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Heart Work: A Phenomenological Analysis of School Embedded Program Facilitators in High Need South Florida Schools

by

Takia L. Bullock

A Dissertation Presented to the
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University
2020

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Nova Southeastern University
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

This dissertation was submitted by Takia L Bullock under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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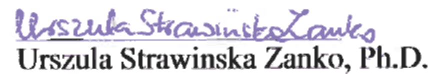
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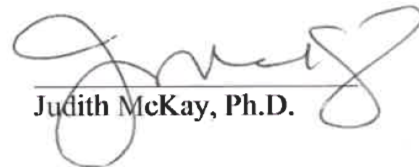
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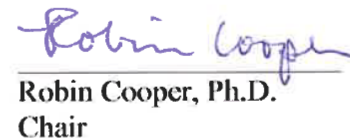
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Chair

Dedication

It is with a humble heart that I dedicate this research to my late grandmother, Mrs. Christine Marie Bullock, my son Marcus A. Carter, and the late Minister Marsha Screen.

My grandmother, affectionately referred to as Grandma Tina, served as the sweetest part of my world until she transitioned to be with the Almighty. Grandma, I love and miss you so much that it hurts. I never imagined getting to the end of this journey without you being here to celebrate with me and iron my graduation regalia as you did for my other graduations. You were always so proud of me, even when I got on your nerves! Well grandma, I finally completed my program and pray that I have made you proud. Also, I will iron my regalia myself, as no one else could replace you.

To my amazing son Marcus, mommy loves you with every fiber of my being. Although you came along and lengthened this process, you were also the strength I needed to complete this journey. I pray that my achievements provide you a blueprint for success. Most importantly, I pray that I continue to grow into the mother you need me to be as we continue our journey together. Thank you for unknowingly being patient and showing me love in the exact moments I needed to feel loved. I love you, big boy.

To the late Minister Marsha, you are the very reason I began this journey. God sent one of his best representatives to ensure I began working on my doctoral degree. You pushed me to apply for a doctoral program when all I wanted to do was enjoy being out of school after completing my Master's degree. Your quiet strength and gentle urging were always at the forefront of my mind and heart throughout this journey. I will forever be grateful for your love and encouragement.

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First, I must thank my Heavenly Father for keeping me throughout my entire life, including this journey of completing this Doctoral program. This journey presented with many challenges; however, Your love, strength and gentle pushing enabled me to persevere to the finish line. One of my favorite praise and worship songs sums up my feelings for the grace and mercy shown to me, "I could never repay you Lord for what you've done for me…Lord you've been so faithful."

To my love, Mark A. Carter, thank you for loving me. You have been my quiet support throughout this journey, although you didn't entirely understand the strenuous process and why it required so much of my time. You didn't hesitate to support our family alone when I took a leave from work to make progress on my research. For that I thank you and promise there will now be more time for enjoying the pleasures of life.

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To Communities in Schools of Miami CEO and Site Coordinators, I thank you for agreeing to allow me to focus on your organization and disrupt a few moments of your time to gain your experiences and perspectives. Your participation in this study will provide a valuable contribution to the fields of conflict resolution, education, and other associated areas.

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Abstract

Student misconduct leading to youth violence has been recognized as a major public health problem requiring intervention. To reduce antisocial behaviors, school districts and non-profit organizations promote prosocial behaviors and problem-solving skills. Positive youth development, social emotional learning, positive behavioral intervention support, and conflict resolution programs have been implemented in many school districts; yet problems associated with aggression, poor decision-making, and low student achievement still occur. This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study explored the lived experiences of seven school-embedded positive intervention program facilitators implementing programs with conflict management components for at-risk students in high need South Florida schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain lived experiences of the facilitators delivering programs with conflict management components and their perspective of student conflict management skill transformation after being enrolled in their program. The major themes developed in this study were (a) commitment to identifying and addressing barriers and needs, (b) hard work, perseverance, and patience, (c) counteracting negative school climate, (d) recognizing impact of risk factors, (e) rewarding experience, and (f) produced positive student outcomes. Analysis of the data showed site coordinators felt the reward of producing positive student outcomes outweighs their negative experiences. The findings of this study should provide valuable data for program facilitators, education stakeholders, community stakeholders, and conflict practitioners vested in reducing problematic behaviors and conflict management skills of at-risk students.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have recognized youth violence as a significant public health problem impacting thousands of youth, families, schools, and communities (CDC, 2018). Youth violence and student misconduct have been a focal point for schools, communities, and legislature for several decades, beginning in the 1980s (Curtis, 2014). School stakeholders such as educators, administrators, school board officials, non-profit community organizations, and others have partnered to implement evidence-based interventions to reduce negative behaviors in students and to promote positive behaviors in students. However, in spite of interventions, student misconduct and youth violence still exist, which suggests there is still work to be done. South Florida is no exception to the issues plaguing schools as a result of experiencing problematic behaviors demonstrated by at-risk students.

The South Florida school district is the fourth largest school district in the United States of America. According to the district's website, the system is representative of 392 schools and 345,000 students (M-DCPS 2018a). The district has embarked on a mission to reduce or eliminate harsh penalties for all students, such as outdoor suspension, and promote positive interventions, such as in-school support and access to community resources. The district offers a vast amount of professional personnel, programs, resources, and partnerships with community stakeholders to meet the needs of all students, including students considered at-risk. Mallett (2016) argued that positive interventions, such as counseling and access to resources and programs geared towards student success, have a greater impact than harsh punishments for students considered at-risk. The district's primary goals include providing quality education, maintaining safety,

and producing productive members into society. Although the school district possesses a vast array of services and programs for all students, the utilization of positive intervention programs, via third party non-profit organizations, provides an extra layer of support in various areas of expertise to further meet the needs of students. The belief is that building assets in students and equipping them with support, skills, and positivity for the future will set the tone for better decision making, positive behavior, and academic success via interventions that promote personal development (Armour, Sanford, & Duncombe, 2013).

The school district has been recognized for its efforts in curtailing the negative effects of the zero-tolerance practices, implementing and utilizing positive intervention programs with a focus on social emotional learning to reduce problematic behaviors, and increasing prosocial behaviors in all students (Veiga, 2015). Evidence-based school embedded positive intervention programs (SEPIP) are being implemented to improve student achievement, reduce opportunities for school failure and improve conflict within schools, some specifically targeting the at-risk youth population (Cowan & Vaillancourt, 2013). Although, SEPIP are being implemented, it is imperative to assess and recognize measures taken to intervene positively on behalf of at-risk youth to prevent low student achievement and problematic behaviors which interfere with school culture and safety. There is very limited research that have examined the effects of SEPIP in South Florida schools serving at-risk students; especially from the perspectives of stakeholders such as program facilitators. This study explored the lived experiences of Communities in Schools of Miami, Incorporated site coordinators regarding providing interventions

with conflict management components to at-risk students in high need South Florida schools.

Background of the Study

In response to a perceived rise in school violence, legislation such as the 1986 Drug Free Schools Act and the 1994 Gun Free Schools Act were established to use harsh punishments as a method of determent (Silvia, Thorne, & Tashjian, 1997; Thompson, 2016; & U.S. Department of Education, 2010). As a result, zero tolerance practices were established and implemented to combat negative behaviors (such as disruptive classroom disturbances, disrespectful behavior, violence, criminal activity) that contributed to poor school climates (Mallett, 2016). Skiba and Rausch (2006) defined zero tolerance practices as disciplinary policies with an overarching priority of school safety. In this policy, any type of misconduct or poor behavior was unacceptable, intolerable and punishable to the fullest extent (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). According to Mallett (2016), a heightened awareness for juvenile delinquency and violence amongst youth, zero tolerance policies, or the tough on crime approach, led to excessive amounts of at-risk students receiving harsh punishments for “typical adolescent behaviors and low-level-type misdemeanors: acting out in class, truancy, fighting, disobedience, and other similar offenses” (Mallett, 2016, p. 2).

Students who were perceived as a threat to either safety or academic achievement were harshly disciplined to discourage unacceptable behavior (Skiba, 2014). Typical consequences included removal from the learning environment, referrals for discipline, suspension, expulsion, occasionally arrest, and transition into the juvenile justice system (Rubio, 2014). Because there was no direct consensus for zero tolerance implementation,

administrators had the ability to set the policy and consequences in their schools or school districts (Mongan & Walker, 2012). School systems utilized their student code of conduct manual to justify their harsher punishments for students in general. However, Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, and Cohen (2014) argued that minority students were disproportionately impacted by zero tolerance practices. In their school discipline census report, the authors (2014) found minority students, students with disabilities, and students identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) received harsher punishments than Caucasian, able-bodied, or heterosexual students. In their study of school arrests and court outcomes, Wolf (2013) determined Black students were "three times more likely to be arrested" than Caucasian counterparts (p. 61). Hoffman (2014) found similar results in their longitudinal study of black students from one school district. The ratio of black students recommended for expulsion increased from 2.1% to 4.5% within two years of a district-wide zero tolerance policy mandate (Hoffman, 2014). This percentage represents an increase of 70 Black students per year and only approximately 20 non-Black students (Hoffman, 2014). However, Hoffman could not determine whether the increase in expulsions were because student behavior warranted more expulsions, or whether administration felt empowered to discipline more students.

Zero tolerance policies led the way for a partnership between school districts and the juvenile justice system. Unfortunately, the partnership contributed to an increased amount of youth facing harsher consequences, as 79% of public schools adopted zero tolerance policies as a direct response of school shootings in the 1996-1997 school year (Bell, 2015). Curtis (2014) argued that youth were being sent to the juvenile system for infractions that should have been addressed at a school level, instead of inside a

courtroom. Punitive measures such as suspensions, expulsions and arrests were coined as the school-to-prison pipeline (Thompson, 2016). In compliance with zero tolerance practices, schools utilized harsher practices rather than positive interventions to reduce problematic behaviors and improve appropriate behaviors. Mongan and Walker (2012) argued that zero tolerance policies failed to yield the intended results of serving as a deterrent. Evans and Lester (2012) identified negative consequences of zero tolerance policies as increase in academic failure; poor relationships with school teachers, staff, administrators; and increased opportunities for mischief. Hoffman (2014) determined that zero tolerance policies failed to perform their primary objective of reducing problematic behaviors.

According to the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (APAZTTF, 2008), the harsh penalties from zero tolerance policies proved less effective than interventions focused on promoting positive behaviors and building capacity in students. Additionally, there was no evidence of a rehabilitation component which provided skills to replace the anti-social behaviors with prosocial behaviors (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Positive strategies have been deemed more effective in decreasing anti-social behaviors (i.e. misconduct, fighting, bullying), promoting pro-social behaviors (i.e. compliance with school rules, appropriate decision making), and creating and maintaining safer schools for students and educators. In a systematic review of violent reduction methods, Kelly (2017) identified the key to reducing problematic behaviors in students was to equip them with prosocial behaviors to improve their decision-making skills. These policies lacked components which focused on building conflict management skills.

As a result of the fallout of zero tolerance policies, school districts began to seek out positive interventions focused on growth and development instead of punishment. Educators, administrators, school board officials, and other stakeholders collaborated to implement interventions that aimed to reduce negative behaviors and to promote positive behaviors in schools. According to Youngblade et al. (2006), school districts continually sought evidence-based interventions for all students to maintain safe school climates and equip youth with positive skills for student achievement. Over time, there have been interventions that have proven effective in meeting the needs of schools improving socially appropriate behaviors (prosocial behaviors) and reducing negative behaviors (antisocial behaviors). Guerra and Bradshaw (2008) suggested school districts are leaning on research which supports utilizing positive interventions over harsher punishments from zero tolerance policies such as out of school suspensions, expulsions, and arrests. One South Los Angeles school district experienced reductions in suspensions (13.3%), expulsions (55.6%), and opportunity transfers (32.7%), after implementing positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS; Curtis, 2014).

Positive interventions are used to increase student capacity for decision making, finding productive outlets, and fostering an overall positive environment (Edwards et al., 2007). By studying methods for reducing violence in schools, Kelly (2017) illustrated how programs based on positive youth development interventions have resulted in reducing anti-social behaviors and promoting “prosocial behaviors” and “motivating healthier decision making” practices (Kelly, 2017, p. 203). Examples of positive interventions being utilized to equip students with essential skills for appropriate development, while building conflict resolution/management skills include Positive

Youth Development (PYD) programs, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs, Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS), Conflict Resolution Education (CRE), SEPIPs, Restorative Justice programs, and Multi-Tiered-Response to Intervention (RtI).

The CDC and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) have evaluated the efficacy of the following prevention/intervention programs implemented by non-profit organizations: PBIS programs, Safe Schools and Healthy Students (SSSH) Initiative, and mentoring programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (Seifert, 2012). Non-profit organizations have the ability to provide additional supports and services for students and families outside of the school district's scope, such as more in-depth therapeutic practices, care coordination, wrap-around services and motivational coaching. Programs differ according to school level, service delivery models, and the needs of school, students, and families.

Positive intervention programs implemented by non-profit organizations are increasingly becoming recognized as an additional layer of support in reducing problematic behaviors, promoting socially appropriate behaviors and encouraging school success (Cowan & Vaillancourt, 2013). Cowan and Vaillancourt (2013) argued the benefit of utilizing school-based mental health programs implemented by non-profit community-based organizations to serve students at-risk of school failure. These non-profit organizations are embedded in the culture of assigned schools and work as team members, alongside administrators, counselors, teachers and parents, to reduce problematic behaviors in students, academic difficulties, dropout and pregnancy rates.

In 2013, the South Florida school district embarked on a mission to reduce or eliminate harsh penalties such as outdoor suspension and promote the utilization of

positive interventions such as in-school support and access to community resources as a means to end the school-to-prison pipeline (Smiley & Vasquez, 2013). Throughout this school district, there are a vast amount of professional personnel, programs, resources and community partnerships with stakeholders designed to meet the needs of all students, including students considered at-risk. Standard interventions offered within M-DCPS include individual, group and family counseling, conflict resolution, RTi, crisis intervention, community resource referrals and ethical collaboration with community stakeholders to meet student needs. These interventions are provided by school board professionals within the fields of School Counseling, Mental Health Counseling, Psychology, and Social Work. Following executive orders of the Obama Administration in 2013, and as an additional layer of support for students considered at-risk, the South Florida school district has increased partnerships with non-profit community organizations who are embedded in selected high need schools to provide positive interventions (Cowan & Vaillancourt, 2013). These programs provide individual and group interventions with targeted students as they have the time and capacity to provide more in-depth counseling and wrap-around services for the students they serve. Examples of non-profit community organizations working inside of the South Florida middle schools include City Year (CY), Incorporated, Communities in Schools of Miami (CiS), Incorporated, and Motivational Coaches of America, Incorporated (MCUSA).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the variety of positive interventions being utilized in high need schools throughout the South Florida school district, problematic behaviors such as violence, gang activity, drug or alcohol usage and school safety are still of concern. Finding a

balance between increasing student achievement and school safety has been a goal of school districts across the nation. South Florida school districts are not exempt from this conflict; progressive means are being taken to resolve this issue. Programs, initiatives, partnerships, and collaborations are being implemented as a means to combat this conflicting issue. In spite of progressive movements, schools are on the news daily regarding some form of misconduct or violence within schools. High need school data tend to be different from the overall school data, suggesting that there is still a conflict in balancing student achievement and school safety in schools.

According to the 2016-2017 South Florida school district climate survey results, students generally feel safe and feel they have a positive school climate in middle schools (M-DCPS, 2018). Of the middle school students who completed the school climate survey, 28% identified violence as a problem in their schools and 17% disagreed with having a positive school climate. Of the high school students who completed the school climate survey, 25% identified violence as a problem in their schools and 7% disagreed with having a positive school climate. However, these results varied on a school-by-school basis, especially at several high need middle schools where safety and violence is a major concern. In one high need middle school, 72% of students who completed the climate survey identified violence as a problem in their school and 37% disagreed with having a positive school climate. In a high need kindergarten through eighth grade center, 57% of students who completed the climate survey identified violence as a problem in their school and 49% disagreed with having a positive school climate. In a high need senior high school, 50% of students who completed the climate survey

identified violence as a problem in their school and 30% disagreed with having a positive school climate (M-DCPS, 2018).

M-DCPS offers a vast array of programs implemented by the Division of Student Services and the Division of Educational Opportunities and Access to service all students in need of support. A middle school redesign initiative has also been implemented to further support academic achievement and social emotional learning and improve experiences for middle school students. As an additional support, M-DCPS partners with positive intervention programs who embed themselves inside of challenging schools via community-based organizations. There are several SEPIP implemented in South Florida school districts; yet, high rates of problematic behavior, such as student misconduct, fighting, bullying continues to occur in high needs schools. While the school district has made attempts to evaluate the impact of positive interventions, due to lack of resources (financial and human), there has been no comprehensive research of SEPIP impacting the South Florida schools' at-risk students. To date, there have been little to no evaluations or studies conducted that have examined the effects of SEPIP in South Florida high need schools serving at-risk students, especially from the perspectives of stakeholders such as program facilitators.

Each year, the school district conducts school climate surveys which are completed by school staff, students, and parents regarding administration effectiveness, safety, violence, gang activity, drug/alcohol usage, academic standards, attitudes and feelings of staff and other items. Although the school climate surveys assess how staff, students, and parents feel about school safety, it does not include SEPIP facilitators, measure progress over the course of a school year, or incorporate perspectives of program

facilitators. Additionally, school improvement plans are created by leadership teams and approved by the school district. This document is primarily focused on academic achievement, but has a small focus on behavioral improvement or socio-emotional progress of students.

While researchers such as Valdez (2000), Ronfeldt, Owens Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom (2015), and Ullery, Gonzalez, and Katz (2016) conducted studies on student academic achievement and students with disabilities, there are limited studies on problematic behaviors with a focus on conflict management skills. Additionally, there have been little to no studies from the perspectives of program facilitators. Thompson (2016) argued positive interventions utilized within M-DCPS contributed to a decrease in school-related arrests, expulsions, and suspensions. However, Thompson (2016) recognized the need for further research on effective practices for reducing student misconduct.

With a history of high rates of students demonstrating problematic behaviors, it is imperative that research was conducted to learn the lived experience of program facilitators implementing SEPIP in South Florida high need schools. If there is not an accurate depiction from the lived experiences of the program facilitators who work most closely with the at-risk students served, then it is impossible to objectively determine how to best meet their needs. Gaining the perspective of program facilitators who work to reduce problematic behaviors that contribute to conflict, misconduct, and violence can lead to modifications that may increase the impact of the SEPIP on transforming at-risk student behavior in South Florida schools. The central research questions of this study were "What are the lived experiences of SEPIP facilitators working with at-risk students

enrolled in their programs?" and "What meaning do SEPIP facilitators find in providing interventions with conflict management components to at-risk students?" The subquestion for this study was "From the perspective of the facilitators, how have the conflict management skills of at-risk students changed since being enrolled in the program?"

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study was to explore the lived experiences of SEPIP facilitators regarding providing interventions with conflict management components to reduce problematic behaviors and improve conflict management skills of at-risk students in high need South Florida schools. The selected methodology for the study was utilized to determine the common meaning of participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) described a phenomenological study as exploring a phenomenon through discussion with individuals regarding their lived experienced. Researchers seek to obtain an understanding of the essence of the lived experience from the phenomenon via interviews (Creswell, 2014). More specifically, the study utilized the IPA qualitative approach aiming to "write in detail" about participants perceptions and understandings (J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For this study, data collection was comprised of semi-structured interviews with program facilitators that were designed to describe and gain an understanding of their lived experiences as it related to a SEPIP transforming problematic behaviors of at-risk students and improving their conflict management skills. This was accomplished by interviewing and analyzing the lived experiences of seven site

coordinators who actively interact with youth enrolled in the CiS program in high need South Florida schools.

This study sought to learn facilitator experiences and perspectives of CiS site coordinators in providing interventions with conflict management components seeking to transform conflict management skills of at-risk students served. In essence, this study sought to know whether CiS site coordinators could provide insight into the reduction of problematic behaviors in at-risk students and whether they have improved their conflict management skills. To achieve a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of participants, the researcher utilized the qualitative IPA approach to employ information which could be meaningful to principals, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, other mental health professionals, educators, students, and community stakeholders who are interested in transforming conflict management skills of at-risk students.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it sought insight from CiS site coordinators who experience the exposure of SEPIP on at-risk students. Literature addressing the experiences of SEPIP in high need South Florida schools is scarce. Obtaining the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators implementing SEPIP in high need South Florida schools provided credible knowledge and depth to the transformative nature of such programs regarding conflict management skills of at-risk students served. Additionally, researchers can utilize the findings of this study to highlight best practices or improve SEPIP implementation at other schools within the M-DCPS district, as well as other school districts using this program nationwide.

By focusing on a public health concern associated with violence in schools (CDC, 2018), this study could prove influential to the field of conflict resolution in order to better reduce problematic behaviors in various school populations by improving prosocial behavior and conflict management skills. This study is relevant to the field of conflict resolution due to the unique student population, high need school sites, and type of intervention. The transformative approach of this study can provide a vehicle for social change in the area of student misconduct and youth violence. Highlighting the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators on the potential to transform problematic behavior into prosocial behavior added to the conversation regarding a major public health issue that has continued for the past three decades.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks this study utilized were Bandura's social learning theory (SLT), Maslow and Burton's human needs theory (HNT), and Deci and Ryan's Self-determination theory (SDT). These theories relate to the phenomenon being studied and conflict resolution as they explain how behavior is learned, how unmet needs contribute to conflict and problematic behavior, and how motivation is needed to transform problematic behavior to prosocial behavior. The selected frameworks relate to the IPA approach of exploring the transformative aspect of SEPIP in altering problematic behaviors and conflict management skills of participating at-risk students within high need South Florida schools. SLT was the foundational theory of this qualitative IPA study. Additionally, SLT, HNT, and SDT provide an essential framework for conflict resolution, as they provide explanation on the reasoning behind the behavior and list necessary tools for resolving problems.

SLT is a combination of cognitive learning theory and behavioral learning theory (Bandura, 1977). While cognitive learning theory is associated with psychological factors, behavioral learning theory is associated with environmental factors. At the core of the SLT is the notion that individuals learn from direct experience or observing, imitating, and modeling the behaviors of others around them (Bandura, 1977). SLT's explanation of how behavior is learned directly relates to the transformative nature of positive interventions. Positive intervention programs such as PYD, SEL, and CRE are designed to equip students with essential asset and competency building skills via interventions which teach, model, directly experience, expose, and utilize positive relationships which explains its relatability to SLT. Bandura's SLT helps SEPIP facilitators understand how problematic behaviors that cause conflict develop and are maintained amongst youth as a result of learning, poor consequences, and pattern development. Exposure and lack of consequences for negative learned behavior lends itself to pattern development, which has the potential to become accepted as normal behavior. Students who demonstrate negative, aggressive behaviors which appear normal will demonstrate in all environments, including school environments which impact school culture and climate.

Human needs theory (HNT) is a theoretical framework introduced by Abraham Maslow as the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Maslow positioned the multi-tiered dimension of human needs by the level in which must be met for individuals to optimally perform. The basic human needs listed in this pyramid structure are physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). John Burton's (1990) addition to human needs theory provided an understanding of the source

of conflict which helped solidify the field of conflict analysis and resolution. Differing from Maslow, this researcher listed the most significant needs as identity, recognition, security, and personal development (Burton, 1990). With this theory, Burton provided an explanation of how unmet needs—whether financial, social, emotional, behavioral, or otherwise—contribute to conflict and problematic behaviors demonstrated by students occurring in schools (Jeong, 2000).

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a broad theoretical framework developed by Deci and Ryan to study human motivation and personality (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The theory frames motivational theory with cognitive and social development and individual personality traits. SDT focuses on the natural processes of intrinsic motivation and integration to aid in healthy development and psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Deci and Ryan (1985) identified the study of motivation as understanding behavior by exploring the energy ("matter of needs") and direction of behavior (processes and structures which aid in understanding intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for satisfying needs; Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 3). SDT is comprised of understanding that the three universal psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are "essential for optimal development and functioning" (Deci & Ryan, 2012, p. 417).

Positive interventions relate to SDT as they aid in explaining how appropriate youth development and motivation may lead to overall well-being through having essential needs met (Deci & Ryan, 2000a). SDT provides an understanding of how a child's personality and intrinsic motivation may flourish or fail based on their social-contextual environments. The combination of human motivation and personality impacts the behavior displayed in school and the community (Deci & Ryan, 2000a). The asset

and competency skill building approach of PYD, SEL, and CRE will provide environments which foster positivity, growth, and motivation to learn and produce acceptable behaviors. SDT explains how students gain essential skills through positive intervention to combat problematic behaviors. Additionally, students may be motivated to display newly acquired behaviors to produce more positive outcomes for themselves.

Definitions

At-risk students are defined as youth between the ages of 11-16 with poor academic progress, life skills, and behavior management which contributes to youth violence and misconduct (Edwards et al., 2007). Beach (2014) defined at-risk youth as youth who experience a significant mismatch between their circumstances and needs.

