraj & Latha, 2015). Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) reports that approximately 5 million to 7 million students are deemed as chronically absent; missing 5 or more days. Specifically, Georgia reports 47% of students missed 5 or more days of school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Additionally, behavior problems adversely affect female students' success and increases their chance of being at-risk of dropping out of school. The Associated Press (2010) quotes Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration's (SAMHSA) Administrator, Pamela Hyde as stating "We need to do a better job reaching girls at-risk and teaching them how to resolve problems without resorting to violence" (para.5).

The Academy for Educational Development (2009) defines mentoring as a supportive educational experience between an individual willing to share information and skills with someone who is prepared and eager to receive the knowledge. Although one-on-one mentoring provides the avenue for mentees to obtain individual support, research suggest that group mentoring has been found to benefit participants by being able to gain input not only from adult

mentors but from their peers with similar experiences (Herrera, Vang, & Gale, 2002). Rhodes (2008) suggests that the research on mentoring program varies in terms of effectiveness due to various outliers such as mentor/mentee relationship, and the personality of participants involved in the mentoring relationship. However, the Academy for Educational Development (2009) suggests that mentoring programs are pivotal entities to assist girl mentees with developing basic skills to help adolescents make positive decisions and assist with academic achievement (Simoes & Alarco, 2014). Additional studies conducted on mentoring programs have proven to be effective in assisting mentees with developing skills to manage anger and conflicts (Herrera et al., 2002; Powell & Jenson, 2010), increase academic achievement (Rogers, 2014), and reduce attendance issues (Gordon, Downey & Bangaert, 2013). With this in mind, a middle school located in Northwest Georgia developed and implemented a school based mentoring program for at-risk girls to address the personal social and academic needs of the students.

Improving the implementation of the At-risk Girls Mentoring Program (AGMP) can assist program coordinators with addressing challenges adolescent girls face as they learn to resolve conflicts, improve academic achievement, and increase rate of attendance. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), (2012) states it is the duty of the Professional School Counselors to continually monitor, evaluate and adjust the program and training to meet the assessed needs of the population it serves. Person & LeNoir (1997) suggested that programs should evaluate program effectiveness on a consistent basis and in an orderly manner.

This evaluation sought to determine the merit of the at-risk girls mentoring program (AGMP) by determining its effectiveness and impact on the participants' social outcomes; development of conflict resolution skills, increase in academic achievement as determined by GPA, and increase in school attendance at a middle school located in Northwest Georgia. This evaluation is guided

by three evaluation questions. 1) Is there a significant difference in the conflict resolution skills of group members as determined by scores on the Conflict Resolution- Individual Protective Factors Index as a result of participating in the AGMP? 2) Is there a significant increase in academic achievement as determined by group members' GPA as a result of participation in the AGMP? 3) Is there a significant increase in school attendance as a result of participation in the AGMP?

A summative evaluation using an objectives-oriented evaluation approach was conducted to assess whether the AGMP met the established goals and objectives. This approach establishes, classifies, and defines goals; as well as compares outcomes with goals (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2010). Data was collected and analyzed utilizing quantitative methods design. This approach was utilized in order to understand in further detail the extent of influence the AGMP had on mentees social outcomes. This program evaluation looked for observed changes in participants' social outcomes using a pretest/posttest non experimental method in order to examine the AGMP's ability to meet goals related to the development of conflict resolution skills, increase in academic achievement as determined by mentee's core GPA, and increase in school attendance.

Although there were some areas of growth in levels of conflict resolution, academic achievement and attendance the results suggest that gains were minimal and not statistically significant. While the results are mixed, this evaluation adds to the literature regarding school-based mentoring. It further provides recommendations on the implementation of the program that could lead to relational, academic and attendance growth from program participants.

The results from the Conflict Resolution- Individual Protective Factors Index indicate that approximately 63% (n=7) of mentees levels of conflict resolution skills increased, while

approximately 18% (n=2) had a decrease in their levels of conflict resolution skills an additional 18% (n=2) of mentees' scores indicated no change. While this indicates that over half of the program participants showed gains as it relates to levels of conflict resolution skills, the results were not considered significant enough to be replicated. Results related to academic achievement do not suggest positive gains with approximately 36% (n=4) of mentees having an increase in core GPA and approximately 64% (n=7) saw a decrease in core GPA from term one to term three. Lastly, results related to school attendance found approximately 45% (n=5) of mentees had a decrease in days absent from school, an additional 45% (n=5) had an increase in total days absent from school and 9% (n=1) days absent remained the same from term one to term 3. These results suggest that some mentees experienced growth; however, the results are not significant.

This evaluation focused on three primary components of the AGMP; conflict resolution, academic achievement as determined by GPA, and school attendance. Though this evaluation produced relatively small and mixed results the AGMP proves to be a valuable support to at-risk girls within the middle school setting the program serves. Stakeholders are offered the following recommendations to improve the AMGP effectiveness as it relates to the development of conflict resolution skills, academic achievement, and attendance:

1. Increase the number of applicable lessons regarding self-control when discussing conflict resolution.
2. Develop academic networks to support mentees' academic success.
3. Increase awareness of the impact of both excused and unexcused absences.
4. Encourage ongoing feedback from program participants, teachers, parents, and staff.