Violence is defined as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person or against a group that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (World Health Organization, 2015, p. 5).

Student misconduct is defined as minor infractions such as "tardiness and absence from class, disrespectfulness towards teachers, and noncompliance with classroom rules" (Thompson, 2016, p. 332).

High-Need Schools are identified as Title 1 schools who receive supplemental federal funding to increase educational success and bridge educational gaps (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Typically, high need schools serve students in communities with high incidences of low-income families, teacher shortages, out-of-field teachers, or uncertified teachers.

Aggression is defined as behavior that is intended to be harmful to another person who does not wish to be harmed (Bushman, Newman, Calvert, Downey, Dredze, Gottfredson et al., 2016).

Youth violence is defined as "young people hurting other peers who are unrelated to them and who they may or may not know well" (CDC, 2018). It goes on to describe violent acts on a spectrum of intensity levels, for example, hitting, slapping, fighting, bullying, threatening with weapons, robbery, assault (CDC, 2018). Tibbs et al. (2017) defined youth violence as "violent acts or behaviors" committed by youth "that range from bullying to assault and can result in serious injury or death" (Tibbs et al., 2017).

Capacity is defined as ability or assets. As it relates to PYD, capacity is understood as developing assets and capability of youth.

Zero tolerance practices/School-to-prison pipeline are defined as punitive measures, such as arrests, implemented by school administrators where youth were being sent into the juvenile system for infractions that should have been addressed at a school level, instead of inside a courtroom (Curtis, 2014). Thompson (2016) defined the school-to-prison pipeline as "a collection of punitive laws, policies, and practices that push young people—particularly African-American students, male students, students with disabilities, and students from [lower socioeconomic statuses]—out of school" and into the criminal justice system (p. 331).

Positive intervention programs are programs implemented by nonprofit organizations who have partnered with school districts to provide evidence-based positive interventions to students in need of additional support according to their program delivery model.

School-embedded positive intervention programs (SEPIP) for the purpose of this study are defined as positive interventions performed by third party non-profit organizations, via a partnership with school districts. SEPIP will be used interchangeably with school-based intervention programs.

School-based intervention programs are defined as positive interventions implemented in schools via non-profit community organizations.

Conflict resolution education programs are defined as a "distinct category within the broader family of programs currently referred to as positive youth development that aim to enhance children's skills and strengths (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007, p. 11).

Conflict management skills are defined as skills utilized to reduce, resolve or manage conflict effectively (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). Nelson, Shechter, and Ben-Ari (2014) defined conflict management behaviors and strategies as integrating, compromising, obliging, avoiding, and dominating (p. 398). Conflict management is also inclusive of conflict resolution and conflict transformation.

Problematic behaviors/Anti-social behaviors are defined as disruptive behaviors which includes violent or confrontational (overt) and non-violent or sneaky behaviors (covert; Slattery & Meyers, 2014). They include defiance and "acting out in class, truancy, fighting, disobedience, and other similar offenses" (Mallett, 2016, p. 2).

Prosocial behaviors are defined as socially competent behaviors which involves emotional, cognitive and behavioral regulation (Carlo, Crockett, Wolff & Beal, 2012).

Transformation is defined as the act of transforming the behavior of at-risk student behavior and conflict management skills.

SEPIP facilitator is defined as a person who serves at-risk middle school students by implementing the program curriculum as outlined by the program objectives. Their titles or roles may include counselor, therapist, mentor, coach, among others.

Limitations

The data collected from CiS site coordinators working in high need South Florida schools may not be generalizable to other SEPIP facilitators. Participants may have been selective in their responses to ensure a positive view of their current employment rather than provide an accurate response of their experience. Additionally, only gaining the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators may have left out pertinent information which could have been gathered from other school stakeholders.

Summary

This chapter introduced the study by laying out an overview of the South Florida school district's use of SEPIP to reduce problematic behavior, such as youth violence and school misconduct, and improve conflict management skills. Further, it provided the problem statement and identified central research question for this study. Chapter two will present a brief review of zero tolerance practices, the emergence of positive interventions, and the exploration of positive interventions with a focus on the efficacy of SEPIP. Additionally, chapter two will present an in-depth discussion of the empirical context of SEPIP transformative potential in reducing problematic behaviors and increasing conflict management skills, theoretical framework of SLT, HNT, and SDT as it relates to student misconduct, youth violence, SEPIP operating in high need South Florida schools, and the research designs selected for this study. Chapter three will describe in detail the methodology used when conducting this study. Chapter four will

provide a detailed overview of thematic findings of the study. Chapter five will discuss the findings of the study and align them with existing literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Student misconduct and youth violence has been widely recognized as a public health concern requiring intervention on varying levels. In this chapter, the researcher will discuss research that is relevant to positive interventions tailored to combating anti-social behaviors associated with student misconduct and youth violence. The researcher will provide a review of historical and contextual literature related to understanding characteristics and risk factors impacting at-risk youth who engage in student misconduct and violence. There will be a brief overview of how interventions moved from zero tolerance practices to interventions which fosters a rehabilitative focus. Furthermore, a detailed analysis will be included of SEPIP such as PYD, SEL, PBIS, and CRE. Factors contributing to the reduction of student misconduct and youth violence will be discussed. This chapter will explain how social learning theory, human needs theory and self-determination theory aids in understanding the complexity of student misconduct, youth violence, and the transformative potential of positive interventions in schools.

Methodological Review of the Literature

Student Misconduct

CDC (2018) recognized youth violence as a significant public health issue impacting individuals, families, schools and communities. Consequently, the impact of misconduct and violence in schools affects the entire school climate, including the individual student, their peers, and school staff. According to Rubio (2014), student misconduct is defined as defiant, disobedient, and disrespectful behavior. These particular behaviors are considered disruptive to the learning environment; however, they

do not threaten the safety of schools. Boyd and Anderson (2013) determined that students misbehave for various reasons, including avoidance or escape of instruction. Issues such as family conflict, school conflict, mental health, or other needs can cause a student to become off-task or engage in disruptive or aggressive behaviors that can affect the entire classroom, including the teacher and other students (Mallett, 2016). The students demonstrating the poor behavior miss out on essential instruction and face reprimands and consequences for the disruptive or aggressive behavior. Additionally, other students also get distracted and miss out on essential instruction, as the teacher must waste class time to address the classroom disruption.

School districts across the nation are charged with the responsibility of increasing student achievement, maintaining school safety, and ensuring positive school climates for students, staff, and parents. However, the prevalence of student misconduct and youth violence in schools has made this responsibility difficult. The CDC defined youth violence as "young people hurting other peers who are unrelated to them and who they may or may not know well" (CDC, 2018, para. 1). In the U.S., youth violence served as the third leading cause of death in adolescents between 10 and 24 years of age (Tibbs et al., 2017). According to Beach (2014), in the U.S., 4,500 students were arrested, with more than 200 being arrested due to violent crimes. According to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FLDJJ, 2017), there were 7,255 (14%) school related arrests and 41,985 (85.3%) community arrests over the 2016-2017 school year. This type of violence has permeated the culture of many schools.

There is a poor relationship between aggressive behaviors and effective interpersonal skills. Valois, Zullig, and Revels (2017) explored relationships between

aggressive and violent behaviors and emotional self-efficacy of public high school adolescents in South Carolina. In their cross-sectional quantitative study, Valois et al. (2017), discovered aggressive behaviors, such as physical fighting, carrying weapons, and receiving threats were a common occurrence in schools. With the results they uncovered, Valois et al. (2017) suggested a considerably large percentage of high school youth were engaging in aggressive and violent behaviors in South Carolina. Slattery and Meyers (2013) identified violent and confrontational behaviors as overt anti-social behaviors. Additionally, Slattery and Meyers (2013) stated that youth with difficulties in impulse-control tended to demonstrate poor relations and interpersonal skill deficits.

Vogel and Keith's (2015) study on exposure to violence found that experiences and exposure to violence may have a negative impact on a child's behavior, development and overall well-being. The impact of violence is not limited to the perpetrator and victim of the offense. Consequences of youth violence impacts families, schools, stakeholders, and communities in various capacities (Vogel & Keith, 2015). Students who demonstrate behaviors associated with student misconduct and violence are oftentimes faced with circumstances which contribute to their inability to demonstrate prosocial behaviors, manage conflicts effectively, or engage in effective decision making. Circumstances impacting student misconduct and violence are identified as risk factors. Beach (2014) found that school, home, community and personal aspects could impact at-risk students.

Risk Factors for Student Misconduct

Researchers sought to understand why some students were more prone to misconduct and violence than others. A number of researchers (Mallett, 2016; Slattery & Meyers, 2013; Valois et al., 2017; Vogel & Keith, 2015) found factors like low

socioeconomic status, student environment, and individual traits could contribute to youth misconduct and violence. Children from families with low socioeconomic status present with financial issues that has negative impacts on educational outcomes (Mallett, 2016). An individual's environment, such as family, school and community, can significantly influence their behavior, norms, values, and experiences. Individual traits such as mental health, intellect, and self-control, can also influence rates of student misconduct (Bushman et al., 2016).

Low socioeconomic status. Many researchers (Mallett, 2016; Raposa, Rohes, & Herrera, 2016; Valois et al., 2017) have found low socioeconomic status could contribute to rates of student misconduct. Mallett (2016) advised that education outcomes were impacted by poverty. Students who were impacted by poverty were two times more likely to demonstrate difficulties in the areas of behavior, development, and social interaction (Mallett, 2016). In their study on the impact of youth risk factors on mentoring relationships, Raposa et al. (2016) listed youth participating in the Big Brother Big Sister of American program receiving free or reduced lunch, parental separation, loss of parental employment as negative impacts on mentoring relationships. Findings in Valois et al.'s (2017) study on the relationship with aggressive or violent behavior on self-efficacy in youth suggested a large number of adolescents in South Carolina high schools engaged in aggressive and violent behaviors and reported low to modest emotional self-efficacy. Additionally, 34% (n=876) of adolescents demonstrating aggressive or violent behaviors reported receiving free and reduced lunch, which is a program for low income families to ensure a nutritionally balanced lunch for students in need (USDA Food & Nutrition Service, 2019).

Environmental factors. Environmental factors such as exposure of violence and adversity in families, communities, neighborhoods, schools, and families can also contribute to student misconduct (Raposa et al., 2016; Sanders, Munford, Thimasarn-Anwar, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015; Slattery & Meyers, 2013; Valois et al., 2017; Vogel & Keith, 2015). In their study of risk factors for youth who demonstrate anti-social behaviors, Slattery and Meyers (2013) found community violence and low parental monitoring could be attributed to the development of both overt and covert antisocial behaviors. Similarly, Sanders et al. (2015) studied the role of PYD practices on enhancing resilience and well-being of at-risk youth. After reviewing the relationship between risk, service use, resilience and wellbeing outcome, Sanders et al. (2015) found vulnerable youth had higher rates of exposure to abuse and neglect in their families and communities than youth without exposure to violence.

In their study on the impact of youth risk factors on mentoring relationships, Raposa et al. (2016) found that environmental stressors such as parental incarceration, ill family members, change of home or schools, relationship issues with partners, bullying in school or neighborhood, and health related issues with family or close friend could negatively impact the mentoring relationship. Although environmental risk factors contribute greatly to youth misconduct and violence, students who struggle with personal factors can find it more difficult to control themselves than their peers with no intrinsic issues. Vogel and Keith's (2015) analysis of adolescent health revealed that youth violence may stem from direct experience or indirect exposure to violence. Their study examined whether vicarious peer victimization impacted behavioral changes in the close friend of violence victims. Vogel and Keith (2015) found that 10.1% of youth who had

been exposed to violence were more likely to commit violent behavior themselves. The authors also found that 28.8% of youth who were the victims of youth violence were more likely to become violent themselves.

Individual risk factors. Researchers (Beach, 2014; Bushman et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2014; Slattery & Meyers, 2013; Valois et al., 2017) reported individual risk factors such as student temperament, mental health and mismatch of needs versus circumstances can also affect student misconduct or youth violence. In a consensus report of school discipline, Morgan et al. (2014) stated repeated student misbehavior may stem from unmet behavioral health and academic needs. Slattery and Meyers (2013) also addressed the role individual character traits have on predicting antisocial behavior in youth. Additionally, an individual's temperament and peer affiliation were found to be indicators of problematic and anti-social behavior (Slattery & Meyers, 2013). Beach (2014) found students with unmet mental health and special education needs were more susceptible to problematic behaviors. Other students were more susceptible when they suffered from poor self-esteem, lack of will to achieve educational goals, or substance use and abuse (Beach, 2014). Valois et al. (2017) also identified factors such as risk, exposure, feelings of injury, intimidation, threats, fear, and vulnerability as predictors for antisocial behavior. Bushman et al. (2016) stated individuals with difficulties in self-control tend to be more aggressive and impulsive leading to violence, delinquency, and other behaviors considered problematic.

High need school factors. Researchers (Chung & McBride, 2015; Pereira & Lavoie, 2018; Serbin et al., 2013; Thompson, Chauveron, Harel, & Perkins, 2014; Tolan & Larsen, 2014; Youngblade et al., 2017) support the significance of positive

interventions in high need schools due to associated risk factors such as school setting stressors (i.e. conflict), developmental changes, high incidences of student misconduct, and youth violence. Chung and McBride (2015) argued that adolescence can present with struggles and complications that contribute to difficulties in school settings. Serbin et al. (2013) discerned that transitioning from primary to secondary school is a critical yet difficult process with increased risks stemming from low socioeconomic factors and family resources. Additionally, students with these needs can be more likely to have interpersonal conflicts. Similarly, Thompson et al. (2014) recognized how students at underserved urban schools present with high needs and require additional intervention in the areas of violence prevention and academic improvement.

Alternatively, Youngblade et al.'s (2017) study on risk and promotive factors in families, schools, and communities revealed that school violence yielded negative developmental outcomes for youth in the area of self-esteem, behavior (externalizing/internalizing) and academics. Pereira and Lavoie (2018) conducted a study with high-need students who had emotional and behavioral difficulties. In their IPA study on navigating social conflicts and bullying, student participants viewed school as a complicated social process, were susceptible to increased bullying, had difficulties finding proper support (via peers or school staff), and struggled to understand and maintain positive friendships (Pereira & Lavoie, 2018). Students who present with high needs can have decreased academic performance, school engagement, and familial and peer relationships (Tolan & Larsen, 2014). Recognizing an intense need to address student misconduct and youth violence, legislators began to enact harsh initiatives in an attempt to reduce these problems.

Zero tolerance. Crisis incidents such as school shootings led to harsh discipline-based policies, or zero tolerance policies being created and implemented (Skiba, 2014). Policies supporting zero tolerance practices were established, such as the Drug Free Schools Act of 1986 and the Guns Free Schools Act of 1994 (Silvia, Thorne, & Tashjian, 1997; Skiba, 2014). Schools began to enforce these policies in an effort to combat student misconduct and youth violence, with a long-term objective of promoting safer schools. With safe school initiatives being implemented and a heightened awareness of student misconduct and youth violence, zero tolerance practices led the way for an overutilization of harsher punishments for some students with behavioral difficulties (Skiba, 2014).

Transition from Zero Tolerance Policies to Positive Interventions

While school districts established zero tolerance policies to make school settings more positive, these policies had a negative effect on school culture and on its most vulnerable student populations (Skiba, 2014). Zero tolerance practices, such as suspension, expulsions, and school arrests, have been deemed ineffective in combating youth violence and student misconduct as a means to increasing student achievement, maintaining school safety, and ensuring positive school climates (Wolf, 2013). Wolf (2013) analyzed a unique statewide database in Delaware containing pertinent information of school arrests statewide. The analysis of their study produced a number of alarming trends regarding the inefficacy of zero tolerance policies.

The first trend found was zero tolerance policies increased the number of student arrests. Secondly, Black students were disproportionately impacted as opposed to Caucasian students. Thirdly, the policies placed the already overworked juvenile justice

system at a disadvantage with having to service students who could have received intervention in schools rather than legally (Wolf, 2013). Lastly, the study highlighted that youth were more likely to be arrested in the community, rather than in school, which only accounted for 16% of juvenile arrests (Wolf, 2013). Studies such as Wolf's (2013) analysis on school arrests and outcomes recognized that normal adolescent behaviors were being criminalized due to zero tolerance policies.

The overutilization of zero tolerance policies failed to yield the intended results of improving school climate, reducing problematic behaviors, and maintaining safe school environments (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). In their study, S. W. Smith, Daunic, Miller, and Robinson (2002) sought to determine whether school-based prevention programs with a conflict resolution and peer mediation focus yielded attitudinal changes and positive outcomes in three middle schools. S. W. Smith et al. (2002) found that harsh punishments provided a consequence without equipping students with replacement behaviors. There was a lack of rehabilitation for reducing the problematic behaviors and replacing them with prosocial behaviors. More specifically, zero tolerance practices failed to include a conflict management component where students could be equipped with essential skills to effectively manage conflicts. The policies utilized punishment-based solutions, rather than teaching essential skills needed for improved behavior and academic success. Conflict resolution was not a priority, if included at all to the rehabilitative focus of the zero tolerance interventions. The results of the study found no evidence of school-wide change in the area of school setting; however, they found a decrease of disciplinary incidents in two of the three schools studied (S. W. Smith et al., 2002). Their implications for future study suggested a positive school climate change

when implementing a more comprehensive program, which include components in the areas of "conflict resolution, values education, cultural education, schoolwide positive discipline, effective communication" (S. W. Smith et al., 2002, p. 580).

Students spend a great deal of time in school and are exposed to various levels of behavior, which in turn impacts their own behavior. Consequently, schools play a significant role in the social and emotional development of youth (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). In turn, school districts across the nation increasingly implemented procedures, protocols, programs, and initiatives to ensure safety, provide essential supports, and offer access to resources for the schools to prevent youth violence and student misconduct (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). A plethora of research exists on policies, programs, and intervention tools aimed at combating youth violence and student misconduct pertaining to maintaining school safety, positive school climates and improving student achievement (Eiraldi, Wolk, Locke, & Beidas, 2015; Kelly, 2017). Positive interventions such as PYD, SEL, PBIS, and CRE programs were developed as an alternative means of addressing school challenges such as student misconduct and violence (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007).

Objectives and Efficacy of School-Embedded Positive Intervention Programs

School-embedded positive intervention programs (SEPIP) are identified as school-based intervention programs in literature. They are positive interventions provided by non-profit community organizations to promote improvement in academic achievement, school connectedness, and prosocial behaviors (Montanez, Berger-Jenkins, Rodriguez, McCord, & Meyer, 2015). According to Wolpert, Humphrey, Belsky, and Deighton (2013), there has been an increased interest for school embedded mental health

programs. The objective of SEPIP is to collaborate with school administration and school personnel to meet the needs of students via delivering academic, emotional and behavioral support. In a study examining the role of school-based intervention on middle school youth mental health and well-being, Shoshani and Steinmetz (2014) determined holistic approaches were instrumental to positive outcomes in educating youth and socio-emotional learning. Positive interventions such as PYD, SEL, PBIS, CRE are being implemented within the South Florida school district via district staff and non-profit organizations. The SEPIP operating within the selected South Florida school district include but are not limited to City Year AmeriCorps, Inc., Communities in Schools of Miami, Inc., and Motivational Coaches of America, Inc.

SEPIP have a rich history of being effective in generating positive outcomes, building assets, building social-emotional competencies, and improving school culture. More specifically, these interventions have been researched to identify their efficacy in transforming problematic behaviors and equipping students with skills to demonstrate prosocial behaviors (Caprara et al., 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; Jain & Cohen, 2013; Lane-Garon et al., 2012; Thompson, 2016). Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, and Weissberg (2017) argued for the importance of meeting the needs of at-risk students and improving school climate via SEPIP. Upon examination of a special article examining existing research on social-emotional competence interventions, Domitrovich et al. (2017) identified school-based interventions as fostering social skills training and embraces social-emotional competence practices which aid in changing the learning environment.

Positive Youth Development. Positive youth development (PYD) as an intervention emphasizes the connection between human development and developmental assets for adolescents (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas & Lerner, 2005). The objectives of PYD include promoting bonding, social competence, emotional competence, cognitive competence, behavioral competence, moral competence, fostering resilience, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in the future and prosocial norms, and providing recognition for positive behavior and opportunities for prosocial involvement (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). This intervention was developed out of the need to increase positive youth development outcomes and reduce problematic behavior. Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (2017) asserted that PYD focuses on risk and protection factors via recognizing, establishing, and enhancing the strengths, contexts and opportunities for appropriate interactions. Instead of focusing on problems, The PYD framework directs focus to building capacity within youth in the areas of “positive personal competencies, social skills, and attitudes (i.e., asset development) through increased positive relationships, social supports, and opportunities that strengthen assets and help youth flourish within their environments (i.e., environmental enhancement)” (Taylor et al., 2017, p. 1).

The PYD framework is built on the Five Cs model or the external-internal developmental assets model (Geldhof et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2017). According to Geldhof et al. (2013) the Five Cs are used to assess student competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring capacity. Sanders et al. (2015) argued that youth should be viewed as individuals with resources requiring development. The authors emphasized the importance of highlighting adolescent strengths, rather than just

identifying them by risk factors, difficulties, anti-social behaviors, or deficits (Sanders et al., 2015). According to Chung and McBride (2015), the PYD framework establishes that environments that foster encouragement and opportunities for growth are essential for healthy development.

PYD programs have a significant amount of research in the area of impact and efficacy as it relates to positive outcomes, asset building, emotion regulation, overall well-being, and positive life trajectories for at-risk students (Caprara et al., 2014; Caprara et al., 2015; Jain & Cohen, 2013; Sanders et al., 2015; Tolan & Larsen, 2014). In a longitudinal study on at-risk youth, Jain and Cohen (2013) explored whether PYD's protective factors could increase urban youth resilience. The authors (2013) argued that family, peer, and neighborhood support influenced positive outcomes in promoting resilient behavior, reducing aggression and delinquency in youth leading into adulthood. Students with higher levels of family and peer support showed positive results for PYD-related behavior adaptation; however, Jain and Cohen (2013) posited that results could vary from one community to the next due to the nature of social norms within each community. Youth who experienced community cohesion with positive social norms were associated with better behavior adaptation than youth who experienced negative social norms within their community. The results of this study revealed the effectiveness of PYD interventions in positively modifying behavior from negative to prosocial. Upon analysis, Jain and Cohen (2013) determined the asset building components of PYD interventions, along with positive support from family, peers, and neighborhoods, promoted a reduction in anti-social behavior and an increase in prosocial behavior.

While Sanders et al. (2015) also explored the benefits of PYD, instead of using a qualitative approach, the researchers instead used a quantitative instrument to study at-risk youth in New Zealand. The results of the study suggested improved outcomes in the areas of resilience, risk reduction and overall well-being for youth who experience high levels of risk, whether contextual, individual, or both from receiving PYD related services (Sanders et al., 2015).

Caprara et al. (2014) conducted an exploratory study to evaluate the effects of CEPIDEA, a school-based PYD based intervention, aimed at promoting prosocial behavior (with an emphasis on helping and consoling) in a middle school. The study examined five components of prosocial behavior as outlined in the CEPIDEA curriculum: values, emotion regulation, empathy and perspective-taking, interpersonal communication, and civic engagement. The researchers (2014) conducted assessments before the course, after the course, and several months later. The researchers also reviewed school records to track student achievement. The researchers discovered that the CEPIDEA program increased prosocial (helping) behavior and student achievement and decreased physical and verbal aggression in the program participants (Caprara et al., 2014). They further emphasized that positive development processes counteracted problematic behaviors such as aggression.

In a follow-up study examining the effects of the CEPIDEA PYD based program consisting of promoting prosocial behavior and emotion regulation amongst middle school adolescents from two different middle schools, Caprara et al. (2015) confirmed findings from previous study. This study utilized the same approach; however, it differed from the initial study, as it emphasized the helping, consoling, sharing, interpersonal self-

efficacy, and agreeableness components of prosocial behavior (Caprara et al., 2015). The researchers discovered that students who participated in this program showed improvements in prosocial behavior, interpersonal self-efficacy, agreeableness, and academic achievement. Additionally, findings reported reductions in aggressive behaviors. The results of both studies support the significance of the PYD approach of building assets, values, and habits which produces positive outcomes, overall well-being and reduces negative outcomes (Caprara et al., 2014; Caprara et al., 2015).

Tolan and Larsen (2014) explored positive and negative life satisfaction trajectories in a group of middle schoolers by testing for developmental patterns in microsystem indicators (parenting influence, peer on peer relationships, and peer and teacher relationships) and functioning indicators (social skills, leadership, aggression perpetration, victimization, learning problems, demographics, and control variables). The study included a multi-site violence prevention project with a PYD focus implemented in 25 diverse middle schools. Tolan and Larsen (2014) observed that 78% of students reported and maintained a high life satisfaction and positive trajectories, 12% of students experienced a decline in life satisfaction and positive trajectories, and 10% experienced improvements in life satisfaction and positive trajectories. Additionally, most students did not report problematic trajectories (Tolan & Larsen, 2014). A component of PYD which focuses on the social and emotional development of adolescents evolved into the social emotional learning (SEL) framework. The PYD framework has similar efficacy results as the SEL framework on asset and competency building to reduce problematic behavior and increase skills producing prosocial behavior.

Social and Emotional Learning. Social emotional learning (SEL) is a specific intervention which has similar components as the PYD model (Taylor et al., 2017). The SEL framework is used to provide essential skills in three conceptual areas: emotional processes, socio-interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). SEL programs are a core set of skills which equip students to navigate and manage life more effectively (Valois et al., 2017). The objective of SEL is asset building, which consists of building capacity in the areas of "cognitive, affective and behavioral competencies," including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making, and problem solving (Taylor et al., 2017, p. 1157). Jones and Bouffard (2012) argued that SEL produces positive outcomes academically, behaviorally, and emotionally. The goal is for students in the program to show improvement in grades, solving conflicts, conduct, and social isolation (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). After conducting a study on SEL program effectiveness in two middle schools, Coelho and Sousa (2017) discovered that enhancing competencies in youth fosters improvements in student achievement, disruptive behavior, bullying and interpersonal violence (p. 656). Beach (2014) stated the importance of providing clear behavioral expectations for students who present with a limited range of "appropriate emotional responses" (p. 52). Increasing social competence skills in youth such as social problem solving, interpersonal conflict management, anger management, and coping have shown to be effective interventions in reducing youth violence (Bushman et al., 2016).

Supporting Bushman's findings on social competence skills, Jones and Bouffard's (2012) report on SEL in schools found that these interventions focus on efforts of

controlling and regulating emotion, prosocial skills, behavior, and aggression. Additionally, SEL interventions may include "bullying prevention, character education, conflict resolution, social skills training" (Jones & Bouffard, 2012, p. 4). SEL has been associated with reducing adolescent violence and aggression (Valois et al., 2017). In a study on SEL school-based interventions, Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) determined that positive outcomes are associated with four elements: (a) coordinated and connected skill activities, (b) active engagement with learning, (c) social skill development, and (d) emphasis on targeting specific skills. Students in the SEL program improved their social and emotional skills (including conflict resolution and interpersonal problem solving), attitudes toward self and others, positive social behaviors, conduct problems, management of emotional distress, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011).

The impact and efficacy of SEL programs on at-risk students has proven to have positive outcomes in academic achievement, social, and emotional skills, including conflict resolution, behavior modification such as improved prosocial behavior, and reduced negative outcomes such as conduct problems (Durlak et al., 2011; Serbin et al., 2013; Coelho & Sousa, 2017). In their meta-analysis focusing on school-based universal SEL programs, Durlak et al. (2011) produced findings employing SEL programs as having positive outcomes in improving socio-emotional skills, attitudes, behavior and academics of students. Additionally, the findings support the reduction of conduct problems such as disruptive behavior, aggression and school suspensions. Their study utilized SAFE criteria and implementation efficacy to determine outcomes in the area of socio-emotional skills, attitudes toward self and others, positive social behaviors, conduct

problems, emotional distress, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). SAFE criteria encompasses SEL practices, which makes up the acronym (S) Sequenced (A) Active (F) Focused and (E) Explicit. The criteria seeks to determine if the SEL intervention activities are connected, coordinated, active learning based, and development focused. Additionally, Durlak et al. (2011) argued that SEL programs were appropriate for all educational levels and socio-economic status areas.

In a longitudinal study of adolescence transitioning from primary to secondary schooling, Serbin, Stack, and Kingdon (2013) sought out to understand whether a lack of family resources and male gender impact academic success in seventh and eighth grade students. The authors utilized the transition theory as the framework to explore the mediation of family resources; behavioral, social, and psychological adjustment; delinquency; attention issues; social skills; self-competence; parental support; subject area (reading, spelling, math); IQ; and academic performance on transition success from primary to secondary schooling (Serbin et al., 2013). The study found that the academic domains, social skills, and parental support were identified as both risk factors and factors producing successful outcomes in middle school students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Serbin et al., 2013). Additionally, researchers (2013) determined that although both genders demonstrated social and academic transition difficulties, male students demonstrated higher adjustment difficulties than female students.

To determine effectiveness of two middle school SEL program formats via student functioning levels, Coelho and Sousa (2017) examined the following social and emotional competencies: social awareness, self-control, social isolation, social anxiety

and leadership. The two types of program delivery formats included pre-packaged broader format (focused on wide range of SEL competencies) and a narrowed curriculum format (focused on fewer SEL competencies). The researchers sought to analyze data of program delivery over an eight-year period to examine effectiveness and sustainability of the program. Coelho and Sousa (2017) found that the students participating in the SEL program titled Positive Attitude illustrated improvements in the areas of social awareness, self-control and self-esteem and reductions in the areas of social isolation and social anxiety for the low middle school students. Additionally, the study found that the pre-packaged program format yielded more positive outcomes than the focused program format (Coelho & Sousa, 2017). While it is important to learn essential skills for social emotional regulation, it is equally important to have prosocial behaviors explained, modeled, and encouraged.

Positive behavior intervention support. Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) or Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is a behavior-based intervention approach used to improve schools, families, and communities via research-based interventions tailored to the environment requiring support (Thompson, 2016). Goodman-Scott (2015) defined PBIS as a "three tiered continuum of preventative, culturally responsive, evidence-based, data-driven interventions based on applied behavior analysis principles with the aim of creating a positive behavior to all students and staff, reinforcing desired behaviors, and viewing the school as a system" (p. 58). PBIS interventions are proactive initiatives which assist schools with modeling and developing appropriate social skills in students (Haggis, 2017). PBIS in schools demonstrate components of SEL and CRE in creating improvements in school climate and safety (Lane-Garon et al., 2012). The major

objective of the PBIS model is to create, implement, and maintain a praise-reward system to encourage appropriate behaviors in students and reduce the amount of reprimands. The goal is for students to learn prosocial values and behaviors that are expected, modeled, and reinforced according to the needs of the school and classroom. PBIS involves modeling and rewarding individuals for the positive behavior you wish to foster within the environment (Fernandez et al., 2014). In a school, this system operates as school-wide initiative to model expected behaviors and utilizes a reward system to encourage the positive behaviors rather than focusing on negative behaviors. In a sense, this system seeks out to change the atmosphere of the entire school and offers consistency in rewarding prosocial behavior and disciplining problematic behavior.

PBIS is widely recognized for increasing positive academic, behavioral, and environmental outcomes in students (Goodman-Scott, 2014; Hollingshead, Kroeger, Altus, & Trytten, 2016; Montanez, 2015). In a case study on PBIS implemented in an elementary school via school counselors, Goodman-Scott (2014) advised how PBIS aligned with school counseling programs in addressing disciplinary problems and improving positive supports and overall school climate for students and staff. In their study, Hollingshead et al. (2016) illustrated how a seventh-grade class utilized PBIS components, such as reduced reprimands from the teacher, and utilized specific behavior praise to improve on-task behaviors. The study indicated how on-task behaviors improved with implementation of praise of a specific behavior was critical to fostering a nurturing and culturally relevant learning environment (Hollingshead et al., 2016). These results highlighted the effect of reducing unwanted behaviors through teacher reprimands and instead creating an environment where caring relationships, high expectations, and

opportunities for meaningful participation existed through the usage of verbal praise (Hollingshead et al., 2016). Similarly, a study conducted by Montanez et al. (2015) yielded results that suggested improvements in classroom behavior and academic outcomes through the usage PBIS strategies for classroom management.

While limiting teacher reprimands and using behavioral praise are examples how to reduce unwanted behavior, they also illuminate a way to provide support to individuals requiring intervention and entities seeking support (Hollingshead et al., 2016; Thompson, 2016). Thompson also determined that discovering the reasons behind problematic behaviors, justifying outcomes, and operating within context of where poor behavior takes place illuminated how PBIS could improve school-wide student behavior. Likewise, Lane-Garon et al. (2012) argued that effective PBIS implementation should generate improvements in attendance, student-teacher school climate reports and reductions in behavioral disruptions. Reductions in behavioral disruptions stem from an increase in disturbances and conflicts being resolved more peacefully as a result of learned skill (Lane-Garon et al., 2012).

Conflict Resolution Education. Conflict resolution education (CRE) programs are a "distinct category within the broader family of programs currently referred to as positive youth development that aim to enhance children's skills and strengths" (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007, p. 11). CRE programs are generally implemented in three formats: instruction (which provides direct skills), peer mediation, and curriculum embedded into instruction. The programs incorporate skills which explain conflict, mediate conflict and manage problematic behaviors (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). The objective of CRE programs or having a CR component in programs are to equip students with skills to

reduce, resolve or manage interpersonal conflict effectively (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). Garrard and Lipsey (2007) identified CRE criteria as incorporating the following areas specific to the conflict resolution field: program goals, primary target behaviors, intervention orientation, program content, and program activities. Consequently, literature supports aligning CRE programs encompassing these criteria to produce effective changes in student behavior.

In continuation with CRE criteria, literature surrounding CRE programs or programs with CRE components have been proven to be effective in decreasing antisocial behaviors and increasing prosocial behaviors and conflict resolution skills in students (Bushman et al., 2016; Lane-Garon et.al., 2012; S.W. Smith et al, 2002). Bushman et al. (2016) addressed the need to recognize and improve conflict management skills in students as a means of transforming school climates from negative to positive. In a four-year study on conflict resolution and peer mediation outcomes in three middle schools, S. W. Smith et al. (2002) determined a decrease in aggressive behavior and conflict related disciplinary infractions. The authors surveyed teachers, students, and parents on changes in student attitudes, conflict resolution skills, school climate, peer mediator efficacy, and program efficacy. Researchers recommended a more comprehensive program that encompasses student-based components in the areas of "conflict resolution, values education, cultural education, school-wide positive discipline, effective communication" implemented for a significant amount of time to enact effective changes for school change (S. W. Smith et al., 2002 p. 580). Additionally, the findings of the study highlighted the need for full commitment and support from administration and faculty in enacting school-wide positive changes. The authors highlighted how CR skills learned

from the program should enable students to manage everyday conflicts more efficiently (S. W. Smith et al., 2002). Furthermore, Lane-Garon et al. (2012) supported the findings of S.W. Smith et al. (2002) in a qualitative study on elementary students who received CRE through mediation training and PBIS. Lane-Garon et al. (2012) obtained an understanding of the nature of conflict, formed cognitive processes that have a direct relationship with conflict management, learned the principles of conflict resolution, and built essential skills to managing conflict effectively (p. 204). The results of the study suggested improvement in conflict strategy choice, cognitive perspective taking, and showing empathy toward others (Lane-Garon et al., 2012).

Lane-Garon et al. (2012) argued that CRE programs should yield improvement in attendance, student-teacher-parent school climate reports, disputes resolved in a positive manner, and reduction in "serious behavioral disruptions" (p. 202). Additionally, Lane-Garon et al. (2012) determined that effective CRE programs equipped students with a framework and skills to resolve interpersonal conflict amongst themselves, thereby preventing physical altercations which require disciplinary action. Another tool suggested includes training students with conflict-related behavioral and anger management difficulties to become peer mediators and linking them with mentors or peer bodies to foster development in communication and self-restraint, prevent physical conflict and aid in creating safe spaces, both psychological and physical (Lane-Garon et al., 2012). In a multi-site review on the effectiveness of a Violence Prevention Project on ninth and tenth graders, Thompson et al. (2014) reviewed program records to assess the program's impact on student engagement, academic self-concept and conflict resolution skills. During their study, the researchers (2014) found students increased their academic

self-concept and conflict resolution skills. Additionally, the study produced results suggesting reductions in verbal aggression (Thompson et al., 2014).

Researchers (APAZTTF, 2008, Mallett, 2016; Mongan & Walker, 2012; Skiba & Rausch, 2006) suggested positive interventions yield better results in reducing problematic behaviors and increasing prosocial behaviors in at risk youth than zero tolerance policies of the past. Yet, violence and misconduct amongst school aged youth still persist. The occurrence of problematic behaviors in schools and communities highlights the importance of determining whether evidence-based positive interventions are actually having an impact on conflict management skills and prosocial behaviors of youth. The consistent literature regarding positive interventions provide evidence why these programs are needed and highlight factors which contribute to positive outcomes, such as reducing problematic behaviors. Understanding how positive interventions have been effective in increasing positive outcomes can provide insight into what is working to promote effectiveness in combating student misconduct and youth violence.

Factors to Reducing Student Misconduct and Youth Violence

Researchers (Caprara et al., 2014; Chung & McBride, 2015; Coelho & Sousa, 2017; Hollingshead et al., 2016; Lane-Garon et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2014; Youngblade et al., 2017) identified contributing factors for reducing student misconduct and youth violence as positive relationships and connectedness, communication, emotion regulation, civic engagement, and comprehensive quality programs, including CRE components. Building positive relationships and feelings of connectedness to mentors and programs fostering growth and development are essential components for transforming behaviors in at-risk students. PYD and SEL programs emphasize the

importance of emotion regulation in improving the prosocial skills and managing conflict more appropriately. Programs fostering positive development in areas such as values, decision-making and conflict resolution skills have proven to be more comprehensive in meeting goals.

Positive relationships and connectedness. Positive relationships and feelings of connectedness in schools and amongst families contribute to reductions in student misconduct and acts of violence (Bushman et al., 2016; Hollingshead et al., 2016; Jain & Cohen, 2013; Serbin et al., 2013; Youngblade et al., 2017). Hollingshead et al. (2016) revealed a reduction in unwanted behaviors through limiting the usage of teacher reprimands and creating an environment where caring relationships, high expectations and opportunities for meaningful participation existed through the usage of verbal praise. Subsequently, Jain and Cohen (2013) argued that family, peer, and neighborhood support influenced positive outcomes in promoting resilient behavior in youth leading into adulthood. Just as Jain and Cohen referenced how support influenced positive outcomes, Serbin et al.'s (2013) study showed positive outcomes of successful transition from primary to secondary schooling due to supportive parenting such as nurturance, responsiveness, affection capacity, and needs awareness. Ultimately, Bushman et al. (2016) listed protective factors in reducing youth violence as strengthening effective parenting skills, family management, and increasing close attachment bonds with caregivers who are consistent and supportive. Lastly, Youngblade et al. (2017) found family context factors such as "family engagement, closeness, and communication" could produce positive outcomes in social competence, behavior (internalizing and externalizing) and self-esteem (p. S50).

An example of a program utilizing positive relationships and connectedness is Communities in Schools of Miami, Incorporated, a non-profit organization which delivers a holistic school approach of supporting the academic and other needs of students. The objectives of the CiS program are to collaborate with schools, community partners and businesses to provide essential resources and support as determined by site coordinator conducting the needs assessment. Through the partnership, site coordinators seek to empower students and families, remove barriers for academic and behavioral success, and increase access to health care. CiS of Miami service a variety of high need schools at all levels including elementary, kindergarten through eighth grade centers, traditional middle schools, and high schools. Services provided are delivered on a three-tier system which includes (a) school-wide services (Tier 1), (b) targeted programs based on needs (Tier 2), and (c) individualized support (Tier 3). Provided services include academic assistance, behavioral interventions, counseling, case management, community and service learning, family engagement, mental health, basic needs, college and career preparation, enrichment, life skills, and physical health (Communities in Schools, 2018). The CiS model aims for dropout prevention by meeting students where they are, and exhausting resources to aid students. CiS of Miami, Inc is the organization where research was conducted with site coordinators in high need South Florida schools.

Communication. Effective communication has been identified as a factor in reducing student misconduct and violent behaviors (Caprara et al., 2014; Lane-Garon et al., 2012; Serbin et al., 2013). Caprara et al. (2014) recognized interpersonal communication skills, such as assertiveness, positive emotions and dealing with peer demands, as a significant component of improving prosocial behavior and reducing

aggressive behaviors. Similarly to Caprara et al. recognizing communication skills as essential to positive outcomes, Lane-Garon et al. (2012) found that involving at-risk students as peer mediators and linking them with mentors fosters development in communication, prevents physical conflict, and aids in creating safe spaces, both psychological and physical. Additionally, supporting previously mentioned findings on the importance of improving communication skills, Serbin et al.'s (2013) study proved that appropriate expressive communication between parent and child as contributing to success in the transition between primary and secondary schooling.

Emotion Regulation. Possessing social skills to manage emotions and feelings effectively can play a major role in reducing incidents characteristic of conflict, misconduct, and violence (Caprara et al., 2014; Coelho & Sousa, 2017; Lane-Garon et al., 2012; Serbin et al., 2013). Serbin et al. (2013) identified social skills such as cooperation, assertion, empathy and self-control as mediating success in transitioning from primary to secondary schooling. Caprara et al. (2014) further uncovered how factors such as emotion regulation of feelings and emotions (positive and negative), empathy, and perspective-taking (recognition of others' needs and perspectives) could contribute to improved prosocial behaviors and reduction in violence amongst youth. Coelho and Sousa's (2017) findings mirrored Caprara et al.'s, in terms of how emotion regulation improved prosocial behaviors; the researchers observed that SEL competency focused programs led to improvements in the areas of social awareness, self-control and self-esteem and reductions in the areas of social isolation and social anxiety for middle school students. Lastly, Lane-Garon et al. (2012), found that the importance of involving at-risk students as peer mediators and linking them with mentors fosters

development in self-restraint possessed the ability to prevent physical conflict, violence and create safer school environments.

Emotion regulation is supported via the City Year AmeriCorps (CY) program, a non-profit organization which utilizes a holistic approach with a PBIS and SEL focus to develop academic and social-emotional support networks for students in high-need schools. CY AmeriCorps members collaborate with administration and school staff to provide services to students exhibiting early warning signs in the areas of attendance, behavior, and academics. The objective is to deliver services which yield positive outcomes for students, classrooms, and the school climate. Services provided includes supporting classrooms in various capacities, monitoring student progress with data, individual or small group academic support, SEL instruction, and skill-building support, afterschool programming, civic projects, and school-wide activities. SEL skills focused upon included "self-awareness, self-management, and relationship development" (City Year AmeriCorps, 2018). The aim of City Year AmeriCorps is to "improve conditions for learning, engage families and inspire civic engagement" (City Year AmeriCorps, 2018, para. 1).

Civic Engagement. Engaging in civic activities, participating in serving learning, and possessing feelings of responsibility to others and communities contributes to reducing and limiting opportunities for school violence and aggressive incidents (Caprara et al., 2014; Chung & McBride, 2015; Lane-Garon et al., 2012). Caprara et al., (2014) learned that civic engagement such as planning, goal setting and helping of others is a prosocial skill factor contributing to reducing aggressive behaviors (Caprara et al., 2014). Subsequently, Chung and McBride (2015) asserted the importance of utilizing

serving learning as a component of building competencies through PYD and SEL instructional modalities. Furthermore, Lane-Garon et al. (2012) highlighted how an elementary school utilized service learning in the form of peer mediation—a CRE component, improved their school climate, and increased positive outcomes for selected peer mediators.

Comprehensive quality programs with CRE components. Researchers (Lane-Garon et al., 2012; Sanders et al., 2015; S. W. Smith et al., 2002; Thompson et al., 2014) support the importance of implementing quality SEPIP with CRE components to reducing student misconduct and violence. S. W. Smith et al. (2002) argued that implementing comprehensive program encompassing student-based components in the areas of conflict resolution, values, culture, school-wide positive discipline, and communication as effective in creating changes for school culture (p. 580). The study provided evidence suggesting improvement in students' newly acquired mediation skills. Their mediation program supported training students with behavior difficulties to serving as peer mediators, which aids in enabling them to resolve conflicts more effectively (S. W. Smith et al., 2002). Whereas Sanders et al. (2015) suggested that the quality of PYD services provided to at-risk youth illustrated a greater significance in attaining positive outcomes in reducing problematic behaviors than quantity of services provided (Sanders et al., 2015).

Additionally, Lane-Garon et al. (2012) argued that effective PBIS implementation should contribute to reductions in behavioral disruptions. Moreover, Thompson et al. (2014) suggest optimizing violence prevention programs with conflict resolution components according to the constraints of the environment, such as scheduling, needs of

school and implementation barriers, to increase effectiveness. Lastly, in a study on the effects of a federally funded violence prevention in three high need elementary schools, Duarte and Hatch (2014) found that implementing comprehensive school counseling programs positively impacted citizenship, empathy, problem solving, school cultures, academic improvement, decreased discipline referrals, and poor attendance.

An example of a positive intervention program implementing CRE components is Motivational Coaches of America (MCUSA), a non-profit organization which operates under Non-Violence Project USA. MCUSA provides evidence-based interventions in the area of behavioral health, wellness, and education. The MCUSA program services high needs schools to improve school engagement, parent child relationships, self-esteem, academic success, while also decreasing substance use and abuse. Facilitators of MCUSA would collaborate with school administrators and staff to better meet the needs of participants. Their services include coaching, counseling, mentorship, and positive empowerment. Students in need may receive mentors who assist them with making positive choices and experiencing life outside of their daily lives. At-risk students received access to programs, and are equipped with decision making skills, social and emotional skills, and conflict management skills (MCUSA, 2018).

Perspectives of School Stakeholders

Although there is limited literature on phenomenological studies where researchers have sought to learn and understand the lived experiences of positive intervention program facilitators, research exists for other school stakeholders such as teachers, counselors, administrators, students, and parents regarding a variety of positive interventions. Additionally, existing literature more aligned with this study are

representative of doctoral dissertations. With a plethora of information on positive interventions, it is mind-boggling that qualitative literature from the perspective of SEPIP facilitators is limited. However, the few studies best matching this research produced themes that may be consistent with those of SEPIP facilitators. The themes resonating in existing literature of phenomenological studies on positive interventions suggest improvement in areas such as excitement about positive outcomes and obstacles that negatively impact program delivery.

Lived experiences obtained from school stakeholders produced themes such as program effectiveness, positive outcomes in youth, and program delivery challenges (Burnett, 2014; Duoos, 2012; Flennaugh, Cooper, Stein, Carter, & Andrews, 2017; Goodman-Scott, Carlisle, Clark, & Burgess, 2018; Olds, 2017; Ortega, Lyubansky, Nettles, & Espelage, 2016; Powell & Holleran-Steiker, 2017). Goodman-Scott et al. (2018) found the use of social stories as a powerful process for working with students. The school counselors recognized that social stories integrated well with their role; however, they identified obstacles such as a lack of support from staff or time to efficiently implement the process. From their perspective, school counselors listed social stories as a great tool for individualized intervention; however, they spoke of the process as time-consuming while lacking resources and collaborative support. In a mixed-method study exploring the impact of a “sport-for-education programme” in South Africa, Burnett (2014), interviewed 15 school principals, who noted the program promoted improvements in school status, prosocial behaviors, and attendance for regular and non-regular attendees, as well as reduced antisocial behavior in students. After surveying school counselors who were implementing evidence-based educational

programs (such as PBIS and RTi), Olds (2017) found programs that addressed mental health resulted in positive outcomes for students. Olds (2017) argued that school counselors recognized the benefit of integrating positive programs into their schools to create positive changes in their students. Additionally, the school counselors identified the need for consistent and collaborative support with school staff and community stakeholders, need for respect and essential resources for implementation, challenges in implementation, and how EBP can dominate the role of school counselors.

Consistent with Olds' (2017) outcomes, Duoos' (2012) study on teacher experiences implementing RTi tiers revealed positive outcomes. Because of the RTi program, teachers better understood the importance of accountability, used data to drive instruction, and could collaborate within the program. However, the teachers identified lack of efficient training, time for effective implementation, essential resources, and support as obstacles (Duoos, 2012). By way of contrast, in a qualitative study on disconnected youth attending an urban second-chance high schools, Flennaugh et al. (2017) determined educators' use of the false hope approach produced negative outcomes. The approach failed to counteract the school-based circumstances, such as inadequate resources. Additionally, participants indicated they received inadequate training for meeting student needs and providing high-quality instruction to yield high expectations. However, there were findings of other essential forms of hope yielding positive outcomes in disconnected youth.

Powell and Holleran-Steiker (2017) also researched positive outcomes during their case study of psychosocial school-based interventions implemented following a traumatic series of tornadoes in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The researchers (2017)

interviewed child participants, school social workers, and program facilitators, who identified positive student outcomes in the areas of emotion regulation, grief, psychoeducation, self-expression and bullying. The social workers and facilitators recognized the social-emotional growth in program participants as they learned effective coping skills and more appropriate methods of self-expression, resulting in a reduction of anger outbursts and behaviors. The social workers and program facilitators focused more on the progress of the students rather than how they felt implementing the program.