DEDICATION

To my late grandparents; Willie Lee and Cleopatra Cook; and Elmore and Oddie Bell Snider, who are the foundation of everything I am, and everything I hope to become. A special dedication to my grandmother Oddie Bell Kinn Snider, she believed in this dream before I was conceived.

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In an African American spiritual written by Wendell Whalum “Guide My Feet” there is a part of a verse which reads “Guide my feet while I run this race, for I don’t want to run this race in vain.” The completion of this dissertation has been a race worth running. Although in this spiritual, the term race utilized is not referring to a sporting event rather the race of life, I find that there are some parallels to the sport. In every race there are three key groups that assist the runner; fans, trainers and coaches.

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ACRONYMS

AGMP: At-Risk Girls Mentoring Program

CDC: Center for Disease Control and Prevention

ESSA: Every Student Succeed Act

GOSA: Governor's Office of Student Achievement

GPA: Grade Point Average

IC: Infinite Campus

ML: Mentee Leaders

MT: Mentoring Team

NAEP: National Assessment of Educational Progress

SAMHSA: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration

SRO: School Resource Officer

WTP: Why Try Program

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 2005 approximately 29% of arrests made were for female juveniles, 18% of which were for violent crimes (Zahn, et al., 2008). Children Trend Data Bank (2013) reports that the common offense for the incarceration of female juveniles are from status offences, which are offences not illegal for adults such as truancy, runaway, curfew violation, etc. More specifically, according to the 2013 Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey data results, Georgia female adolescents have begun to exhibit risk taking behaviors at a rate similar to their male counterpart (CDC, 2010 (See Appendix A). In some cases such as being bullied rather on campus or online the survey found that girls report experiencing this risk behavior more than boys. The Associated Press (2010) quotes Pamela Hyde, SAMHSA's Administrator as stating "We need to do a better job reaching girls at-risk and teaching them how to resolve problems without resorting to violence."

The following dissertation describes conflict resolution, academic and school attendance issues faced by adolescents, and a middle school program designed to aid adolescent girls with coping with these challenges. Merriam Webster defines adolescent (n.d.) as a young person who is developing into an adult. This period is marked by a person between the age of 12 and 19. For many, adolescence is where they began to embark upon risk taking behaviors (Solomon & Garibaldi, 2013). Boyles (2007) finds that adolescent self-regulation is located in a part of the brain that is underdeveloped during adolescent years, pushing many adolescents to pursue risk taking activities. Some common risk taking behaviors amongst adolescents are: fighting,

substance abuse (smoking tobacco/marijuana, drinking alcohol, etc.), unprotected sexual activity, truancy, vandalism, and trespassing (Raising Children Network, 2015). Academic achievement, school attendance, and behavior are known to be effective in identifying adolescents at-risk for dropping out of schools (Allensworth, & Easton, 2007; Kurlaender et al., 2008). Studies conducted on mentoring programs have proven to be effective in assisting mentees with developing skills to manage anger and conflicts (Herrera et al., 2002; Powell & Jenson, 2010), increase academic achievement (Rogers, 2014), as well as reducing attendance issues (Gordon et al., 2013).

Conflict Resolution

Robers, Kemp, Rathbun, and Morgan (2013) research suggests that among students ranging in the ages of 12 to 18 there were 749,200 reports of violent victimizations at schools. Though the aforementioned number is inclusive of both female and male the amounts of adolescent girls participating in risk taking behaviors are beginning to rise. With the onset of various risks taken by adolescents such as the inability to manage conflicts (Letendre and Smith 2011); providing awareness of these challenges creates the opportunity for individuals to begin to change and develop a resolution. Ramani and Zhimin (2010) define conflict as two or more values, perspectives, and opinions contradicting in nature. Conflict occurs when these values and perspectives are threatened; or uneasiness arises from fear of the unknown. Conflict is an essential and unavoidable human phenomenon; it is normal and can be a positive force for personal growth (Ghaffar, 2009; Schrumpf, Crawford, & Usadel, 1997). Ghaffar (2009) further postulates that conflict is often needed. He suggests that conflict helps to 1) raise and address problems; 2) energizes work on the most appropriate issues; 3) motivate individuals to participate; and 4) learn how to recognize and benefit from their differences. Conflict can vary

in the school setting from making a decision about whom to sit next to in the cafeteria to arguing over issues related to missing property. However, individuals skilled in resolving conflict in an effective manner have a developmental edge over those who never acquire this skill (Johnson & Johnson 2004). Providing this skill to adolescents through the development of effective mentoring programs implementing conflict resolution skills found a decrease in anger and conflict within the school (Herrera et al., 2002).