Consistent with previous studies, in a grounded theory qualitative study on restorative circles outcomes, Ortega et al. (2016) explored the perceptions and experiences of students and staff involved in the restorative circles program. The themes resonating in this study reflected positive and negative outcomes. Student participants in Ortega et al.'s research expressed their frustration and disappointment with students not being truthful and open about their incidents, instead resorting to violence rather than a more peaceful approach, and not taking the process seriously. Despite these setbacks, Ortega et al. (2016) highlighted the positive outcomes of the program, including interrupting the school-to-prison pipeline, improving relationships, efficient conflict management, meaningful dialogue, and positive academic and social achievement. Adult participant responses supported existing literature on the ineffectiveness of zero tolerance practices. Ortega et al. (2016) supported the implementation of restorative circles as a viable positive intervention for reducing conflicts and violence, while improving school success academically and behaviorally.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory (SLT) was developed by Albert Bandura (1977) as a combination between the psychological factors of cognitive learning theory and the environmental stimuli of behavioral learning theory. In general, SLT represents learned behavior through observations of the behaviors, attitudes, and consequences of other individuals (Bandura, 1977). In theory, learning from interactions in social settings will encourage individuals to assimilate and imitate the behaviors experienced or observed.

According to Bandura (1977), there are four essential conditions for SLT: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. First, an individual must actively pay attention to the behavior they are attempting to learn. Attention can be impacted by various factors such as individual character traits, prevalence, complexity, and distinctiveness of behavior. Retention pertains to remembering the behavior paid attention to. An individual must retain the behavior they previously osberved. This process requires symbolic representation, motor skill coordination, and pattern organization. During the reproduction stage, the individual reproduces the image obtained through observation. Motivation requires an individual having an opportunity to imitate the observed behavior. An individual's motives may include recalling the modeled behavior and seeking the associated consequence (Bandura, 1977).

SLT provides understanding and explanation for youth violence and student misconduct. Bandura (1978) explained how aggressive behavior is modeled and reinforced from family members, communities, and mass media. Bandura further suggested that media could influence youths by teaching aggressive conduct, altering

aggressive behavior restraints, and desensitizing and familiarizing individuals to violence (Bandura, 1978). Additionally, desensitization to aggressive behaviors fosters a level of indifference to resolving conflicts poorly (Bandura, 1978).

Individuals who witness violence or physical aggression as a response to interpersonal conflict may display the same behavior when confronted with conflict in their personal lives (Seifert, 2012). In her book, Seifert (2012) argued the theory ignored how the unique traits of an individual, such as DNA, brain development, and learning differences, could have an impact on learned behavior. The previously mentioned traits are those which has the capacity to impact an individual's capabilities and desire of copying learned behavior (Seifert, 2012, p. 48).

In their study of adolescent peer victimization and violence, Vogel and Keith (2015) argued that violence exposure may be heard from others, witnessed or observed either at home or within communities. Their empirical longitudinal quantitative study utilized SLT as a component of their theoretical framework to examine the direct effect of vicarious peer victimization on middle and high school students. It consisted of a three-part hypothesis according to the theoretical framework of SLT, General strain theory, and peer group selection models. Vogel and Keith (2015) attempted to explore how the direct effect of vicarious peer victimization could be "mediated by changes in peer behavior" (p. 840). The results of the SLT measurement were consistent with the theory, as they found 28.8% of peers who experienced violent victimization were more likely to engage in violent acts. The authors concluded that research on adolescent victimization should also focus on victims of violence as well as their peers.

Vogel and Kelly (2015) found SLT as an appropriate method to explore youth violence as, the theory can be used to explain how youth who witness others engaging in violent behaviors may consider violence as a viable option to handle situations. They further stated that poor behaviors may provide reward and relief from uncomfortable situations (Vogel & Kelly, 2015). In addition to SLT as a theoretical framework, human needs theory explains how unmet needs contributes to conflict.

Human Needs Theory

Human needs theory (HNT) was introduced by Abraham Maslow (1943) as the hierarchy of needs. Maslow positioned the multi-tiered dimension of human needs by the order in which they must be met for individuals to optimally perform. The basic human needs of the pyramid structure are physiological, safety, belongingness or love, esteem and self-actualization. Physiological needs are food, water, warmth and rest. Safety and security are essential needs for balance and survival. Belongingness and love needs involve relationships with others, whether they be intimate, familial, or platonic. The need for esteem is a psychological need which impacts feelings of accomplishment. Last on the pyramid is self-fulfillment need, or self-actualization, which includes the capacity and freedom to reach complete potential in the areas most important to the individual (Maslow, 1943).

John Burton (1990) grounded the basic human needs theory within the conflict analysis and resolution listing the most significant needs as identity, recognition, security and personal development. His human needs position situated the theory to understanding the source of conflict and solidifying the independence of conflict analysis and resolution as a field. Burton argued that needs-based conflict and interest-based

conflict differ as needs are non-negotiable. He asserted that universal needs may not be universal for all, as needs differ by cultures (Burton, 1990). For example, an individual from an American Christian background may have varying needs from an individual from a practicing Muslim background.

Having needs met is essential to an individual's development and need fulfillment physically, emotionally, socially, and economically. Lacking essential needs provides an environment which lacks balance, impacting other areas of life leading to dissatisfaction, fear and other conditions associated with human misery (Jeong, 2000). Jeong explained that struggling to satisfy needs can contribute to an individual's behavior, their interactions with others, and ultimately their life outcomes. An individual who is unable to have their needs met may have difficulties achieving goals, appropriately interacting and engaging with others, asserting independence and performing as a productive citizen and community member (Jeong, 2000). Price (2013) provided insight to Burton's human needs argument, explaining that it provides an understanding of why conflict occurs which has the potential to actually solving the conflict.

In relation to the topic of this research, human needs theory explains how at-risk youth who present with varying levels of risk factors such as low socioeconomic families and communities; varying academic, emotional, and behavioral needs; and aggressive environments, may present with difficulties blending in at school due to unmet needs (Morgan et al., 2014; Raposa et al., 2016). Difficulties complying with rules, regulations, those in authority or simply having positive interactions with others may be a normal occurrence for students who have more things to consider than their typical counterpart.

For example, for some students, the only meal they will have for the day may be what they receive at school.

In another example, researchers argued there could be other obstacles, such as financial strains, domestic and community violence, or unmet academic, emotional or behavioral needs preventing them from functioning at their optimal level in schools (Morgan et al., 2014; Valois et al., 2017). As explained earlier, unmet needs for one student may differ greatly from unmet needs of another student. Problematic or aggressive behavior may be normal behavior to the student or an abnormal behavior that causes a disruption which could lead to further complications in school (Slattery & Meyers, 2013). Additionally, self-determination theory provides an understanding of how motivation plays a role in making behavioral changes when presented with programs that empower prosocial behaviors.

Self-determination Theory

Self- determination theory (SDT) is a broad theoretical framework developed by Deci and Ryan to study human motivation and personality (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The theory frames motivational theory with cognitive and social development and individual personality traits. SDT focuses on the natural processes of intrinsic motivation and integration to aid in healthy development and psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Deci and Ryan (1985) identified the study of motivation as understanding behavior by exploring the energy ("matter of needs") and direction of behavior (processes and structures which aid in understanding intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for satisfying needs; Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 3).

SDT is comprised of understanding three universal psychological needs; autonomy, competence and relatedness, are "essential for optimal development and functioning" (Deci & Ryan, 2012, p. 417). SDT explains how an individual can be intrinsically motivated by internal and external social-contextual factors such as support, rewards, threats, evaluation, positive-negative feedback, competition, and choice (Deci & Ryan, 2012). If an individual is receiving positive feedback and rewards, which impacts their competence and self-determination, they may be intrinsically motivated to behave or perform positively (Deci & Ryan, 2000b). Consequently, threats or negative feedback may negatively impact an individual's competence and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000b). Relatedness enhances intrinsic motivation in individuals as feelings of being connected and embraced by others satisfies a psychological need and positively impacts social development (Deci & Ryan, 2000a, 2000b).

SDT has been broken down into six subtheories that focus on motivation or personality functioning: cognitive evaluation theory (CET), organismic integration theory (OIT), causality orientations theory (COT), basic psychological needs theory (BPNT), goal content theory (GCT), and relationships motivation theory (RMT; Deci & Ryan, 2012). CET focuses on the role social contexts, such as interpersonal controls, ego, and reward systems have on an individual's intrinsic motivation. OIT focuses on extrinsic motivation in relation to regulation and integration which has an internalizing aim impacting an individual's autonomy. COT focuses on how individuals adapt to their environment and regulate their behavior. Three causality orientations are assessed with COT, the autonomy orientation, control orientation, and impersonal or amotivated orientation. BPNT focuses on the SDT essential needs, autonomy, competence and

relatedness, and its connection with an individual's psychological well-being and overall function. GCT focuses on differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic goals as it relates to motivation and overall well-being. Finally, RMT focuses on how the essential SDT need of relatedness impacts an individual's overall well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Garn and Jolly (2014) utilized SDT as the theoretical framework to explore the learning motivation of high-performing students attending a summer learning program. Their qualitative IPA study consisted of interviewing 15 participants which were transcribed, coded and analyzed. The results of the study produced two major themes which were ensuring learning is fun and the rewards and pressure of maintaining good grades. The participants expressed their need for learning to be personalized to their interests and learning goals which represents intrinsic motivation and regulation. Additionally, the participants acknowledged internal pressures (self), external pressures (parents), and rewards as factors behind their academic performance (Garn & Jolly, 2014).

Combined Theoretical Lens

As a combined theoretical framework, SLT, HNT, and SDT offer a better understanding of factors contributing to youth violent behaviors and a youth asset development framework that promotes prosocial behaviors. Neace and Munoz (2012) argued that family and school environments have the most influence over a child's social-emotional learning. SLT can be used to explore how youth learn violent behaviors and in turn begin to utilize the behaviors that are most common to them. This theory illustrates how youth are molded through observation and experience to utilize aggressive behaviors to resolving conflict or simply because consequences prompted continued use of poor

behavior (Bandura, 1977). HNT provides an explanation of how students with unmet needs may not perform at their best. The circumstances of their lives may either directly or indirectly impact their capacity levels and ability to appropriately interact with other students and those in authority (Maslow, 1943). Burton further provided explanation of how lacking basic human needs may be at the root of conflict; it can be difficult to treat these issues from a conflict resolution perspective, as basic human needs are non-negotiable (Burton, 1990).

SDT provides an understanding of how a child's personality and intrinsic motivation may flourish or fail based on their social-contextual environments. The combination of human motivation and personality plays a large role in the behavior displayed in school and the community (Deci & Ryan, 2000a). Children in environments that foster positivity and growth will be motivated to produce acceptable behaviors. Deci and Ryan (2000a) found that students who are intrinsically motivated to learn are inspired, eager to learn, open to employ talents, and show responsibility. Consequently, children reared in negative and unproductive environments will lack the motivation to produce prosocial behaviors. Students who are not intrinsically motivated may present as rejected, be more apathetic, have less growth, and be less responsible for their actions (Deci & Ryan, 2000a).

Gap in the Research

There is extensive research on positive violence reduction school-based programs focusing on varying topics such as PYD, SEL, PBIS, and CRE imploring quantitative research designs (Durlak et al., 2011; Lane-Garon et al., 2012; Melendez et al., 2016; Montanez et al., 2015). However, there are limited studies utilizing qualitative research

designs which emphasize philosophical assumptions, values, and hopes for social justice (Creswell, 2013). Secondly, school-based conflict resolution research is lacking current data to support its relevance to effective best practice being utilized for today's youth (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007; Lane-Garon, 2000; Riner & Saywell, 2002; S. W. Smith et al., 2002). Lastly, there is limited qualitative research on school-embedded positive intervention programs from the perspectives of program facilitators which is a key population. This study used a qualitative research design to understand the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators working with at-risk students within high need South Florida schools.

Methodology

The selected research design of this study was IPA. The purpose of the study was to examine the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators working with at-risk students in high need South Florida schools. This study sought to explore the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives regarding the transformative nature of their program. With a primary focus on the detailed examination of lived experiences, the researcher had the opportunity to explore "understandings, experiences, and sense-making activities" regarding the CiS transformation of at-risk student conflict management skills.

Summary

SLT, HNT, and SDT are the theories which comprise the theoretical framework of this study. This framework was used to understand how students acquire learned behavioral traits, how unmet needs contribute to problematic behaviors, and how motivation contributes to student misconduct and violence as it relates to the conflict

management skills of at-risk students. Lacking the rehabilitative lens of positive interventions, zero tolerance policies were deemed less effective in eliminating anti-social behaviors and increasing prosocial behaviors in youth. Positive interventions such as PYD, SEL, PBIS, and CRE have been proven to be more effective in equipping students with essential prosocial skills that focus on improved decision making and conflict-solving components. SEPIP, which incorporate PYD, SEL, PBIS, and CRE components, are increasingly being utilized as additional support to schools serving at-risk students.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this IPA study was to examine the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators working with at-risk students in high need South Florida schools. This study sought to explore the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives regarding the transformative nature of their program. By using an IPA approach, the researcher sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning site coordinators find in providing interventions with conflict management components to at-risk students. Specifically, this study examined the understanding and perceptions of CiS site coordinators on the various issues facing at-risk youth and how they may have experienced changes as a result of participating in the program. The selected methodology provided information that may be meaningful to school districts with similar problematic behaviors.

Methodology

This study employed an IPA approach to explore the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators working with at-risk students in high need middle schools. The central research questions of this study were "What are the lived experiences of SEPIP facilitators working with at-risk students enrolled in their programs?" and "What meaning do SEPIP facilitators find in providing interventions with conflict management components to at-risk students?" The subquestion for this study was "From the perspective of the facilitators, how have the conflict management skills of at-risk students changed since being enrolled in the program?" IPA was selected as the most appropriate methodology approach for this study because of the alignment with the epistemological objective of this research (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). By using this approach, the

researcher was able to learn the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators regarding the transformative nature of at-risk student conflict management skills within high need South Florida schools. With a primary focus on the detailed examination of lived experiences, there was an opportunity to explore "understandings, experiences, and sense-making activities" regarding the CiS transformation of at-risk student conflict management skills. For this study, site coordinators were able to provide their experience-based insight on how at-risk students in the program have been transformed by the CiS program. With its interpretative focus, the open nature of IPA allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the idiographic details and how participants understood the phenomenon from the multiple viewpoints, making it appropriate for this research.

Phenomenological studies can be used to explore the meaning of the lived experiences of a group of individuals experiencing a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The framework of phenomenological inquiry began with seminal authors such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Schleiermacher, and Gadamer (J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Each of the seminal authors transformed phenomenology and refined it into different approaches, including hermeneutics, transcendental phenomenology, and existential phenomenology. Hermeneutics known as the theory of interpretation, was introduced to phenomenology as researchers began to understand meaning through interpretation (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The hermeneutic circle is used to understand movement between the part and the whole of relationships. The hermeneutic circle is evident as researchers collect and analyze data to gain an understanding through what is being interpreted by participants.

Creswell (2013) described transcendental phenomenology as receiving a fresh perspective on information received from participants' lived experiences of the studied phenomenon. Researchers must utilize the epoché concept when addressing, describing, and bracketing out their experiences, preconceptions, and prior knowledge to cleanse their own biases before attempting to receive a fresh perspective from participants (Creswell, 2013). J. A. Smith et al. (2009) described this process as moving beyond consciousness and ego to focus on the description of participant experiences. Existential phenomenology has a strong focus on the individual's embodied relationship with the world. This approach considers the experiences, ideals, values, emotions, purposes, relationships, and intentions (Thorpe & Holt, 2008). Through the existential approach, a researcher can gain understanding from the participant; however, the participant experience can never truly be shared or captured (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Transcendental and existential phenomenology approaches were not selected for this study, as this researcher believed the IPA approach would deliver greater results for the research questions of this study. IPA enabled this researcher to learn how CiS site coordinators made sense of their phenomenon through gaining insight from their rich interpretations.

Researchers use interpretative phenomenology to find meaning through interpretative practices (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The purpose of interpretive phenomenology was to combine the experiences of individuals who experienced the same phenomenon into a rich description which contains its essence (Creswell, 2013). J. A. Smith et al. (2009) defined IPA as a qualitative research approach which examines the process of how individuals "make sense" of lived experiences of a phenomenon. With

IPA, researchers can examine the lived experience being studied in detail as it is expressed on its own terms by participants. The detailed examination of each case assists the researcher with providing accounts of participants' similarities, differences, and patterns of meaning individually and collectively (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

Garn and Jolly (2014) utilized the IPA approach to explore learning motivation in high performing students participating in a summer learning camp. The study consisted of a two-step IPA approach where researchers (a) explored participant thoughts, feelings and experiences about learning motivation via interviews and (b) interpreted and made sense of the participants experiences. Two major themes were produced which consisted of fun learning and rewards and pressure of good grades. The interpretation suggested motivation and regulation was increased by learning choices and external pressures decreased their motivation (Garn & Jolly, 2014).

The research design was selected to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of SEPIP in high need South Florida schools. The researcher utilized IPA techniques to seek the essence and make sense of participant responses regarding implementing positive interventions with a conflict management component within high need South Florida schools (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). By using this design, the researcher was able to gain insight into how CiS Site Coordinators interpreted their experiences in transforming conflict management skills of at-risk students within high need South Florida schools. Participant selection included purposive and snowball sampling to recruit current program Site Coordinators operating in high need South Florida schools. Additionally, the researcher supplemented the semi-structured in-depth interviews with a field journal (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The purpose of the field journal

was to capture body language, vocal cues, and other non-verbal indications that could not be translated via text alone, as well as the researcher's immediate thoughts during the interview process.

Sample

Purposive sampling or purposeful sampling is defined as the intentional selection of site(s) and participant(s) which will foster the best information to obtain an understanding of the problem and research question (Creswell, 2014). This sampling process enabled this researcher to select participants with direct involvement with the phenomenon being studied. In turn, the purposive sampling method aided in gathering participants who could provide an understanding of the phenomenon of transforming at-risk students participating in the CiS Bridges to Graduation and Beyond and the Americorps Miami Reads programs. Snowball sampling is defined as individuals referring potential participants and cases as they would fit the criteria of the study (Creswell, 2013).

The setting of this study was a large South Florida school district with almost 400 schools and over 300,000 students (M-DCPS, 2018a). The district offers a vast amount of professional personnel, programs, resources, and partnerships with non-profit community stakeholders to meet the needs of all students, including students considered at-risk. The core values of the district are evident through the vast amount of program and services provided by district personnel. However, this study will focus on the high need South Florida schools serviced by CiS. At the time of the research, the program served twelve high need South Florida schools on various levels, including traditional

elementary schools, kindergarten through eighth grade centers, traditional middle schools and traditional high schools.

The FLDJJ monitors trends in delinquent youth per fiscal year. According to the FLDJJ Delinquency in Florida's Schools report, there were 7,255 (14%) school related arrests and 41,985 (85.3%) community arrests or the 2016-2017 school year (FLDJJ, 2016-2017). In Broward County, there were 344 (10%) school related arrests and 3,167 (92%) community related arrests for the 2016-2017 school year. In the researched county, Miami-Dade County, there were 289 (9%) school related arrests and 3,074 (91.4%) community related arrests for the 2016-2017 school year. The report listed burglary, aggravated assault and battery, and assault and battery as the most frequent offense for within the reported school year for school and community related arrests (FLDJJ, 2017).

The organization selected for this research was Communities in Schools of Miami, Inc. The program facilitators operate as Site Coordinators within their assigned schools under the Bridges to Graduation and Beyond and the AmeriCorps Miami Reads programs. There was a total of seven Site Coordinators currently working within the organization at the time of the study. All participants met the study criteria of currently being employed as a CiS Site Coordinator. After obtaining approval from Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB; Appendix A), as well as the host organization, the researcher emailed the approved documents which consisted of approval letter (Appendix B), consent form (Appendix C), and a flyer to the CiS President and CEO (Appendix D). The president subsequently emailed these documents to their program Site Coordinators. The president provided this researcher with a CiS

staff roster for the sake of data collection and reaching out to CiS Site Coordinators for recruitment.

The recruitment process consisted of formal and informal modes of communication. This researcher initially introduced herself to each CiS Site Coordinator via email (Appendix E) and later via telephone. During this pre-screening process, this researcher introduced the research and provided a comprehensive review, including a description of the study, along with giving the ability for participants to ask follow-up questions. Each participant was advised of the consent process and the necessity for recording. This researcher stressed confidentiality throughout the recruitment process.

Upon expressed interest, the researcher sent the consent form via email to each participant to review, sign, and return. The researcher addressed participant questions and concerns regarding the interview process, which included addressing questions regarding interview topics that may cause discomfort, confidentiality from employer, providing pseudonyms to maintain anonymity, and the length of time not to be exceeded in the interviews. The researcher then scheduled interviews after consent forms were signed and returned.

This study explored the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators working in high need schools within the South Florida district. CiS was selected for this study due to its visibility in the South Florida school district in servicing schools. At the time of the study, the program implemented two programs, which were the Bridges to Graduation and Beyond and Miami Reads programs. The Bridges to Graduation and Beyond program was implemented during school hours by the assigned site coordinator. The

Miami Reads program was implemented as an after-school enrichment program by assigned site coordinators.

Participants

The participants for this IPA study were CiS site coordinators working in high need schools within M-DCPS. CiS site coordinators function as an additional layer of support for students considered at-risk. They are employed by their non-profit organization and implement their program according to specifications and goals. Site coordinators collaborate with school administrators, counselors, teachers and parents to meet the needs of their students. School administrators serve as the leaders of their schools and maintain the responsibility of the daily operations of appointed school. In this capacity, administrators manage all school employees and students while diligently working to maintain safe and positive schools. Administrators are the individuals in the school who have the authority to allow non-profit organizations to operate within a school. School counselors are the primary support for students, parents, and community partners. Individuals in this position act as a direct link between administrators and non-profit community programs supporting and meeting the needs of students academically, behaviorally and emotionally. School counselors are viewed as the heart of the school and possess a great deal of background information for all students. School counselors are the individuals who make referrals and provide community resources to students and parents, as well as foster working relationships with SEPIP facilitators. School teachers are educational instructors equipped with essential academic skills and experience by subject area. Teachers are the daily instructors who aid in teaching students according to

assigned grade level and subject area. Teachers collaborate and communicate with SEPIP facilitators in meeting the needs of students served.

For participants to have been eligible to participate in the study, they must have been employed with CiS and directly involved with implementing the conflict management component of the Bridges to Graduation program. The only positions considered for participation were CiS site coordinators. Participants also had to be directly involved with CiS participating students include serving as one or more of the assigned facilitators for the high need South Florida school. These inclusionary criteria ensured the participants could provide the greatest level of experience and insight into the transformative nature of the SEPIP on at-risk students served.

Purposeful sampling was utilized to obtain participants who were both currently employed as CiS site coordinators, and working in a high need South Florida school. Snowball sampling was utilized, as the CiS president emailed approved documents to site coordinators advising them of an opportunity to participate in the research study. For the convenience of site coordinators, this researcher offered in-person and telephone interviews. Originally, this researcher proposed a sample size of four to six participants, as suggested by J. A. Smith et al. (2009), due to IPA being an "idiographic approach, concerned with understanding particular phenomena in particular contexts" (p.49). However, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with seven participants operating as site coordinators within the selected organization.

The sample size of this study included seven current CiS site coordinators. There were five site coordinators working under the Bridges to Graduation and Beyond program. There were two site coordinators working under the AmeriCorps Miami Reads

program, which slightly differs from the other program. All participants were female and aged between 22 and 55. Two of the site coordinators had less than two years of experience, one had three years of experience, and four had more than seven years of experience working within this capacity. There were some Site Coordinators who included their years of working in the field, but not necessarily with CiS as a site coordinator. All of the site coordinators were bachelor's degree level service providers, with the exception of one master's degree level service provider.

Data Collection Methods

The study utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews and a field journal as the data collection methods. J. A. Smith et al. (2009) suggested in-depth interviews and diaries as the best methods of collecting data under the IPA approach. IPA requires the collection of rich data which is best collected via participants with the "opportunity to tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length" (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 56).

In-depth interviews, as a qualitative research method, were collected in the format of semi-structured interviews which were audiotaped and transcribed. Creswell (2014) advised qualitative interviews consisted of face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and focus group interviews. This study made all attempts to conduct face-to-face interviews, but had to resort to phone interviews for six of the seven participants. The focus group method was not used in this research. J. A. Smith et al. (2009) stated the purpose and aim of in-depth interviews was to facilitate an interaction with participants that would consist of a combination of open-ended, general, and focused questions, enabling participants to tell their stories in their own words (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p.

57). The goal of this interaction was to have a discussion on the significant topics, enabling research questions to be answered without directly asking the research questions. Following the IPA format, an interview protocol (Appendix F) was developed to assist with guiding the interview efficiently to accumulate the essential information of the experience being studied (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

Semi-structured interviews are an efficient way of accumulating such essential information from CiS site coordinators regarding their lived experiences equipping at-risk students with conflict management skills. The semi-structured interview operates in a manner for participants to be comfortable enough to tell their true and honest experiences, perceptions, and understandings of CiS program's impact on the conflict management skills of the students served. J. A. Smith et al. (2009) stated that interviewing allows participants to better provide the depth and details of their lived experience needed to gain an understanding of the phenomenon, and is the "integral part of the inductive principles of phenomenological research" (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 65). Consequently, semi-structured interviews encompass the capacity to facilitate enough rapport, empathy, and flexibility to produce essential rich data necessary for IPA research. While interviews are good at capturing participants' words verbatim, a field journal is also helpful to collect information that cannot be accurately depicted in participant statements (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

A field journal was utilized in this study as a means of gathering contextual information such as researcher thoughts and interpretations (Creswell, 2014). The researcher took notes after each interview to reflect on the impressions made regarding her interaction with participants (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The field journal assisted with

"contextualization and development" of the data analysis (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 73). Field journals as a data collection method in the IPA approach was appropriate for this study, as it assisted with the detailed account of participant lived experiences as information is fresh on the researcher's mind. This useful resource allowed for rich data collection that may have been overlooked or forgotten to be included in the analysis process (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

The seven interviews conducted lasted between 20 and 60 minutes and were recorded on a password-protected electronic device (the researcher's personal iPad). During the interview, the participant responded to open-ended questions related to their experience implementing positive interventions with a conflict management component within high need South Florida schools. Additionally, follow-up and wrap-up questions were asked according to participant responses, the interview protocol, and nature of the study. Each interview began by the researcher thanking the participant for agreeing to be interviewed and discussing your experiences and perceptions along with reminders about recording, the transcription and analyzing process, what to expect during the interview, and anonymity of themselves, students, school staff and coworkers.

Procedures

Prior to data collection, the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) departments of Nova Southeastern University (NSU) and CiS of Miami, Inc. to coordinate, collect data, and explore the lived experiences of Site Coordinators in transforming conflict management skills of at-risk students in high need schools. The IRB process ensures the protection of human participants (Creswell, 2014). Additionally,

the researcher also completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Group 2: Social Behavioral Educational (Non-HPD) Researchers course.

In order to gain access to the participants, this researcher sought out appropriate gatekeepers in CiS of Miami, Inc. to assist in recruitment. Recruitment of potential participants consisted of formal and informal modes of communicating with CiS gatekeepers to reach an appropriate sample size. Formal communication consisted of face-to-face meetings with site coordinators to discuss the research and gain approval of participation. Informal communication consisted of emailing and telephone conversations to gain approval for the study. A brief proposal document was drafted as documentation of the study to allow gatekeepers and participants to understand what was being studied and how they fit into the study. Creswell (2014) provided a proposal outline to determine how to report results, why the research site was chosen, how the study will impact the site, which of the site activities would be involved, and how best to benefit the gatekeeper in assisting with process. All other pertinent information such as confidentiality, recording and type of interview was discussed during recruitment phase. This qualitative IPA study utilized purposive sampling and snowball sampling when identifying and selecting the site and study participants for this study (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). This researcher achieved an appropriate sample size via recruitment efforts.

Approved consent forms were provided to gatekeepers and potential participants with a considerable length of time to review and return before the interviews were set to begin. The approved consent forms were provided in person or via email for signature and collected before the participant was interviewed. The brief proposal document or proposal abstract was offered to participant so they could understand the study's purpose

(Creswell, 2013). The researcher stressed the confidentiality of each interview to ensure participants understood their rights to privacy. This researcher's obligation as a mandatory reporter was also addressed and emphasized as a disclaimer in the consent form. Interview scheduling then commenced between the researcher and each participant to select an appropriate date, time, and location to conduct the semi-structured interviews. Essential components of an interview setting were addressed and considered during the scheduling process.

Interview expectations were addressed during the recruitment process and reiterated before the interview commenced. Expectations to be addressed included time commitment, interview style, rights, and the main principles of interviewing (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Addressing the interview style and principles helped participants understand that what they were communicating was important and essential to the process. This researcher explained to participants that their experiences, perceptions, and understandings were of extreme interest and an important factor in learning how they made sense of the phenomenon (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Participants were advised that the interview may feel like a one-sided conversation and some questions may seem obvious; however, the information was essential to learning how they understand the target phenomenon (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

During interview scheduling, participants were provided with a list of neutral locations which supported a confidential, anonymous, and comfortable environment to choose from. The nature of the research was discussed during the recruitment stage; however, confidentiality, anonymity, and comfort was reiterated for participants prior to the start of the interview. The length of time and interview style was also discussed to

ensure participants selected the most appropriate location. The researcher also stressed the need for a quiet location that was free from distractions (Creswell, 2013). Because most of the interviews had to be conducted over the telephone, these factors were also addressed to ensure participants had selected the most comfortable location, free of distractions when the call began (Creswell, 2013).

All the interviews for the research were conducted by using the approved interview protocol. The researcher used this protocol to ensure each interview was conducted in the same manner. (Creswell, 2013). The form included 6 to 10 open-ended questions and prompts to elicit the essential answers to the research questions (Appendix G; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The researcher familiarized herself with the interview protocol prior to the beginning of the data collection process.

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher worked to establish rapport with participants by engaging in active listening and non-intrusive probing, refraining from leading the participant, and encouraging the participant to feel like the content expert. The goal of building rapport is to ensure participants are comfortable and trust in the research process. While the purpose of the interview protocol is to ensure consistency, flexibility is also key to allowing the participant to communicate effectively. Additionally, this researcher noted ideas or key points each participant made in order to follow-up with the participant later in the interview. As a considerate researcher, participants were afforded extra time to ask questions or address any concerns at any time through this process. The goal was to ensure participants were comfortable enough to provide the detailed information needed to gain an understanding of the lived experience regarding the phenomenon (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

During the data collection process, participants were advised and reminded of the recording component in the interview process. The importance of recording to the transcription and analysis process was also communicated and reiterated. An appropriate recording device was utilized for collecting the essential data to provide a rich, detailed description of how the participant associated meaning to the phenomenon being studied. The data collected for this study were transcribed from the recording and field journal notes. Transcription, using the IPA approach, is an interpretive activity that creates a "verbatim record of the data collection event" (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 73). Additionally, IPA requires a "semantic record of the interview" which means the transcription will include every word spoken during the interview (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Relevant non-verbal utterances, such as laughter, pauses, and hesitations were also noted (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). According to J. A. Smith et al., (2009) IPA transcription requires seven hours for each hour of recording. After each interview, this researcher transcribed directly from the recording and field journals. The lengthy transcription process allowed for reflection, consultation and development.

Interview Questions

1. Describe your role as a program facilitator (counselor, therapist, coach, mentor?)
2. Describe your overall experience working as a program facilitator.
3. Tell me about the moment you noticed any sign of behavior transformation in a student or students.
    a. How did you feel when this occurred?
    b. How often does this occur?

4. Describe your most memorable moment in transforming student behavior. When did you feel like you made a difference with your students?
5. Describe your most challenging moment in transforming student behavior. Describe how it made you feel? How has this moment impacted your program delivery?
6. Which program component/intervention do you perceive as most impactful to conflict management skills of students served? Why?
7. Which program policies do you perceive to be most challenging for impacting conflict management transformation in students served? Why?
8. Describe your connection/experience with parents.
    a. Tell me about your experience connecting with parents.
    b. How does collaborating with parents impact student transformation?
9. How do you feel about the relationship between program facilitators and school staff affect your program?
    a. Tell me about your experience working in your school
    b. Tell me about your connection with:
        i. School administrators
        ii. Faculty
        iii. Staff
10. What advice would you have for other program facilitators working in this capacity?

Analysis of Data

This study utilized an IPA data analysis approach, as outlined by J. A. Smith et al. (2009). The analytic focus of IPA is the essence of the approach. This focuses the researcher to apply an analytical lens to the participant experiences (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). When using IPA, participant perspectives on the phenomenon will move from "the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative and principles… a commitment to an understanding of the participant's point of view, and a psychological focus on personal meaning-making in particular contexts" (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). The IPA data analysis process consists of (a) reading and re-reading the transcriptions, (b) making initial notes, (c) developing emergent themes, (d) searching for connections across emerging themes, (e) moving to the next case, and (f) looking for patterns across all cases.

For this study, the IPA analysis began with immersion into the transcription of the first interview. As the heading suggests, this component of the framework involved reading and re-reading the selected transcript, listening to the audio recording of the interview while reading the transcript at least once and imagining the participant's voice while reading through the transcript (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). At this stage, the researcher was encouraged to make record of "powerful recollections of the interview experience" and notable "observations about the transcript" in her field journal (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 82). This process enabled the researcher to engage with the participant on a level that illuminates the essence of what the participant is communicating during the interview. Consequently, this process enabled the researcher to gain an understanding from the narrative and construct the interview together as a

whole. This deep analysis allowed for patterns to emerge as they shifted from more "generic explanations" to more "specific" events (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 82). Researchers would realize how the relationship between researcher and participant builds throughout the interview process from the initial rapport building phase (broad and general), to richer details (specific events), and ending with a synthesis of the interview at the end (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

Initial noting was the next level of analysis; this step included examining the language content of the interview. The researcher took notes of interesting content while familiarizing herself with the transcript. In this phase, identification of how participants speak of, understand, and reflect on the phenomenon commenced. It is during this stage where the researcher began notetaking, consisting of explanatory notes or comments on the actual transcript. Per J. A. Smith et al. (2009), there are no rules or requirements in this phase. The intent is to conclude with a "comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data" (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). This process consists of engaging with the transcript. The notetaking should provide comments with a clear descriptive phenomenological focus which represents the participants' precise meaning. The description should emphasize key objectives and their meanings. Interpretative noting assists with delivering an understanding for the how and why of the matter. Per J. A. Smith et al. (2009), initial noting involves reviewing language used by participants, understanding what the participant is concerned about, and identifying concepts which will help as you make sense of emerging themes (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). During the interviews, the researcher took steps to note descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments.

Developing emerging themes consisted of reducing the data to its most important and detailed components. Analysis on this level encompassed incorporating exploratory notes to engage in mapping interrelationships, connections, and patterns of the participants' perspectives (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Notes were transformed into themes (phrases) which illustrated the essence of the participants' words and thoughts, while incorporating the researcher's interpretation. Ultimately, the emergent themes process produced and reflected the essence and understanding of the participants' perspective (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

Exploratory comments from the transcriptions were included on one individual document with descriptive, linguistic and conceptual lenses. Each comment type was assigned a color and tracked throughout the entire document. Descriptive comments were captured using the color turquoise. Linguistic comments were captured using the color purple. Conceptual comments were captured using the color green. Participant responses which fit the category of each comment type were highlighted, dated, and noted accordingly. Through this process, the researcher could immerse further into the rich data, capture essential responses, begin the reduction process, and work towards the development of themes. Notes were transformed into themes (phrases), which illustrated the essence of the participants' words and thoughts while incorporating the researcher's interpretation. Ultimately, the emergent themes process produced and reflected the essence and understanding of the participant perspective (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

At this stage of the process, themes were already established and placed in chronological order. After reviewing the themes, the researcher engaged in charting or mapping system to determine how the themes relate to each other. By organizing the

data into themes, researchers can illustrate the most interesting and important facets of each participant's experience. J. A. Smith et al. (2009) suggested IPA analysis tools for identifying patterns and themes, which may be helpful throughout the analysis process including searching for similarities, differences, contextual and narrative elements, frequency, and function. Throughout this component of the analysis process, it was essential to notate and record tools and strategies utilized to explore the patterns and connections (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, this researcher created an illustration, via chart-map system, of the theme exploration process. The researcher repeated this series of steps with each interview. Once each interview was analyzed, the researcher looked for patterns across interviews to determine how they connected. This creative process included reconfiguring and re-labelling themes.

Ethical Responsibilities and Considerations

Ethical responsibilities and considerations were practiced and observed throughout the study for participant protection (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). As mentioned above, the researcher completed the CITI training course titled "Group 2: Social-Behavioral-Educational (Non-HPD) Researchers." Afterwards, the researcher submitted the data collection protocol to the Nova Southeastern IRB for review and approval of the study before actively engaging in data collection methods. An IRB committee operates as the protective agent for the rights of human participants. The IRB review process requires researchers to assess the potential risks (physical, psychological, social, economic or legal) to participants (Creswell, 2014). This researcher submitted a brief proposal to CiS of Miami, Inc. for approval. The brief proposal document included information regarding purpose of study, length of time needed, potential impact and

research outcomes (Creswell, 2014). This researcher refrained from selecting a SEPIP where there was a vested interest in outcomes.

Validity

The quality of this qualitative research utilized the four principles associated with Yardley Criteria to ensure thoroughness as if having an independent audit conducted. The four Yardley Criteria principles are (a) sensitivity to context, (b) commitment and rigor, (c) transparency and coherence, and (d) impact and importance (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, the researcher engaged in member checking to ensure the accuracy of interview transcriptions. Lastly, the independent audit validity option included being thorough in the chain of evidence process. This researcher filed data thoroughly from the initial documentation throughout the remainder of the process towards final report. Therefore, anyone following the evidence trail would see connections from the raw data to the final written report. This process ensured the produced account is credible, truthful, legitimate, and transparent. The audit did not actually take place; however, the thoroughness of the research process is available if needed.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality and participant comfort were stressed throughout the entire data collection and data analysis process. Creswell (2014) addressed the existence of potential power imbalance between the researcher and participant. In observance of power differentials between researcher and participant, caution and consideration was practiced for the sensitivity, impact, stress, accuracy of interpretation, and consequences of conducting a study with human participants (Creswell, 2014). Participants were given

pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. Additionally, this researcher utilized password-protected documents to ensure confidentiality and minimize participant risk.

Participant privacy was protected and conveyed throughout the data collection process according to ethical standards. This researcher avoided collecting harmful information of participants (Creswell, 2014). This researcher disclosed her mandatory reporting requirement to all participants. Efforts were made to ensure participants were aware that they were actively participating in the research and and that actions were being taken to avoid exploitation of them. Additionally, consideration was given to the CiS of Miami, Inc. organization to provide respect and minimize impact and disruption of setting.

Participants were not pressured into consenting to this study (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, participants were advised of their inherent rights during the recruitment phase and before the interview began. This researcher also advised the participants of their right to end the interview or choose not to answer a question if they felt uncomfortable (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2013) also listed principles of data storing and handling for qualitative research as developing backup files, ensuring the use of quality audio-recording equipment and accessories, developing and managing a master information lists, protecting participant anonymity, and developing a data collection matrix.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the entire recruitment, scheduling, data collection, data analysis process. Initial recruitment and conversations commenced via email and private telephone conversations between researcher and participants. The scheduling calendar, related documents, and the researcher’s field journal were kept

within her home office, inside of a locked file cabinet. All digital data was stored on password-protected electronic devices. Interviews were recorded on a password-protected electronic device and also kept within the home office locked file cabinet. Participants were given pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality and all further analysis and writing only utilized the pseudonyms provided.

A Bracketing Moment

At the time of the research, the researcher was employed as a school social worker (SSW) within the selected South Florida school district. In this position, this researcher provided individual, group and family counseling, conflict management, crisis intervention, and attendance intervention. The SSW collaborated with team members to assess difficulties, strategize appropriate interventions, disseminate essential community resources, mediate between schools and families, and conduct parent interviews to aid in determining eligibility of services for the Exceptional Student Education program.

Because of the close ties to the school district, this researcher utilized reflexivity to position her writing while being conscious of any biases, values and experiences which could have influenced her writing. Included will be information on the researcher's experiences and how they could have shaped interpretation regarding the selected phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Objectivity was utilized throughout the data collection and analysis process by focusing on actively listening and attending closely to participants' words (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Paying close attention to participants' words allowed for bracketing of pre-existing concerns, thoughts, or theoretical framework (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Creswell (2013) defined epoché or bracketing as setting aside the researcher's experiences with the phenomenon to maintain objectivity.

This process calls for the researcher to first address their own experiences and bracketing out the personal and professional views in order to embrace participant perspectives of the phenomenon. In this study, bracketing consisted of the researcher avoiding her personal and professional experience to interfere with the process in order to remain objective while collecting and analyzing data.

Expected Contributions of the Research

The contribution of this work was to help address the gap in understanding the lived experiences of CiS of Miami, Inc. site coordinators in transforming conflict management skills of at-risk students in the fourth largest school district in the U.S. This research should provide an understanding of what site coordinators experience and understand from their roles as change agents for at-risk students. Additionally, this study should provide data for similar school districts and non-profit organizations with students demonstrating problematic behaviors to either replicate, adjust, and expand SEPIP to fit the needs of their at-risk students.

Summary

Chapter one provided an overview of student misconduct and youth violence as a public health issue and how interventions have progressed in reducing its occurrence in schools. History has shown how interventions have transitioned from zero tolerance to positive interventions. Additionally, the central research question and subquestions were listed as guides for this study. Chapter two provided information on how positive interventions implemented in schools has a significant amount of research suggesting positive outcomes in reducing problematic behavior and equipping students with prosocial skills for overall well-being and managing conflicts more effectively. More

specifically, SEPIP such as PYD, SEL, PBIS and CRE have been recognized as effective in reducing problematic behaviors and improving problem solving skills; yet, student misconduct and youth violence still exist in schools and communities.

Chapter three provided detailed instructions of how this researcher planned to utilize the IPA approach to explore the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators in transforming the conflict management skills of at-risk students in high need South Florida schools. Participants, sample size, recruitment measures, and the data collection method were discussed in detail. Additionally, the data analysis process was outlined to explain how this researcher intended to analyze and interpret the themes highlighted from the semi-structured interviews. Seven site coordinators were interviewed to explore their understanding, perceptions, experience implementing programs with a conflict resolution component. This researcher intends for the results of this study to advance the field of conflict resolution in understanding the experience and meaning derived by CiS site coordinators working to transform the conflict management skills of at-risk students.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This researcher followed the IPA process as outlined by J. A. Smith et al. (2009) to complete the data analysis component of this study. Participants utilized pseudonyms for students when describing incidents which required the use of a name. Before the analysis process began, this researcher transcribed the interviews, edited the transcriptions, and emailed the transcriptions to each participant for member checking. While waiting for participants to review the transcripts, the researcher began the analysis process by reading and re-reading my first transcription as a means of immersing into the data. During and immediately after the interviews, the researcher took notes in her field journal to reflect and recollect the actual interview. Afterwards, in accordance with IPA, initial noting commenced which consisted of adding exploratory comments to the transcription. The researcher began analysis by reviewing descriptive comments and moved on to linguistic, and conceptual comments (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The initial noting process was initially written on the actual printed transcript; however, this researcher switched to using the Microsoft Word program to complete this process.

Comments were differentiated by a highlighting and color-coding system to capture the nature and essence of each comment type. Afterwards, the researcher listened to transcriptions and referred to field journal to capture linguistic comments. Lastly, the researcher went through the transcripts a final time to capture conceptual comments. Upon completion of step two, the researcher moved into developing emergent themes through mapping out "interrelationships, connections and patterns" from the exploratory

notes. This process was drafted onto a Microsoft Word document in a list form. The list included chunking parts of the transcript together while searching for similarities, differences, formulating 'super-ordinate' themes, contextual elements, frequency of comments, and placing it all together on a working draft. Step five included moving to the next transcription and repeating the process for each of the transcriptions. This process concluded with searching for patterns across transcriptions by utilizing the working Microsoft draft and several mapping charts of comments to link responses. The researcher then used her comments to delve deeper into the interpretation.

Table 1

Steps of Analysis in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Step Number	Description
1	Reading and re-reading
2	Initial noting
3	Developing emergent themes
4	Searching for connections across emergent themes
5	Moving to the next case
6	Looking for patterns across cases

The findings of this study are reflective of the IPA process with a focus on the lived experiences and meaning found for site coordinators SEPIP with a conflict management component in high need South Florida schools. The results of this study also reflect the IPA approach "double hermeneutic" process, as this researcher provided an interpretation of the experiences of the participants (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). This researcher found there were both commonalities and differences of experiences amongst

participants. However, the findings herein are organized and identified by six themes: (a) commitment to identifying and addressing barriers and meeting needs, (b) hard work, perseverance, and patience, (c) counteracting negative school climate, (d) recognizing impact of risk factors, (e) rewarding experience, and (f) produced positive outcomes. Each superordinate theme presents with two to three subthemes as illustrated below in a diagram (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Diagram of All Six Themes.

Working as a SEPIP facilitator to improve the behavior and conflict management skills of at-risk students in high need schools may be challenging; however, watching the positive changes in the students and schools being serviced offers fulfillment when done from the heart. In summation, although being a SEPIP facilitator requires hard work, it should also be considered as "heart work." No matter how taxing the work, SEPIP

facilitators remain steadfast in utilizing their hearts to continue working with at-risk students to produce positive outcomes.

Analysis of Themes

Theme 1: The Experience of Working as a Site Coordinator Requires a Level of Commitment to Identifying and Addressing Barriers and Meeting Needs to Improve Student School Success

CiS Site Coordinators indicated their primary focus in working with at-risk students was identifying and eliminating stressors and barriers to students' academic, behavioral, and emotional success. Unmet needs and poor expressive communication and conflict resolution skills were identified as significant factors contributing to behavior problems and conflicts. Site coordinators recognized that students who lacked a number of basic needs, including clean clothing, resources to attend school regularly, food at home, and hygiene products. As a result, these students habitually missed school due to lack of resources and mandatory school uniform policies. Other barriers site coordinators identified were students staying home to care for ill family members and lacking reliable transportation to attend school regularly.

In general, site coordinators assumed the task of rolling up their sleeves and solving problems for students and families to prevent student dropout and increase school success. It was very apparent that site coordinators take pride in being a valuable resource to their schools, students and families. While the description of their roles varied, site coordinators stressed their ultimate role was to determine why the student was at risk of failure and then exhaust all resources to prevent them from dropping out of school. Subthemes associated with identifying and addressing barriers include (a)

fostering opportunities to reveal sensitive experiences and (b) engaging in active listening (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Theme 1 Diagram.

Assessing students to identify barriers to school success required site coordinators to explore the student's world to obtain essential knowledge as a means to addressing barriers. Barriers may manifest in many forms and require varying levels of support. Sunshine explained her role as a site coordinator was "to provide support services for students, to remove any reason why they're not in school and learning." When she was able to identify the barriers to school success, Sunshine gained a deeper understanding of what the student is facing and can then help address the issue. She genuinely felt blessed to be able to serve in this capacity to learn what students were being faced with so she

may address the varying issues to increase school success. Similarly, Jasmine explained that her job was "to target high risk children and work on factors that can lead to them dropping out." In essence, she works with at-risk students to "prevent them from dropping out of school" by identifying and addressing barriers to successful school behavior, academic achievement, and good attendance.

When addressing barriers to school success, Camille and other site coordinators used a variety of strategies to ensure they meet the needs of each student under their care. There are certain cases where site coordinators learned that students missed school to fulfill the role of caregiver for family members. Camille described how she worked with parents to identify why the student was not coming to school so she could provide support as needed. In one case, "the mom [was] sick and she need[ed] some type of assistance, we try to take that burden off the student, off their child and, you know, contact the parents and see if there's something that we, as the adults, can do to help her instead of putting that responsibility on the child." In this occasion, the Site Coordinator utilized a multi-step process to uncover the primary reason the student did not come to school in order to meet the need, relieved them of additional stress, and redirected their focus to being successful in school. Camille used this plan so that the site coordinator and the parent collaborated to remove family burdens from the student so they could be successful in school.

Jasmine sought to assess and determine barriers when she "look[s] at filling the gaps of support if they need food, clothing, job assistance for parents… to give them wraparound services to make sure that they get what they need to be successful in school." She recognized that failing to address gaps of support in students as treating the

issue on a surface level and not working to resolve the root of the issue. It is understood that progress in improving behavior and conflict management will not occur without surface level issues being first identified and addressed. Site coordinator commitment to helping in various capacities to alleviate issues that interfere with school success also included building essential life skills, such as how to resolve and manage conflicts more effectively.

Camille could not efficiently implement the conflict management component of her program without first identifying reasons behind truancy, which was the largest issue impacting her school. The following excerpt explains what Camille experienced when in attempting to meet the needs of her students. “Most of my students I come to find out that they don’t come to school because they don’t have clean uniforms or they don’t have uniforms to wear…” For Camille, something as simple as providing basic needs removed the barrier to students accessing their education.

> So, as the site coordinator, I find detergent for them. I give them the detergent to wash their clothes to be able to go to school. I provide uniforms so they can come to school. If they don’t have shampoo or if they don’t have any hygiene items, I get that for them.

Understanding that sometimes working with students does not always require complex strategic plans to address unmet needs, Camille would start her school year by having essential hygiene products and food available in her office to provide to students as needed. Site coordinators work diligently with community stakeholders to obtain resources to be readily available to meet student needs.

Similarly, Michelle stressed that her primary responsibility as a site coordinator was "providing the kids with any needs, any help, anything that they need to have a successful year" as her overall responsibility. Michelle repeated the word "any" twice, which suggests there was no need too small or large that she was not willing to address. Her understanding that students who lack these essential needs may lack the confidence to attend school and function at their optimal level drove her commitment to helping them. She went further to explain how she would exhaust all resources to meet their needs when she expressed, "if it's something I don't have, my job is to assist them in finding that help."