The ability to facilitate conflict management through communication can prove to be an effective tool for resolving issues (Schrumpf et al., 1997). Fleetwood's (1987) pivotal research found it is a necessity for school administrators to be able to recognize conflict and its ability to be a negative or positive construct within the building, as well as assist students with developing and applying effective strategies to manage conflicts. When conflicts are not properly managed, they can become physical fights, which could lead to suspension. Breunlin, Bryant-Edwards, and Hetherington (2002) reported that the practice of suspension has been questioned because it does not seem to deter students from fighting. Further research suggests that suspension has negative consequences for student such as a decrease in graduation rates (Teske, 2011). Other studies on conflict resolution report a decline in suspension due to issues regarding conflict after implementing conflict resolution programs (Smith, Daunic, Miller, & Robinson, 2002; Wilburn & Bates, 1997).

Academic Achievement

Academic Achievement implies success gained in areas such as grades and test scores. Gul (2015) indicates that achievement does not only represent the knowledge and skills received, it also represents the ability to utilize skills in an array of situations. In December of 2015, President Obama signed The Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA). The 2015 ESSA further

promotes academic achievement of all students as an integral part of all school program development and School Improvement Plans (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Although academic achievement is at the foreground of development, research found that academic achievement can be impacted by variety of internal and external factors (Mohanraj & Latha, 2015). One factor impacting academic achievement is found in girls who struggle with aggression (Fergusson & Woodward, 2000). Other factors include teachers' perception of students' ability to succeed academically (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade, 2009), students' perception of their ability to succeed (Pershey, 2010), and access to school counselors (Malone, 2013). The various impediments could leads to gaps in academic achievement amongst students.

Research suggests that African American girls scored below basic achievement levels in math and reading in comparison to other ethnic groups (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2013). An earlier study conducted by NAEP (2009) found that African American girls in their 12th grade year had lower Grade Point Averages (GPA) than other ethnic groups. This concept is referred to as an achievement gap. The differences in performance as exhibited by test scores, grades, or graduation rates between two sub groups, such as minority groups, gender groups, socio-economic groups and etc. can be defined as achievement gaps (edglossary, n.d.). More recently Georgia's Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) (2015) reports that in the 2014-2015 school year at the local county in which the program resides 35% of students retained were female. More specifically the school in which the program resides had 50% of students being retained identifying as female at the culmination of the 2014-2015 school year (GOSA, 2015). GOSA (2015) further reports that the school in which the program resides had females grade 6-8 scoring as beginning learner on the End of Grade Assessment; 23.9% in English, 26.8% in Math, 37.4% in Science and 27.4% in Socials Studies.

With this in mind, school counseling programs are implemented with closing the achievement gap as the foundation for development (ASCA, 2012). One means counselors can assist with closing the achievement gap is through the development of programs promoting a connectedness to school culture, peers, and school staff (Baker, & Narula, 2012).

Attendance

Daily attendance in school is important and leads to student success. Balfanz and Byrnes, (2012) reports that approximately five million to seven million students are deemed as chronically absent; missing five or more days. Researchers further found that Georgia reports 47% of students missed five or more days of school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). More recently, GOSA (2015), reports that 32.9% in the local county located in Northwest Georgia and 23.3% in the school in which the program is housed identify as female with 6-15 days absent. Further research reports that 11.2% in the local county located in Northwest Georgia and 3.2% in the school in which the program resides identify as females with 15 or more days. According to Georgia's Compulsory Attendance Act, O.C.G.A. 20-2-690.1 (a) (2010) attendance in school is mandatory of all students under the age of 16.

Lack of attendance in school can be in part due to family factors, uninvolved parents; school factors, attitude of administrators, teachers and students; economic influence, need for a job or transportation; and student variables, knowledge of attendance law (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). Students who overcome these factors and attend school regular experience higher grades in classes and on testing (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Tanner-Smith & Wilson, 2013). Providing students with evidence based interventions provided by counselors such as incentive programs, attendance monitoring as well and counseling through both individual and group methods has proven to increase attendance of students (Edwards, 2013).

Purpose of Evaluation

Improving the implementation of AGMP can assist program coordinators with addressing challenges adolescent girls face as they learn to resolve conflicts, improve academic achievement and increase rate of attendance. Person & LeNoir (1997) suggested that programs should evaluate program effectiveness on a consistent basis and in an orderly manner. This evaluation sought to determine the merit of the AGMP by determining its effectiveness and impact on the participants' social outcomes; development of conflict resolution skills, increase in academic achievement as determined by GPA, and increase in attendance at a middle school located in Northwest Georgia. Utilizing a logic model, stakeholders, resources, activities, program objectives, as well as data collection and analysis; procedures for implementation and evaluation have been identified. This evaluation ascertained rather the AGMP met its goals to:

1. Assist at-risk girls with the identification and implementation of conflict resolution skills.
2. Assist at-risk girls with improving academically by encouraging youth to stay in school and enhancing skills beyond high school graduation.
3. Encourage at-risk girls to attend school on time daily

This evaluation will be guided using the following evaluation questions (EQ):

1. Is there a significant difference in the conflict resolution skills of group members as determined by scores on the Conflict Resolution- Individual Protective Factors Index as a result of participating in the AGMP?
2. Is there a significant increase in academic achievement as determined by group members' core GPA as a result of participation in the AGMP?
3. Is there a significant increase in school attendance as a result of participation in the AGMP?