Michelle provided an example of meeting a student's need to assist them with having a better school day, in the following statement "a simple thing as I didn't eat breakfast this morning… so, I may have a granola bar. That granola bar saved the morning." Her tone changed as she described how providing a granola bar to a student helped to resolve a conflict between student and teacher due to hunger. This example explained how she listened to the student, identified the problem, and sought to resolve the matter to "save the day" so to speak.

Another identified barrier that site coordinators highlighted was students lacking effective communication and conflict management skills. Site coordinators must avail themselves and maintain flexibility in their schedules to rapidly respond to conflicts. Jasmine highlighted how students' lack of appropriate communication skills, for example, the inability to properly express themselves, deal with adversity, and control their anger, led to disrespectful behavior and conflicts in school. As a result, she witnessed students "not being able to deal with anger, adversity and know how to express

it in a proper way… they argue or they get mad at you then disrespect the teachers or walk out the classrooms." This description of how students' lack of ability to communicate effectively to express themselves in a proper manner contributed to site coordinators having to work with students to learn what caused the conflict and guide them through processes to learn how to resolve and manage conflict better. Therefore, participants found it imperative to have an inviting demeanor and environment to foster a comfortable atmosphere for students to freely express themselves.

Subtheme 1: Site Coordinators' office atmosphere fosters opportunities for students to reveal sensitive experiences that may not have been previously shared with others. Site coordinators worked to ensure students feel comfortable bringing their issues to them. They prided themselves on fostering a safe and comfortable environment for students to freely express themselves, vent, and be heard by a trusted adult. Each stressed an open-door policy while constructing opportunities for students to reach out for assistance and support as needed. Maintaining an open-door policy with students so they know that site coordinators were there for them and available to listen to them uninterruptedly was a priority for a majority of participants.

Camille discussed how she designed her office to provide a place where students felt they could relax and take a break after conflicts arose in their classes. She highlighted an instance where she used her office to help calm down a student after having an argument with a teacher regarding the restroom. Camille stated "I [told] the student, 'okay, well just take a minute in here, just breathe in.' I have a lavender oil diffuser going on to relax them, I put some soft music on… I even have a heater in there and just give them time to relax and breathe." By providing a space out of the hectic

environment of school life, Camille allowed the student to calm down and address the issues that initially prompted the conflict. Her environment sets the tone for open communication between her and her students to better serve them.

Similarly, Michelle expressed that her open-door policy supports allowing students to come in and feel comfortable when she stated, "my door is always open… pop in, sit down, put they feet up… they feel like they can just relax." This open door and inviting environment can eliminate some of the initial tension that a student may feel when discussing their issues with an adult. Sunshine reiterated the same open-door policy and took it a step further, stating "we're here… come knock on my door, they have my phone number, they can call me even if I'm not on campus." The repetition of "we're here" by Sunshine suggested her strong willingness for students to come and receive support from her. The environments described by participants highlighted settings that produced opportunities for students to openly communicate and discuss matters that they may have never shared with others.

Providing an inviting and nonjudgmental environment promotes opportunities for students to reveal sensitive situations and experiences they may not have shared with anyone before. Throughout the interview, site coordinators expressed ideas such as learning more about students and having an openness that facilitates opportunities to release hurtful situations that could have risen that day or in the past. Their responses emphasized their priority in creating and providing a space for students to openly express what may be troubling them. It was apparent they deemed themselves as trusted adults and availing themselves for breakthrough opportunities produce atmospheres which provided an entryway for site coordinators to identify factors negatively impacting

students. These breakthrough moments, which were described by Michelle, as "when they break down, that's when they start telling you what's going on. And then you figure out why she's acting this way" were pivotal for Site Coordinators in meeting students where they were as they strived to help them. It was noted in my field journal that site coordinators emotional tones strongly expressed their willingness and compassion for being a support for students in these moments.

To further iterate the importance Site Coordinators placed on atmospheres creating opportunities to learn from students, Michelle stressed how students revealed more to her than they would to teachers due to the atmosphere she fostered. Her statement "you learn more… and I think they get more comfortable with me, where they can share those things… they open up more with me… you learn that there's other things going on with the kids, that they're becoming problematic," explains how her setting the environment promoted opportunities for students to open up about sensitive situations to better help her complete job responsibilities of helping students. Site coordinators took pleasure in making sure their office created an atmosphere that effectively produced a better work environment.

Subtheme 2: Working as a Site Coordinator requires engaging in active listening. Possessing the ability to actively listen to students and allow them the opportunity to freely express themselves is a significant part of the role of a site coordinator. Participants determined that conflicts between students, with school employees, or outside the school, could all stem from the feeling that no one was listening to them. It was clear that site coordinators understood the importance of listening to their students and families when identifying barriers and determining how to

properly address them. Active listening is no simple task, especially for adults working with at-risk students. Participants learned that identifying and addressing barriers required a different set of lenses, including active listening and careful interpretation of their statements, when determining how to best serve their students. Site Coordinators all expressed their experience of students feeling more comfortable communicating with them as if they find it easier than speaking with other adults.

To be impactful in learning more from students, it was imperative that students felt free to open up to someone who would actually listen to them. Site coordinators understood how easy it could be to automatically judge students and tell them how they could better handle situations. However, experience has shown allowing students to talk, calm down, and release their frustrations provided an opening for site coordinators to guide them through a process to gain clarity and proceed to better resolve the issue.

Jasmine reflected on how nonjudgmental listening empowered students who typically felt like other staff members do not value their opinions or thoughts. She expressed the importance of listening and empowering students to open up, stating “listening is a big thing. It’s a lot of kids feel that they don’t have any power because they’re children. And they’re screaming that they don’t feel adults respect their point of view or what they have to say.” Therefore, as a site coordinator, Jasmine had to focus when speaking with students. By removing distractions and being intentional in listening to what a student needs, she could get the student to open up and speak more freely so she could better serve them. She feels compelled to be the one person who provides some form of empowerment to students by listening to them.

Additionally, Jasmine highlighted how listening to students and allowing them to freely express themselves creates opportunities for positive behavioral changes leading to student success, and better conflict resolution. In this instance, she described a student who presented with anger issues and constant conflicts. Jasmine commented,

> Instead of when I first started working with her, pointing out all the areas that were wrong or could use some help, I just listened to her. Really to build a rapport with her… and she mentioned that no one lets her talk. Because when she starts talking, of course, she comes with attitude, so people cut her off and she never gets to really express herself. And being so was able to express herself better since she wasn't so angry. So, I gave her a safe space to speak and articulate herself.

In this instance, she recognized that the student needed to be approached differently and would require a more genteel working relationship to make progress. So, she simply provided her with an open forum to release what she needed to release so that work could start afterwards. Jasmine's atmosphere was obviously different for the student and led to a more open start to their relationship, so she could begin utilizing her techniques. Jasmine's statement illustrated how engaging in active listening allowed an opportunity for the student to freely express herself, release anger, and move towards being open to learning essential skills.

Site coordinators are not school employees and serve as an extra layer of support for at-risk students; therefore, students may feel more at ease to discuss things than they would not discuss with school employees. While stressing the importance of Site Coordinators being inside of all schools, Lauren described how students came to her on

her first day at their school to open up and discuss what they were feeling. She realized that this experience was a pivotal moment where she would gain an entryway into the lives and hearts of her students. As a new adult in the school, she was presented with an opportunity to listen and help students who were exposing their vulnerability by immediately opening up to her. According to Lauren, "sometimes kids open up to a stranger... every child have [sic] a voice but they don't know how to use it... even the first day here, a lot of kids didn't know me at all. But they came to me and opened up and told me some things." My field journal notes reflected Lauren's visible pleasure when students were comfortable expressing themselves to her. This experience was not one what she took lightly. She immediately recognized it as her new role in the school of being someone providing students with opportunities to be vulnerable and disclose sensitive situations and circumstances. Lauren added to the theme by stressing the importance of site coordinators being embedded in all schools and serving as an additional support for schools and students.

Theme 2: Site Coordinator's Program Implementation in High Need Schools Requires Hard Work, Perseverance, and Patience

High need schools present with issues that can be challenging as educators and other professionals strive to serve at-risk students and improve school climates. Site coordinators provided experiences that suggested working in high need schools requires hard work, perseverance, and patience in order to be impactful in making positive changes. Site coordinators working in high need schools experience challenges implementing successful programs as they work to complete job requirements, seek buy-in from colleagues and students, and meet deadlines. They are met with difficulties

trying to get through to at-risk students, relying on school employees to complete job requirements, and having to persevere in spite of adversity and challenges. The essence of this theme is site coordinators need to be effective in creating change in students and high need schools, but had to work hard, persevere, and be patient in order to do so. Subthemes associated with the hard work, perseverance, and patience theme include frustration and disappointment, varying levels of school support, and parental collaboration (Figure 3).

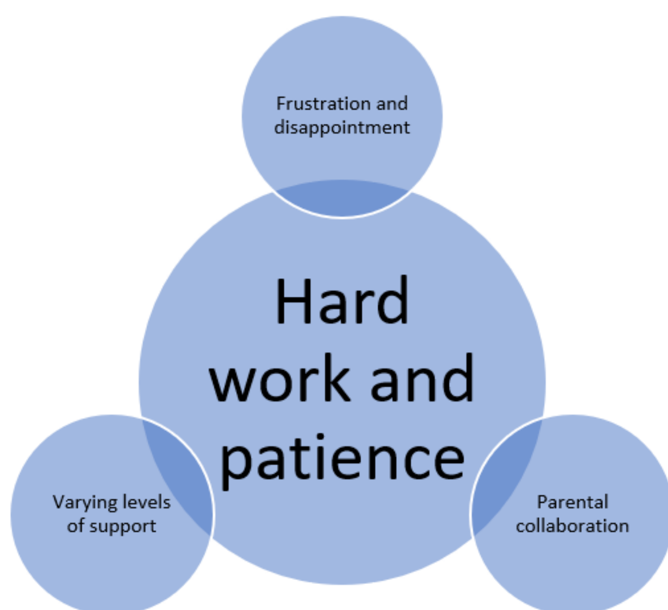

Figure 3. Theme 2 Diagram.

Site coordinators expressed a strong desire to help students and be impactful in servicing their assigned schools. Participants found that in seeking to help students in improving behavior and conflict management skills, there must be some form of willingness from the person in need of assistance. Camille described a challenging component of implementing her program is obtaining buy-in from students so that they were open to working with her. Her statement suggested how she must be patient when

seeking buy-in with students, as she simply yearned to help them make improvements in their lives. In regard to seeking buy-in Camille was observed, “I think the most challenging thing, making a student see that we’re just here to help, we’re not judging, or we’re not forcing them to do anything. Just want to open their eyes to what they’re doing.” Patience resonated from this statement, as she expressed wanting to explain her eagerness to help students so they would be more open or willing to allow her to work with them. During the interview, Camille’s voice reflected an emotional tone of invitation when discussing the positive benefits students may experience if they enrolled in the CiS program.

Raine identified how working with at-risk students was hard work due to them not receiving and applying the information and lessons taught to them. She expressed having to be patient, as it may take more time to get through to students who typically want to ‘march to the beat of their own drum’ and learn from their own experiences rather than from the advice of adults. Raine commented that,

> It’s very hard working with kids that have behavior, who doesn’t want to listen. Kids who don’t listen, that’s very hard. Because regardless what you say to them, they tend not to listen, and they want to be like ‘it’s my way of the highway’...it’s very hard. So, it takes some time. It really takes some time for you to get through to them.

Raine stressed how working in this area required patience when helping the students understand she was there to serve them. With this quote, Raine showed strength, and recognized when you must back away, monitor situations, and hope students realize they need guidance and support. In her experiences, Raine learned she could not be pushy, or

force her strategies on unwilling students. Being patient required waiting for the student to return to her ready and willing for change.

By the same token, it was found that not only was working with at-risk students was hard, but patience was also necessary when experiencing stressful occasions from working with school employees. Although the work is hard and one must be patient, Raine stressed that,

> You can never vent really what's going on. You always have to let it go and go with the flow. So, whatever happens to you as the Site Coordinator you have to let it go. Because you're working here, and you have to have a good relationship with each adult. So, I do a lot of mindfulness. Whereas, whatever they say to me, I let it go. Because tomorrow you will need the staff members. So, collaboration is very important. In order for you to do that, you have to have a good relationship with each person from the custodian to the principal.

Having patience and demonstrating the ability to persevere in spite of the challenging task at hand in working with at-risk students in high need school resonated with Raine. Her approach to life and working in this capacity exuded patience and perseverance. A very powerful depiction of Raine's approach to working as a site coordinator reflected how she perseveres. This statement helped create the pseudonym for her as she stated,

> Become water. You just come and become the school. Focus on you. Focus on your program implementation and do whatever it takes in terms of helping...focus on your goal and the student that you are serving and that's it. You can't focus on

> how you feel. You don't go with how you feel. You go about how you get things done. You have to be a go getter to implement your program.

Although she was one of the shortest interviews, there was such power in her spirit of tenacity. Her tenacious approach helped her to push through and continue working in this field in spite of the challenges.

Subtheme 1: Site Coordinators expressed feeling frustrated and disappointed when faced with challenging moments working with at-risk students. Site Coordinators described experiences where they were frustrated and discouraged when working to enact positive behavioral and conflict management improvements in the lives of at-risk students. The participants expressed feeling frustrated and discouraged at some point working with at-risk students. The nature of the work requires understanding the needs of such students; however, despite their training, participants still felt disappointed at times when their students made little to no progress. Many of the participants detailed when feelings of anger, fear, hurt, and defeat have risen during their experience as site coordinators.

Throughout the interview, it was evident that Sunshine's servant's heart and empathetic nature were deeply affected by student progress. When asked about challenges of working with at-risk youth, Sunshine's statement highlighted how her hope and love for her students contributed to her frustration. The energy and passion she possessed during this interview was so overwhelming to capture; text alone could not truly reflect the intensity of her frustration in wanting the best for her students. As stated below, she explains how she would become frustrated working with at-risk students.

> I guess for me, just hoping, well I set goals for them. Okay, by a certain time this should be happening. And not seeing the change happen on my timeclock...we have two months to get this done. And if it doesn't happen within that time period, I get scared. Like okay Johnny, what's going on? We've been working. I've been diligent with you. I'm taking you to class every day. I'm calling. I'm making home visits. I'm checking on you from every perspective… I'm pushing, I'm pushing and you're not reciprocating. Then it's frustrating. Like come on please, I'm giving you all of me and I need for you to at least try. And so yes, it's it can be frustrating.

As Sunshine disclosed this challenging moment, she became very animated and occasionally paused to collect herself when describing her feelings. Her candidness when expressing her frustration may have been compounded by her own expectations of Johnny's progress and wanting him to succeed so badly.

By the same token, Raine described feeling discouraged when wanting to help a student who was not ready to be helped. Discouragement can weigh heavily on a person when they meet heavy resistance when attempting to initiate behavioral and conflict management changes. Raine's reflection of this experience was captured when she stated,

> It's very discouraging. Whenever you feel that… take a deep breath, give yourself a moment and then you focus on someone else… whenever that happens, you feel discouraged, you feel like 'oh I'm not doing the best that I can.' You feel a little down.

Raine's dull and flat tone belied her sadness when she cannot help students because of their unwillingness. However, she recognized that she needed to allow herself to regroup and keep moving forward with creating change for students who were willing to receive her help. I could feel the weight of sadness and discouragement when she commented she was not doing the best she could. While Raine may struggle with doubt because of discouraging experience, she continued to move forward and learn from those challenges.

In a like manner, Michelle also expressed feeling discouraged when wanting to help students who bluntly stated their disinterest in school or problem-solving programs. She appeared downtrodden about being unable to reach students when she stated,

> I've had a few where they're not on my caseload, eventually they transitioned out of school. But it was like they I couldn't get to them. Like they were really hardcore. Like 'look Miss, like don't even attempt, don't even try, I'm not doing this. I don't want to be here. That's it.' So it's like when you can't get through to them. It's like dang, 'I just want you to listen to me.' And I wouldn't say it doesn't hurt but it's like you've failed that child.

Michelle often paused while reflecting on the experiences, which highlighted how hurtful it was to not have a breakthrough where the students opened up and allowed her to help them. It was apparent that she yearned to help them, despite their strong protests against the attempt. Feelings of discouragement and failure and weigh heavily on a person and she clearly expressed such. In moments such as this, site coordinators felt as if they failed these students, as their entire reason for being assigned to their schools was to work with some of the most critical cases and students to help create positive change. There

was no doubt that Michelle's inability to reach as many students had made her feel discouraged.

Subtheme 2: Site Coordinators experienced a range of support levels from positive to negative by some school employees. Without a strong support network within the school, site coordinators may be hindered when trying to fully implement the goals of their program. The level of support site coordinators experienced from school administration, student services, and teachers varied between being very supportive to not supportive at all. The majority of site coordinator experiences have been great due to receiving an appropriate level of support to efficiently deliver their program. However, there was some frustration experienced by site coordinators due to lack of support from some school employees. Working as an embedded school program facilitator placed a certain vulnerability on site coordinators, who are at the mercy of the school to complete certain tasks such as collect students from classes, prepare data collection reports, and obtain approval for programs, ideas, and events. Although most site coordinators had positive experiences, some of the participants expressed their frustration with their level of support.

Camille experienced varying degrees of support from different channels within the school. She expressed that,

> The principal is very supportive of what we do. Any idea I bring to him he finds a way of making it happen… student services is good, especially the lead counselor. She's very involved with CiS and using me to bring new things to the school.

However, she admitted to feeling insignificant when compared to other school employees, and felt she had to show they were doing something to help the high need school. She was very candid when describing the dismissive attitude of school employees, leaving her to feel she was simply at the school to "put this on our school improvement plan… like we're just there to make the school look good. You know like 'oh, that school has this program in it… they're trying." The frustration was evident when she described how complicated it was to plan large events and rely on school employees for approval. Camille's response suggested how the dismissive attitudes from school employees felt as if her programs and events were lower priority in her school when she stated,

> It seems like our events aren't as important as other events. So, sometimes we get a response late and it's a week before the event, and it's like well you know what, it's not going to even happen anymore because there's no time to plan. Sometimes there is very little support, but not from administration. Just from other staff.

Lacking the essential school support to implement a comprehensive program and fulfill job requirements may negatively impact her employee evaluation with CiS. Camille's frustration is therefore understandable; she feels hindered in attempting to be effective in meeting job responsibilities and creating positive changes in students and schools, which could potentially affect her own livelihood.

Michelle explained the difficulties in obtaining essential information from school staff. Although she works in a school, she is not a school district employee and does not have access to the database which holds the information she needs to make fulfilling her

job responsibilities easier. She must rely on school staff to provide key information from the school district database to complete her CiS data collection reports. In the following statement, Michelle described the typical struggles she has when attempting to complete her data collection report.

> A lot of things that I need to put in my data as far as Communities in School, I have to go to a school employee. And sometimes they're busy or sometimes, like right now, I need second quarter grades. So, I have to wait until the person is available or until the person is able to give it to me.

Michelle was displeased that her program's efficiency was hindered by school staff, especially when she was restricted from working with students or unable to quickly locate them. Michelle commented,

> Sometimes if I can't find a student and I need the student. And the locator is wrong, the teacher's not answering the door, now I can't see my student and I don't know when the next time I'm going to see my student.

Additionally, Michelle's responses highlighted how productivity and time efficiency were affected by the lack of a strong school network. Michelle struggled to track down and address the needs of students, and has occasionally learned too late that some of her students have withdrawn from school. Michelle detailed her frustration, commenting,

> How was I supposed to know they withdrew if I don't go to the registrar or go to the counselor and be like hey, I haven't seen this student in two weeks and the teacher's telling me they haven't seen them. But nobody knew that the student withdrew.

My field journal reflected the frustration in her voice when she was forced to follow school protocol to work with her students, even when it is not efficient. It was evident that following the school protocol and not having access to the school database contributed to her frustration and served as a barrier to time efficient program implementation. Michelle's statement stressed her displeasure with wasting time and lacking support needed to be successful in completing job responsibilities and helping her students.

Under those circumstances, I understand why Raine provided a politically correct answer when initially asked about her experience working with school staff. Raine retracted her initial response in describing her experience working with school employees. She stopped mid-sentence in explaining something she stated was the negative perspective which suggested restraint in disclosing information that may be viewed negatively. She continued instead by disclosing her personal approach to dealing with workplace conflict, which was "let it go and go with the flow." However, when the question was redirected to request her personal experience, she refrained from addressing specifics regarding her experience working with school staff. Instead, she laughed and responded with "a lot of politics… a lot of politics." Her laugh indicated that she would not share any specific details and would prefer to not say anything that may potentially add conflict to her current situation. Her response suggested a history of many unpleasant experiences; however, her approach to handling conflicts and negative experiences included remaining focused and pushing forward despite her personal frustration.

On the other spectrum of the continuum, Sunshine's level of support fell on the more positive side, as she experienced a great deal of support from her school colleagues. "They've come to trust CiS, understanding that we are here, whatever the purpose is, we're here to deliver… we're here. They understand that whatever they need, if we can find the funding for it… whatever they need, they know they can depend on CiS to follow through. And so, we do our very best to work as a team to make it happen. This particular school, no worries. I'm so very happy to be here." Sunshine has been a site coordinator for many years and have built strong connections with the school, parents and community. Her experience reflected a history of tried and true strategies and interactions that have proven her to be a solid fixture in the school. Her energy exuded love, support, care, and contentment with serving in this capacity.

Although it took Jasmine time to build the network she has, she explained the benefits to program development that this work produced. Jasmine stated,

> If you don't have their buy in or support, you really can't deliver much of a program… I know that other people may not be as lucky or as fortunate to have cooperative staff, but I actually do, so I'm pretty happy about that.

Jasmine understood the difficulties other clients had, and noted "if the school is not supportive in what you're doing, because you need their help in everything, whether it's getting a room or location to meet with a child or anything. You need the school." Jasmine was candid about how she had to work diligently for her school to understand her role and positive approach to working with students. Her school is deeply entrenched within the community, as many employees were also community members. Jasmine explained how she had to present her best authentic self, and not as someone who would

come in the school and miraculously fix any issues. She admitted that she was initially viewed as an "outsider" by the school. The buy-in occurred after she went "through the grace period or testing period" and they learned her approach style and observed the progress she made with students. Although the turnaround time for the buy-in was not as quick as she would have liked, she did her best to implement her program as efficiently as she could until she was able to "form teams and alliances."

Subtheme 3: The experiences of site coordinators require a good relationship with parents in transforming students. Collaborating and providing support to students and their families is a key component of transforming students. Site coordinator experiences collaborating with parents varied with some participants having more positive experiences than others. It was made clear that they were unable to provide support and create positive changes for students without obtaining permission and efficiently collaborating with parents to be successful. The majority of site coordinators expressed positive experiences collaborating with parents to create positive changes for their children and families.

Raine explained how her experience with parents has formed into a bond of trust in working with her students and providing support to the family. Her response suggested how parents share positive experiences with her that travel to others who seek her out to help them in a variety of ways. My field journal reflected how Raine appreciated the bond she shared with her parents in the following statement.

> You know the parents and you know the child. And the child know that you know the parents, so you have more power in terms of getting your work done… As the site coordinator, I can guarantee the parents trust you in a way that you are

> there for them. You support them. You are the counselor. You are the secretary. You are the go-to person. I just had one today looking for me to do a marriage application. Do they know me? I don't remember them. But they know that if they come here, there's a site coordinator from Communities in Schools they will get the help that they need. We are here to make sure the parents can get all the help that they need so they can have a better life. We help the parents, and the families and the kids.

Raine described how parents relied on her for support, counseling, assistance, and how she has become the "go-to person" to meet their individual and family needs. She appeared to feel strongly about parents trusting and relying on Site Coordinators to meet their individual and family needs. Raine is deeply entrenched in her school and has served as a site coordinator for several years, which contributed to her positive relationship with parents.

By the same token, Sarah expressed mixed experiences from the parents at her school. Parental support plays an integral component in her program and she explained that the parents in her group were "very supportive of our program. Not all are. But for the years that I've been here, most of them are supportive. They try their best to help if I come to them about their child or about anything. They come to our parent engagement activities." A significant statement suggesting that it meant a great deal to her that parents try their best to help and support their children. Her tone implied that she does not expect them to be perfect; however, she appreciates their willingness to support and help in the way best suited for them.

On the other hand, Camille's experiences with little parental support has forced her to work harder to transform at-risk students because of low parental support. Lacking the parental engagement to support the transformative work she does in school created a frustrating experience. She expressed that,

> The parents of the children on my caseload are very disengaged with school. They do not tell their student that they need to go to school, that school is important...if they can't make it to school today, 'then just stay home.' They rarely go to the school for anything.

Lacking parental support on stressing the importance of school and following through with consenting to participate in positive program for Camille as she diligently works to help students. She seemed to really try and find positive experiences with parents and actually apologized because she could not think of any. Lacking parental support in creating change served as a barrier to positive change, and can be draining as coordinators continually fight to help students and their families without proper support.

For this reason, Jasmine addressed how lacking parental support interfered with the progress being made with students when she stated,

> A lot of times you do make some gains at the school but they go back home to their environment and if you don't have the parents or guardians working with you to really align each other's work in support of the child, then what you see if you get gains in school but then the behaviors return.

Working together to support students and make positive changes has a direct impact on the progress made between site coordinator and student. Jasmine addressed the importance of parents reinforcing the positive work taking place at school and the

negative impact of it not being supported at home. She acknowledged how the negative behaviors may return without parents supporting the work and progress being made by the site coordinator and student, which can be frustrating to the site coordinators.

Theme 3: Site Coordinators Struggled to Counteract Negative School Climate

Site coordinators identified common problematic factors like defiance, disrespect, truancy, aggression, and bullying. Participants indicated these problematic behaviors negatively impacted their school climate and required their support to work with students in improving behavior and conflict management skills. Consequently, site coordinators identified the types of conflicts impacting their schools as parent child conflicts, general family conflicts, teacher student conflicts, peer on peer conflicts, relationship conflicts, and community conflicts. Subthemes associated with counteracting negative school climate included addressing student versus staff conflicts, curtailing counterproductive practices, and understanding the importance and impact of CiS (Figure 4).

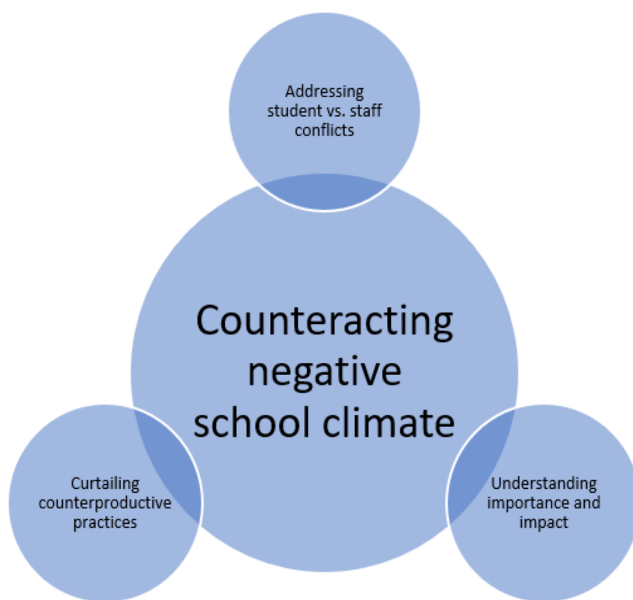

Figure 4. Theme 3 Diagram.

All participants identified bullying as a major issue that they address daily in their schools. Site coordinators must address various forms of conflict as they strive to equip students with the skills needed to make improvements. Therefore, to work with students who have difficulties expressing themselves properly and resolving conflicts, site coordinators must teach effective communication and conflict resolution and management skills to improve school climate. Reflections from the field journal highlighted site coordinators' struggle to counteract the negative school climate and maintain their progress with students after experiencing inconsistent disciplinary practices. Additionally, participants identified how ineffective school disciplinary practices failed to curtail the problem behaviors and conflicts plaguing their schools.

Sunshine experienced "so many different types of conflicts that end up happening in the schoolhouse" which negatively impacted her school climate. The types of conflicts she worked with students to resolve and manage included "conflicts at home with parents… conflicts with relationships… conflicts with peers… family issues." She expressed frustration when describing her experiences with problematic behavior and conflicts such as "fighting" and the toll it took on her and her school. She indicated that working with students to improve their behavior and conflict management skills required programs with objectives that supported peace and treating others as they would want to be treated.

Michelle identified problem behavior as conflicts as "fighting… stubbornness… 'I don't care' attitudes, walking out the classroom when they're not supposed to." These behaviors contribute to a negative school climate where students resorted to acts of violence rather than utilize effective conflict management strategies. She indicated how

ninth and tenth graders were more prone to engage in fighting for seemingly trivial circumstances when she stated, “this set of kids, you say boo, they ready to punch you.” These behaviors contributed to the school climate and served as problematic behaviors and conflicts site coordinators assisted with resolving in their schools.

Similarly, Jasmine identified bullying, fighting, and disrespectful behaviors as problematic behaviors that contributed to her school climate. Jasmine indicated conflicts are a result of students lacking efficient conflict management and communication skills when she stated,

> the lack of the ability to properly deal with conflict...not being able to express themselves or articulate themselves in a certain way gets them a little upset and they react, whether it’s being disrespectful to their peers or their teachers.

Jasmine highlighted how disrespectful behavior presents itself as a direct reaction of students becoming frustrated at lacking skills to properly address their concerns or needs. She also emphasized how fighting occurs as a result of students “not being able to resolve conflict.” In these incidents, students either do not possess the skills needed to effectively resolve and manage the conflict or choose not to adhere to them.

Subtheme 1: Site Coordinators served as mediators for conflicts between students and staff. Site coordinators reportedly experienced incidents where school employees failed to de-escalate conflicts with students because they lacked the time and compassion to truly listen and learn the reason behind a student’s poor behavior or conflict. Participants expressed that the educational climate of today has teachers overworked, leaving less time to address issues in a more empathetic and effective manner. Site coordinators understand the circumstances and limitations of other staff,

such as teachers being overwhelmed with responsibilities and having difficulties managing the stressors typical of working in high need schools. However, lacking the time and compassion to address student issues tended to reinforce behaviors that need to be corrected. However, it is difficult for teachers or other staff to correct behavior without a true understanding of why the behavior occurs.

Camille described an example of how conflicts occurred between teachers and students requiring her assistance in resolving the issue. In her interview, Camille described how she had to step in to ensure a difficult situation between a teacher and a student did not escalate.

> There has been a lot of times where students are very defiant to the teachers, where the teacher's like 'you have to finish your work, or you can't go to the bathroom.' And bathroom is like precious time to the students. So, there's been times where 'no I'm not going to do the work, I'm just going to walk out.' They'll walk out, they'll come to the office and vent 'oh that teacher doesn't like me, doesn't let me go to the bathroom, I really needed to go.' And then you ask the student, 'well did you go to the bathroom?' 'No, I don't even have to go anymore.'

Camille had to identify the underlying issue of the student failing to complete their assignment and using the restroom as a scapegoat. Something as simple as an incomplete assignment led to a student walking out of the classroom and ending up in the office venting their frustrations. Camille in turn had to process the situation with the student to determine better options and resolve the issue.

Jasmine addressed how some conflicts between teachers and students may be resolved in the classroom via asking pertinent questions and failing to make assumptions. Jasmine reflected on an incident where a simple question could have prevented a student from receiving an infraction and being sent to the office,

> I watch [infractions] being written up on kids for the silliest things. One little kid… called another child a 'jit' and they were like in second grade, and so he was a 'jit' right? … The teacher didn't really know what that meant but felt he was using foul language. So, she wrote a [infraction] on him and threw him out the classroom and sent him to the office. And basically, said that she's so tired of his disrespect. But...this is normal 'lingo' for these children and it really wasn't, he didn't call him like a derogatory statement… not to say that it's nice to call someone else a 'jit' but a 'jit' is just, it's not the end of the world, what I'm saying. And I just think that that could've been handled a little differently.

This example reflects a common issue that could be eliminated through cultural competence, compassion and willingness to push through the Site Coordinator's own frustrations to eliminate a conflict. Because of Jasmine's experience working with students, she understood that the term was not derogatory as the teacher assumed. Jasmine expressed disappointment with the lack of compassion the teacher displayed for the student when she stated, "it was discouraging for me that the teacher didn't even seek to find out what this meant or find out what the child meant by that." She indicated how the conflict could have been resolved had the teacher simply inquired a little further to understand what the term meant.

Subtheme 2: **Site coordinators expressed displeasure with counter-productive practices of school employees.** Site coordinators found inefficient disciplinary practices further exacerbated negative behaviors and conflict management skills demonstrated by at-risk students. Addressing problematic behaviors effectively resonated with site coordinators working to support their students as they realize there is a need to find a balance between effective disciplinary practices and support services. Site coordinators expressed displeasure dealing with harsh disciplinary practices in their schools such as zero tolerance policies. However, one participant strongly expressed the need for tougher disciplinary practices in her school.

Jasmine emphasized her displeasure with harsh disciplinary practices such as zero tolerance practices. She stressed her belief that zero tolerance practices were ineffective in combating problematic behaviors in adolescents when she stated "they have this no tolerance for certain things, I just feel that it's not effective in changing behavior and it's like a pipeline. It just keeps coming and it keeps coming and there's no resolution for it." Jasmine went further to include her recommendation of "mandating for teachers to inquire further" to learn background information before handing out a harsh disciplinary option. She expressed her belief that administrators should manage conflict incidents between students and teachers, stating "I would like to say well, 'what did you do before you sent him to the office to resolve this?'" Jasmine indicated that typically situations are managed without special consideration for circumstances and understanding the student's reality when teachers chose to rid themselves of what they perceive as the problem student. She clearly believed teachers should have the responsibility and care to do a

little background work and show compassion before writing up infractions and kicking students out of their classrooms.

An opposing view comes from Sarah as she believed her school could benefit from stronger and more consistent disciplinary practices. Sarah explained how she felt limited in disciplinary options when dealing with students demonstrating problematic behaviors. She felt the shift from zero tolerance practices left her ill-equipped to manage the daily problematic behaviors and conflicts of at-risk students in high need schools. She expressed lacking appropriate options for managing poor behaviors when she stated,

> Basically, from what I understand, we can't do anything. So, if we had a behavior problem, before we could put them in time-out, or we could do some exercise or something like that with them. We're not allowed to do any of those things. So sometimes, it makes the tutors frustrated because there's no consequence for the behavior problems.

Sarah mentioned how the lack of effective discipline practices negatively impacted the tutors who work with the students to complete homework and make academic progress. As a leader she did not feel able to fully support her staff and eliminate stressful experiences without effective disciplinary options. She believed program staff could benefit from evidence-based practices to better address the behavioral issues they are faced with in their program. At this point, Sarah felt her only option was to advise parents of student behavior so they may discipline their children. Sarah stated "just talking to the parents. Because that's mostly the only option you have. Because we can't do time out. We can't have them write lines. We can't have them do different

things." Additionally, Sarah advised she did not simply want harsh discipline practices, but instead requested better options of managing problems and conflicts. Sarah stated she wished for "something positive that I can tell the tutors to do with them besides looking at the positive and the negative. Something else that can help with the behavior problems." Her voice indicated her feelings of disempowerment when working to support her students and team members.

Subtheme 3: Some site coordinators expressed feeling insignificant and stressed the importance of schools and communities understanding their impact in schools and the lives of the students they serve. Site Coordinators worked diligently to meet the needs of and support at-risk students in their schools. However, some site coordinators have experienced situations that made them feel as their role and program events are less significant than others in their respective schools. As a result, site coordinators stressed the importance of schools and communities learning and understanding how significant their roles are and the impact they have on the lives of their students. They expressed the need to feel appreciated and valued as an essential support to the schools they serve.

While describing a moment where she felt undervalued, Camille emphasized the importance of schools and communities learning the impact of site coordinators. She stressed how site coordinators fill a gap in school support services. She found strength in the belief that her role was uniquely different from positions held by school employees. Camille appeared to advocate for the reverence site coordinators deserve when diligently working in high need schools when she stated,

> I don't feel that we're given the importance that maybe we deserve … I think that it's important for the schools and for the community to know that we are important… and it's very important for a person like us to be in a school. Because even though there's a School Social Worker, even though there's School Counselors, they don't do what we do… There's nobody else in the school that does what we do…. So, I think it's important for the community and for schools to start recognizing the importance of our work.

Camille recognized the need to advocate on behalf of the Site Coordinators having similar experiences in their schools. She stressed the importance of her unique role being inside of schools as an additional support for at-risk students. The continued use of the word important indicated how significant it was for her to feel embraced and respected by her school colleagues for the work she does.

Similarly, Michelle appeared to question whether her school colleagues truly understood or recognized the impact and value of her work in their building. She expressed feeling unappreciated and unsure whether they understood the impact of her work when she stated, "sometimes I feel like the school doesn't appreciate or maybe the school doesn't know how much I do. I know my students know. But I don't think the school knows or appreciate that." Michelle appeared confident her students understand the value of her work; however, it was unclear whether her colleagues truly understood the impact of her work. She seemed to believe they would appreciate her more if they understood the significance of her work and how hard she works to support students.

Lauren had high expectations of the role site coordinators should maintain in schools. She believed site coordinators should maintain a strong presence inside of

schools; in her school, Lauren strived to be a valuable resource, and tried to show the students she was “here to provide support for you. Whatever you need, I’m here.” Lauren stressed that site coordinator impact on the school should be felt even if they no longer worked at the school, stating “if you were to get pulled out that school, not to say that it should affect the school, but it should affect the school.” Lauren believed it should be common practice for schools to rely on site coordinators to assist with troubleshooting issues and emerging in their assigned schools. She emphasized schools utilizing site coordinators as tools to meet school needs and assist with their most vulnerable students. Lauren believed site coordinators should leave a lasting impression on the overall school climate, even if they are no longer servicing the school.

Individual response that supports this research. Raine unknowingly supported this research of learning the experiences of program facilitators by stating “I thank you for interviewing me in terms of making me think more about what I do. Because… they don’t ask us how we feel, what’s going on.” She found meaning in taking a break to reflect on her work, the impact of her experiences and gratitude felt for someone considering interviewing her. She went further, identifying how critical it was for site coordinators to have a strong support network both above and below them when she stated, “it’s important that the people in the field get enough support from the higher up because as we keep giving, we also need help.” Raine indicated how important it was for individuals working in this capacity to be understood, considered, and supported. As she reflected on her role and impact on delivering a program with a conflict management component, it was apparent there were moments where she was also in need of assistance.

Theme 4: Site Coordinators Make Meaning of Their Experience of Implementing Positive Interventions with Conflict Management Components by Understanding Risk Factors Negatively Impacting At-risk Students and Being Intentional in Supporting Them in Spite of Challenges

Site coordinators recognized that students considered at-risk may come from homes and communities where it is common practice to witness and experience antisocial behaviors. As a result, participants understood that students were more likely to demonstrate learned antisocial behaviors and poor conflict management skills in school which requires their assistance. Participants in the study described experiencing frustrating interactions of parents behaving or responding poorly to stressors or life situations. Camille, Michelle, and Jasmine's responses produced the theme consistent with children imitating behaviors and attitudes that are more frequently experienced at home and in their communities.

Ultimately, site coordinators found that understanding parental behavior could provide an explanation for poor behavior and conflict management skills in students. They seemed to make sense of understanding these risk factors and using it as inspiration when supporting their students. Their recognition of these risk factors appeared to serve as a catalyst for filling gaps and putting feelings aside to continue helping students in need. Subthemes associated with recognizing impact of risk factors include understanding traumatic experiences in students, emotional support for students, and guidance, support, and love (Figure 5).

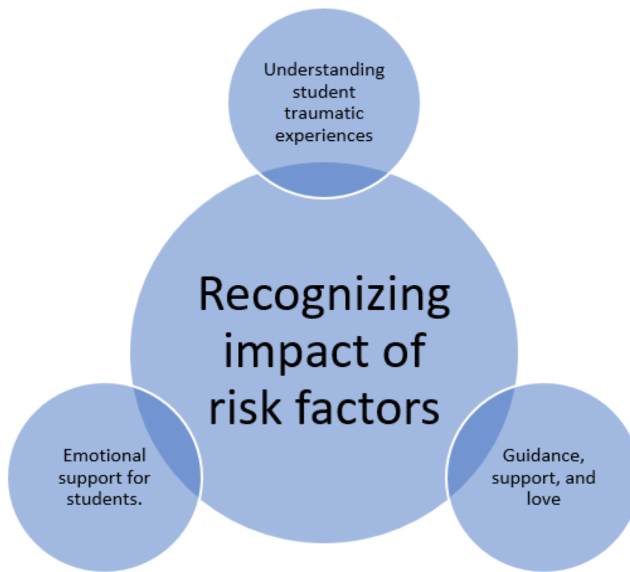

Figure 5. Theme 4 Diagram.

While explaining a frustrating moment where a student's poor attitude and performance, Camille described how she had to reflect and collect her thoughts. She went on to explain that the student was "a product of… whatever she went through," which helped her to have more compassion and patience while working with the student. The self-talk she engaged in enabled her to place her feelings of frustration and disappointment aside to further support and guide the student. By pushing past her frustration, Camille was able to better support the student, thereby allowing the student to realize where she went wrong, correct the issue, and continue working. The response reflected the benefit in having site coordinators recognize student behavior can be directly influenced by exposure and experiences from home and their community when planning their course of action to work with the student.

When identifying how some home and community environments serve as risk factors, site coordinators seemed to use this awareness as motivation to put their feelings

aside and continue working with their students. Participants found it imperative to understand these risk factors as they worked hard to improve behaviors and attitudes of at-risk students. Site coordinators described interactions with parents that not only served to explain the student's behavior, but also encouraged them to fight harder to serve the student. Michelle described an example of contacting a parent to assess and offer support for the student and family due to a teacher's concerns. She explained the parent's negative response, commenting, "the mom was just like (making sucking noise with teeth) he's already not there, he's already suspended, and I want to take him out anyway." This dismissive response helped Michelle realize the student's behavior was a direct reflection of the parent's behavior. She elaborated, commenting, "what can you say to the child if the mom is talking and acting that way?" Based on this comment, Michelle understood the difficulty site coordinators faced when counteracting learned behaviors and the impacts of home environments on students.

Most of the participants had experiences which led them to them saying "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree" when seeking an explanation for student behavior. Unfortunately, some parents unknowingly reflect the poor behaviors site coordinators are working to improve in their students. Jasmine found some parents lacked the ability to demonstrate the appropriate behaviors Site Coordinators are expecting them to reinforce at home, and stated "sometimes the parents are worse than the children." Site coordinators expect parents to reinforce a behavior they are not familiar with or do not have the capacity to manifest without assistance themselves. Therefore, site coordinators have to recognize when some parents may require more support than what is needed for the student. Circumstances such as these

may negatively impact the student's transformation. Jasmine reinforced this issue when she stated, "their parents weren't at that level to see them doing better because they weren't doing better themselves." Site coordinators expressed the importance of recognizing how these risk factors serve as a barrier to improving student behavior and conflict management skills of at-risk students and using it as fuel to support the students the best way they can.

Subtheme 1: Site coordinators recognized the impact traumatic experiences have on student school success. Site coordinators recognized the impact of traumatic experiences, whether directly or indirectly, on the students with whom they work. Their responses reflected their understanding that students exposed to or affected by traumatic experiences may present with limited ability to regulate their emotions and manage conflicts adequately. Site coordinators adapted their programs to be empathetic to the realities of student experiences and how it manifests in their behavior and resolves or manages conflicts. Their responses stressed how they first identified and acknowledged the possible occurrence of traumatic experiences as it provided explanations for behavioral choices. Site coordinators genuinely believed recognizing student trauma led to healing and better choices for everyone involved. They recognized that failing to acknowledge and provide essential support for students and families with these experiences will not produce positive outcomes in working with at-risk youth. Site coordinators emphasized how it required awareness, hard work, and sensitivity to be effective in working with students who have experienced some form of trauma, whether directly or indirectly.

Site coordinators must be aware of traumatic experiences in order to assess how to best work with their students. By identifying the traumatic experiences others may try to avoid site coordinators can better understand how said trauma triggers and influences student behavior and choices. Jasmine highlighted how she used awareness of trauma to help students understand where it stemmed from so they could begin to heal and make positive changes when she stated,

> But once they start really realizing that they're human beings that had situations and they're responding a way towards it, and that they can change that. They have the choice to change how their responding. Most of the time they do. Most of the time they're excited to know 'oh, I'm not messed up' or 'I'm not this bad kid that everyone makes me out to be, I'm just a little depressed and this is how it manifests.

By using this skill set, site coordinators were able to better explain to students how behaviors manifest and how their experiences influence their choices. Jasmine explained how helping students to understand this created a shift in their behavior.

Accordingly, Jasmine identified how "violence, domestic violence… childhood sexual abuse" could contribute to student behavior and decision making. Jasmine explained how she must also identify vicarious trauma in her students to not downplay their experiences and its impact on them. Jasmine addressed trauma when working with at-risk students by enabling students to push through their pain to achieve positive outcomes. She recognized the importance of students learning how traumatic experiences could be used to empower them to make a conscious decision to improve their behavior and conflict management skills. Her approach seeks buy in from students

so they will want to change and put forth the effort to make the positive changes. This is no easy feat to accomplish and required more than just awareness. Jasmine was aware that at-risk students required more support and understanding due to their circumstances, as she stated, "I'm there to be that one person… to listen and to guide them a little bit differently." Site Coordinators create a bond with students via providing emotional support to promote positive relationships and changes.

Similarly, Sunshine explained her approach in working to resolve conflicts involved first assessing the situation and "understanding where the parties are coming from" to decipher the response of each party. She stressed how assessing conflicts helped her to learn of any traumatic experiences which may have triggered and influenced a student response to conflict from "a place of really deep hurt." Sunshine found it imperative to have this understanding of what caused a person's reaction before mediating with both parties together. In this description, it is evident that Sunshine's role as a veteran site coordinator has allowed her to recognize the role invisible emotional pain and scars play in conflicts and poor behavior. She stressed how pivotal recognizing traumatic experiences is for impactful work with at-risk students.

Subtheme 2: Site Coordinators feel they serve as an emotional support to aid in student progress. Several site coordinators expressed serving as an emotional support for students as they nurture them when in their care. Three site coordinators embraced a nurturing role for the student's served while operating with a level of care they would want extended to their own children. In their role as site coordinators, participants embodied a parental role they felt was needed because of a lack of strong emotional support in the student's family or community setting. Serving in this capacity of

emotional support resonated with site coordinators as they provided examples of students embracing them as a parental figure and incidents where they behaved in a manner one would hope someone would display for their own children.

Sunshine's passion regarding the subject of emotional support suggested this was not a role that is taken lightly. Site coordinators work with students to create goals, monitor progress made, and adjust accordingly. This process consists of assessing and monitoring the student's strengths and weaknesses to work towards making improvements in various areas. Sunshine displayed a tone of desperation when she described a moment where a student failed to make estimated progress and how it could be frustrating when this occurs. However, her display of emotion quickly dissipated as she stressed the importance of maintaining a stance of emotional support for the student when she stated "but you don't give up, because as a mom… I would want the same for my children, for somebody to pour into them the same way… and as far as I'm concerned, these are my children and I love them, Oh God…" Her emotional display of affection and love for the students she serves appeared to overtake her for a moment before she regrouped to continue the interview. Sunshine's interview was briefly interrupted by a student's knock on the door and it was apparent that she was a go-to person for students who require support in managing conflicts.

Similarly, Raine expressed how fulfilling it was to experience being able to "give back to the kids... be there for the kids and their families in the capacity where I'm considered as a role model, a mom to the kids." Raine's statement highlighted her commitment to serving the students and families of her school and community in a positive manner. She expressed feelings of fulfillment in providing emotional support for

her students. Site coordinators found their role placed them in a position to provide emotional support on a different level than what could be provided by school employees. Providing emotional support of this nature, site coordinators must display a level of care that draws students and families to them, as this role seemed to have been placed in her lap, so to speak.

Another example of emotional support provided by site coordinators was provided by Michelle, who clarified that some situations required a common sense and motherly response versus a policy response. She expressed understanding the significance of following rules, in particular, not being allowed to transport students inside of her car. In describing a critical situation, she believed warranted a motherly response instead of following protocol when she stated "in some situations, it's a common sense thing. I wouldn't leave my own child, so why would I do that?" There are occasions where nurturing and protective instincts overpower compliance to policy to better meet the needs of students. She stressed her position on the matter with expressing "I feel like some instances… what would I want someone to do with my child? And I wasn't going to leave them, and nobody is at the school." Her motherly response to a critical situation provided a safe and comforting environment to a student and family with whom she worked with directly. This was the level of guidance, support and love site coordinators provide to their students and hope that is bestowed upon their own child(ren).

Subtheme 3: Site coordinators strive to guide, support, and love the students they serve. Site coordinators ensured that building and maintaining positive and meaningful relationships with students to guide, support and love them was

evident. Working in this capacity yielded more than an emotional bond with students. Participants highlighted how their step-by-step processes and direct guidance is what occurs for their students. Participants provided examples of experiences that illustrated how their work consisted of processing issues with students and guiding them to make better decisions to improve behavior and resolve conflicts. Their responses recollected times where their support and love proved impactful in positive outcomes for students. Site coordinators found comfort in knowing students seek them out for help and providing an essential support for their students.

Camille described an incident involving a teacher-student conflict where the student walked out of class and provided contextual statements to highlight how she guides students through a conflict resolution process without attacking their actions. After allowing the student to vent and describe the conflict, Camille allowed the student to recollect herself and guided her through a process to resolve the issue appropriately, stating, "I tell the student 'do you think that maybe you did something wrong?' And help them reflect on what they did. And then 'are you ready to go back in? Do you think it's better for you to go back in than be here?" This careful line of questioning helps students to resolve their own issues, while improving emotion regulation, decision making, and conflict resolution skills. When the processing phase is complete, Camille would guide the student through the action phase as they must work to resolve the conflict in order to get back in class. As a result, Camille actually walked the student back to class and facilitated an apology between the student and teacher to aid in the student reentering the classroom to continue receiving instruction and complete respective lessons.

Correspondingly, Michelle expressed that site coordinators' level of support must be evident and visible for students when she stated, "always have their back no matter what. I mean, to the side you can have a conversation with whoever you need to have a conversation with. But make sure that they feel like you have their back." Site coordinators serve in a position of support which can only be displayed if the students actually feel supported by them. This level of support does not mean to support wrongdoing and bad choices from students. However, it highlights being a person who makes sure to address the position of the student so that the other party can understand the behavior choice. She recommended maintaining the integrity of the working relationship without compromising the student's reputation. This occurrence includes speaking to the student in private to make sure they are aware of their role in the situation when she stated, "but you let them know when they're wrong." These statements display how site coordinators publicly support the students while privately providing positive guidance and understanding of their wrongdoing to prevent student humiliation.

Sunshine further advised how her direct approach to providing student support included actively walking them to class and empowering them to make decisions which yield positive outcomes. As outlined in the field journal, Sunshine used expressive body language as she referred to different levels of student outcomes and support provided according to the student's needs and personality. Sunshine stated "sometimes it's a quick turn around and then there are times it takes some doing and reminding them and having faith in knowing that they have someone to talk to if need be... And some of it takes pulling teeth." She went further to explain how she assessed each student's situation so

she may serve as a reminder to work towards progress even when they do not feel like it when she stated,

> Some of it takes walking them to class every day because you know certain classes that they always skip, because they don't want to go to that class because of whatever's happening. And remind them, look, you're made of this, you can do it.

Sunshine's example highlighted how her empowering and hands-on approach consists of guidance via walks to class and constant reminders that they are equipped to make good choices and face adversity. Her approach and empathetic nature can serve as support to students struggling with their decision-making. During this answer, Sunshine stressed how she believed in the student and that they deserve better outcomes.

Moreover, Raine highlighted how she was sought out by students in need of love, support, and guidance when she expressed

> Whenever they come to you, they looking [sic] for that covering, that umbrella that you as an adult, as a role model would provide for them. So, most of the kids that come here… are in need of some guidance. Or there's a lack of love or comprehension at home.

Raine emphasized how students learned she possesses and willingly provides love, support and guidance to students. She explained how serving as a role model enabled her to meet student needs of protection, guidance, love, and support. Site coordinators found that providing guidance, love and support to students in need requires an open heart and loving nature.

Theme 5: The Experience of Working as a Site Coordinator has been Rewarding Professionally and Personally

Site coordinators found working to improve the behavior and conflict management skills of at-risk youth to be rewarding professionally and personally. Participants found their work to be fulfilling, enriching, satisfying, and beautiful. By recognizing their role as a change agent, Site Coordinators found satisfaction in helping students move from poor behavior choices towards improved behavior and conflict management skills. Capturing the positive transformations of at-risk students they serve appeared was the most fulfilling to all site coordinators. Participants seemed to have a strong connection with the transformative progress made by their students. The personal connection with the changes and witnessing the growth of the students is the most impactful on their professional and personal lives (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Theme 5 Diagram.

Site coordinators believed their work was rewarding on varying degrees. The meaning they found in helping students make positive transformations in their lives suggested the positive magnitude of working in this capacity. When asked to describe her overall experience working as a site coordinator, Sunshine smiled and stated,

> It's one of the most rewarding things I've ever done in my life. The opportunity to give back and love and care and share and just being a part of our young people. Just watching them change… right in front of you. I can't imagine being anywhere else but here… It's the most beautiful experience… I feel blessed. It's a good feeling to be a part of something so beautiful.

The unfolding of her heart radiated at the very moment Sunshine described the gratifying feeling of being an active party in the transformation of such a vulnerable population. Her openness in describing how she felt her work served as a direct connection with her faith was enlightening. Sunshine found meaning in knowing that working with an open heart was worthwhile as she played in integral part in the positive outcomes of her students.

Similarly, Jasmine directly supported Sunshine's description of the working as a site coordinator when she stated, "my overall experience has been really enriching... it's rewarding to see the growth in children and seeing the seeds that you plant come into fruition." The feeling of helping her students improve their lives reinforced the purpose of working as a site coordinator. She found pleasure in observing the transformation of her students and knowing that it may be a direct reflection of her hard work. Her response provided a visual depiction of how site coordinators feel when working with students and witnessing the positive changes manifest before their eyes. Jasmine's

observation highlighted how working with at-risk students may be frustrating; however, the reward at the end outweighs the challenges.

Additionally, Raine described how she found meaning working as a site coordinator through the emotional reactions of students when they see her. She recognized her role as a change agent for her caseload of students by observing their positive responses to her. Recognizing herself as a positive change agent for students yielded feelings of gratification and provided a direct reflection of how meaningful her work is. Raine enjoyed observing how some of her most violent and shy kids would grow to positively respond to her because of the work she performed to help transform their behavior and conflict management skills. She noted how their reactions to her provided an overwhelming understanding of her impact in their lives when she stated,

> Most of the kids that I worked with regarding their behavior, some are them are very violent and some of them are very shy. After dealing with them and showing them the way, they're very appreciative of my role in their life. When they see me, the embrace they give me makes me feel like 'wow I've been doing a great job.' And that's the most important thing for me. When a child sees me, they call my name in a way that I play a big role in their success, their upbringing.

Raine's description highlighted how making positive connections with the students manifested in their positive growth. She appeared to find meaning in her work through the student's open display of affection towards her. Raine explained that her connection with the students and being able to make positive changes in their lives was most impactful in learning how she has enriched their lives.

To emphasize this point, Sarah also described how working as a site coordinator has positively changed her life professionally and personally. She emphasized how she found meaning and felt enriched by enriching the lives of her students. Working as a site coordinator to positively impact the lives of a vulnerable population in a high needs area created a rewarding feeling she never expected to experience. Her description of her overall experience highlighted how she found the work satisfying and worthwhile when she stated,

> So far, my overall experience has helped me a lot. It helped me grow as an individual. And professionally it's very satisfying being able to see the changes that I'm making in the children's lives… That's the biggest thing I get out of it, knowing that I'm making a difference and being able to be in their lives.

Participant experiences working as site coordinators produced an overwhelming feeling of being fulfilled as a direct reflection of watching their students transform their behavior and conflict management skills for the better. Their feelings of being fulfilled, enriched and satisfied in this line of work indicated how utilizing their heart work in this area contributed to the positive outcomes of their students.

Subtheme 1: Site Coordinators attributed the success of working with at-risk students to their unique, genuine, practical, and realistic approach. Participants indicated the necessity for utilizing a unique, genuine, practical, and realistic approach to be successful working as a site coordinator. They stressed the importance of establishing an approach that was unique to procedure, values, personality, needs of school and students, and used common sense. The uniqueness of their role in meeting student needs differed from other school employees and contributed to their connections with students.

Site coordinators explained how they formed bonds with students based on being realistic and genuine in their discussions with students. Their unique and practical approaches enabled them to relate to students by simply being themselves and allowing students the freedom to be themselves. Additionally, the practicality of their approach empowered students as they acknowledged all gains towards improvement, no matter the size. They all maintained an approach that was genuine to their personality type, school culture, and needs of the school and their students.

Michelle appeared to believe her students related best to her because she presented in her most genuine form. She stressed the importance of being genuine and authentic when interacting with students when she said, "just be you, the kids gravitate to you for you being you." Additionally, her open forum approach allowed students the freedom to be themselves and express themselves openly, within reason, as she stated "let them be them, let them be free." She addressed that her openness allowed for student comfort and the freedom to use light profanity, if necessary, to release frustration within reason. Michelle stated, "they may have to explain something to you, and they may have to say a few curse words." However, she indicated how she will set boundaries as needed as a reminder for students to not overstep. Michelle noted, "it's not a problem putting your foot down at times" and would remind students to "tone it down a little bit" if they began to take liberties with the privilege.

Similarly, Jasmine highlighted the importance of using an approach that is realistic and practical when working with students. Site coordinators work with students to set goals for improving their areas of weakness. Jasmine found that goal setting must be intentional in order to create feelings of accomplishment in students that lead them to

seek more favorable outcomes. As a result, she stressed the importance of being sensible when working with at-risk students "to maintain realistic goals." Setting unattainable goals could negatively impact students, while realistic goals encourage feelings of achievement. She found meaning in appreciating that "small gains can be successes" when working with students who had difficulties behaving and responding appropriately to conflicts. Jasmine's approach indicated how she was intentional in setting achievable goals to further encourage students to strive for positive outcomes.

Subtheme 2: Site coordinators acknowledged student behavior and conflict management improvement. Site coordinators explained their roles in transforming behavior and conflict management skills via addressing identified barriers and working with students in need. They recognized that behavior and conflict management improvement may appear differently for students as they are all unique. However, site coordinators relished in witnessing positive outcomes in their students. All participants explained at least one positive transformation in student behavior or conflict management skills as a direct reflection of their support. The improvements witnessed consisted of working for positive attitude changes, responding more appropriately to conflicts, recognizing errors in their behavior, and gaining a sense of hope for the future. Site coordinators were proud when explaining individual and overall scenarios of student behavior and conflict management improvement.

Camille indicated student transformation in an example of a student experiencing conflict on a job provided through a CiS partnership. The student's poor attitude embarrassed Camille, and almost resulted in the termination of her position. However, Site coordinators are trained to not allow their feelings to distract them from the purpose

of their jobs. As a site coordinator, Camille worked with the student to explain how her behavior contributed to the conflict and warranted consequences. Camille advised how working with the student helped to defuse the situation and allowed her clarity as to how to proceed more appropriately. She appeared to be pleased when the student apologized and stated, "I do need to change, I do see what I did wrong." Through direct work with the student, Camille addressing the unacceptable behavior the student, helped her to gain clarity and facilitated a resolution with the CiS partner via an apology from the student and a promise to improve. Camille appeared to be pleased when the student expressed her appreciation for CiS involvement in her behavior transformation as she stated " I know that if it wasn't because of you making me see the attitude I take on people, that I wouldn't have this opportunity." Camille's direct support for the student contributed to behavior transformation and the ability to enhance her life through gainful employment.

Michelle described how one particular student's behavior improved through her identifying that his poor behavior choices stemmed from being embarrassed of needing corrective lenses (eyeglasses). She observed that the student's transformation created feelings of happiness in the student and teachers when she stated, "when [the student] finally received the glasses [the teachers] were very happy about it… even the child's behavior changed." Michelle appeared to find pleasure in describing a positive outcome of a student she supported. She continued to describe a conversation with the student to highlight how addressing the barrier to success was accomplished via eyeglasses, "all you needed was glasses, why you just couldn't say that?' And all they would do is smile or laugh." The eyeglasses appeared to eliminate the student's barrier to school success and

instilled confidence which produced a positive behavior change. Michelle identified the student's need and produced a positive outcome for the student and teachers.

Similarly, Sunshine described a challenging situation where a student who struggled to pass the required high school assessments began to doubt her ability to graduate as a result. She explained how she worked to encourage and instill hope in the student via tutoring and daily pep talks. Sunshine animatedly described the struggle to fight for the student to remain encouraged and inspired in hopes of a positive outcome. After finally passing the last exam required for graduation, she stated to Sunshine "I have hope." Sunshine found meaning in being able to instill hopes of progress, self-esteem, and the ability to stay encouraged to accomplish goals as she stated, "yes, there is hope in all of this. You just have to believe in yourself that you can do this." The transformation of self-doubt, fear and unworthiness to hope, progress, and feelings of accomplishment appeared to enrich Sunshine's life.

Subtheme 3: Site coordinators found pleasure in celebrating student success and transformation. Celebrating student success further promotes improved behavior and conflict management skills. Site coordinators found pleasure in intentionally celebrating and recognizing the progressive changes in their students. They sought out to acknowledge any positive outcomes directly related to student behavior, decision making and conflict management skills no matter the size. Participants utilized transformations celebrations as a tool to further encourage progress and promote prosocial behaviors more prone to positive outcomes. They acknowledged organic feelings of celebrating successes as a natural component of working with at-risk students.

Jasmine addressed the importance of recognizing all positive changes in the students' lives no matter how big or small. She understood the direct impact acknowledging progress had on success when she stated, "I look at small gains as being successful... I work with the student and let them know, the work that we're doing, the small gains are important." She taught her students not to compare themselves to others and embrace the understanding that "progress looks different depending what you're working on." Jasmine focused more on the practicality of recognizing individualized progress according to the student's needs and circumstances. As a site coordinator working with such vulnerable populations, she practiced a forward-focused approach to working with students, stating "as long as we're moving, the momentum is going forward and as long as we're addressing their needs and the plan then it is a success and we're working towards those goals." Jasmine intentionally practiced making progress, no matter the size, to accomplish set goals.

Sunshine was animated when she explained how celebrations were a common occurrence for her when witnessing the positive transformations of her students. She expressed her enthusiasm in celebrating positive student transformations when she stated,

> You just want to celebrate, seeing where that student came from, or those students came from. And watching them slowly grow and just seeing the transformation in them. You have no choice but to celebrate because it's something beautiful that happen... And who would not celebrate?

Sunshine found pleasure in watching students change positively in hopes of celebrating their successes. As a result, celebrations served as a direct reflection of the hard work of

the student and herself. Celebrations highlighted the authentic connections between site coordinators and their students in working towards positive outcomes.

Similarly, Lauren explained how she celebrated positive outcomes of students who participated in her program. Through working with students in her program, Lauren and her team helped students positively improve their grades, self-esteem, effort and behavior as evident in her statement "the majority of my students who were bringing in Ds and Fs, they actually either went up to Ds, Cs, and even Bs. And they were proud and happy." She helped them to realize that they can set goals and actually make positive changes in their lives. As a result, Lauren explained how she celebrated the student's accomplishment via an "ice cream social" to highlight their progress and further encourage them to continue making positive changes.

Theme 6: Site Coordinators Recognized How They Played a Pivotal Role in Producing Positive Outcomes in their Students

Site coordinators recognized the integral role they played in student improvement of behavior and conflict management skills. They attribute the improvement to skill development, love, comfort, and meaningful support they provided to students. Participants worked diligently to equip students with essential skills, tools, and techniques to cope, persevere, and successfully accomplish set goals. Site coordinators expressed how they work to build skills with students who require more individual support. Site coordinators found their involvement in supporting students to improve their behavior and conflict management skills was impactful. Subthemes associated with producing positive student outcomes include maintaining an open heart, implementing peace and social skills programs, and self-care practices (Figure 7).

Camille emphatically expressed how working with the students individually and providing support is the most impactful component of her program. She appeared to place value in students being held accountable for making improvements and accomplishing goals. Site coordinators found their presence in some students' lives may serve as the most intimate guidance they receive.

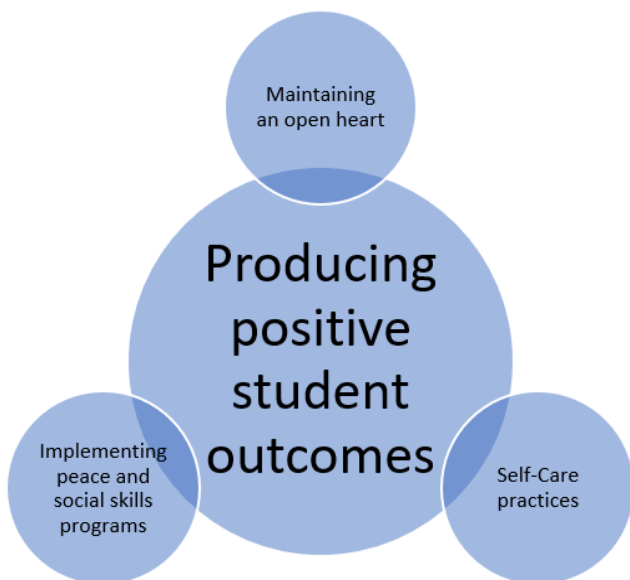

Figure 7. Theme 6 Diagram.

Camille alluded to this when she stated, "I think it's very effective for a student to know that someone's going to see them every other week. And that they have to provide something to that person showing that they're making some type of improvement." She learned that her students may have never experienced creating a standard and setting expectations Therefore, she placed a high value on the meaningful support delivered via the one-on-one mentorship component of her program (which required students to be accountable for any area in need of support such as attendance, grades, behavior, and conflict management skills).

Sunshine described how she utilized an empowerment approach to equip students with the skills and perseverance to overcome challenges. She utilized her approach as a strategy for students to either obtain or restore their "sense of hope and bringing back sunshine in their lives." Sunshine described her strategy of using herself as a vessel to stimulate student's self-esteem and positive belief systems when she stated, "that's the reason why we do this." Additionally, she described how her meaningful support required patience to watch the progress of students slowly evolve from a fragile state to realizing their potential. Sunshine understood the importance of her role in helping students conquer goals over time when she stated "just watching them slowly realize that, you know what, I can get passed this. It's going to take time. And reminding them, look we're here to support you." The approach intertwined throughout her interview and highlighted how she utilized emotional support, empowerment, and resources to garner the buy-in for students to make progress.

Similarly, Jasmine highlighted the importance of her role in students improving their behavior, conflict management and communication skills. She recognized that student transformation took place when she could equip them with skills and provide support. Jasmine stated, "certainly, the transformation comes from me working with them and giving them information and skills to be able to resolve conflicts in a healthier way… being able to express themselves better." Jasmine provided examples of strategies she utilized with students to make such improvements by stating,

> So, I think being a listening board, practicing with them, and even doing role plays, giving them the ability to articulate themselves when there is an issue. I do that with them for their peers, for their families, for faculty in school. So that they

> know how to present themselves better so that they can resolve the conflicts that they are having.

Jasmine supported her students via role playing exercises and active listening to improve behavior and skills of her students. She utilized these exercises to help students make improvements in various areas, relationships; she also taught them how to manage conflict within these relationships.

Similarly, Raine indicated her asset-building approach as a pivotal component in improving student behavior and conflict management skills. She utilized an approach similar to SEL that focuses on "self-discovery, self-care, self-regulation, and self-control." Raine believed that improvements commence after several individual mentoring sessions where she guides them to set goals, focus on their future and move accordingly when she stated, "I make them focus on themselves… once they got that understanding... their behavior changes quickly." Raine's supportive approach fosters circumstances where "the behavior changes completely, once you have them to refocus on themselves, they tend to behave much better." She teaches students to redirect their attention from people-pleasing to self-pleasing. Raine believed student improvements occur when students are invested in themselves and seek positive outcomes.

Subtheme 1: Site coordinators emphasized that maintaining an open heart is essential to supporting and working with at-risk students and families. Site coordinators overwhelmingly indicated working in their positions requires working with an open heart. All participants stressed the importance of utilizing their hearts in some form throughout their interviews, with some directly suggesting the need for working with an open heart to be impactful working in this position. Working as a site

coordinator required maintaining an open heart and listening without judgement to meet the needs of students and families. Site coordinators determined that love, openness, care, and connectedness were requirements for effective transformation of the lives of at-risk students in high need schools. The most amazing part of their responses was how they felt genuine and heartfelt. Jasmine captured the very essence of the site coordinator experience when she referred to their work as "heart work." That one simple term reflected how site coordinators diligently worked to improve the behavior and conflict management skills of at-risk students in high need South Florida schools. They emphasized awareness of how delicate their job was and worked to ensure students were handled with care. Additionally, site coordinators had to find balance in working with an open heart to prevent experiencing burnout and compassion fatigue.

Sunshine emphatically poured her heart out throughout the entire interview, illustrating that she performed her role "with an open heart to love and give and share and have the capacity to listen." She stressed the importance of understanding the magnitude of care that was essential for working as a stakeholder with the power to "injure a child or help a child." Through Sunshine's response, it was evident this work was not to be taken lightly and should be managed with extreme care. She reiterated a previous theme suggesting the importance of listening and willingness to guide students toward solutions to their issues or problems. Sunshine also offered background context to further explain why she works with an open heart when she stated,

> Our children need us because they don't necessarily come from homes where they get that love. A lot of our parents don't know how to say I love you because they've never heard it. So, they don't know how to. You can't give what you've

> never had. And so, from my background, understanding that, I've learned to say, 'I love you, I care about you.' Because that's important and it makes a difference...you have to have an open heart just to love. Our children need that.

The understanding and clarity found from Sunshine's explanation allowed a peek into the lives of the students she serves. She understood the generational trauma experienced by her target population and how it trickled down to the youth. As a means to reverse the impact of not feeling loved, she opened her heart to her students and shared it with them because she identified it as a need. Likewise, Camille emphasized the importance of working with love. She went further by suggesting working as a site coordinator must be ingrained into their hearts, as they must perform their duties "with love" and maintain a strong affinity for transforming the lives of students and families.

Limitations of working with an open heart. An individual reflected on the impact of working with an open heart, and felt some situations could present a heavy load that may be difficult to shake off. Working in this capacity requires site coordinators to guard their hearts to some degree to prevent burnout and overload. Jasmine described a heart-wrenching experience involving a student who revealed she had been molested by her father. It was evident that the situation still weighed heavily on Jasmine's heart as she conveyed the intricate details of the incident and how she held the student while she cried and released her stress, fears, and anxiety through tears on Jasmine's chest. Jasmine's voice reflected the heaviness of the student's situation and how she found meaning in supporting the student when she stated,

> And it was just a reminder of you really don't know what's going on with these children until they are either comfortable enough to say something or at the point

> like she was where she was just sick of it and couldn't take it anymore. And it's sad, it really is sad. So again, you really have to make sense of the senseless. Try to put things in perspective as much as you possibly can, when they really don't make sense. When they are so hurtful. And it's nothing that you can do to even solve that, other than just be there for her.

Jasmine's attempt to process the heaviness of the student's situation was evident in her description. She expressed the feeling of hopelessness in experiencing the student's dilemma from the outside and only serving as a fixture of support. However, she found comfort in knowing she was able to provide some level of comfort and support for the student on that day as they awaited the fallout of the situation.

Subtheme 2: Site coordinators emphasized how implementing programs promoting peace and improving social skills was most impactful in working towards transforming their school climate. Site coordinators detailed comprehensive programs and curriculum tailored to promote and improve peace and appropriate social skills as being most impactful in transforming student behavior and school climate. Two veteran site coordinators identified PeaceBuilders, a program and curriculum previously utilized school-wide to promote peace and improve decision making skills of students as being the most impactful in transforming school culture. Additionally, a Peace Works program currently being utilized was recognized for its positive outcomes in schools. Site coordinators emphasized the positive school climates manifested from the school-wide program initiatives.

Sunshine identified the PeaceBuilders program as most impactful in positively transforming the school climate, behavior, and attitudes of the entire school. She

indicated how the PeaceBuilders program, based on positive affirmations constructed a powerfully happier school environment for students and staff. Specifically, she emphasized how the program focused on instructing students, stating,

> Start with peace...let's choose our words. And that's one of the things that we used to remind our students about how to treat one another. And that makes a difference in behavior. Because if you're thinking positive and you're thinking peace, and it's a constant reminder in your mind to think before you speak. Instead of saying hate, think, use another word. And that made a difference with cultivating a school climate where it's a more positive environment to be in.

Sunshine explained that the program helped her in working with her students to embrace peace, positive decision making and improvements in behavior. She indicated that utilizing the program helped her to create an atmosphere which prompted students to use positive language and encourage better treatment towards others. In essence, implementing the program helped her to change the school's climate through application and practicing how to apply the learned strategies.

Furthermore, Raine also identified the PeaceBuilders program as producing significant positive outcomes in student behavior and school climate. She indicated that the program was utilized to "create and change the climate of the school....and help resolve conflicts with kids." Raine acknowledged how the PeaceBuilders program stimulated a more positive school culture via instilling the six principles associated with the program, which included "praising people, give up put downs, seek wise people, notice hurts, and right your wrong, and of course helping others."

These principles helped Raine to equip students with skills to recognize how their words and actions directly impacted their interactions with others and significantly improve their conflict management skills. On another level, Raine recognized the personal transformation in her life as a direct result of implementing the PeaceBuilders program when she stated, "it also changed me as a person." She appeared to develop more peaceful practices which she continually utilized to maintain her positive outlook when faced with challenging moments professionally and personally. Additionally, Raine advised that she incorporated PeaceBuilder principles into the life skills component of her program to further promote positivity and peaceful practices in her students. Although CiS no longer has funding for the program, she has adopted the principles and practices into her approach due to its impactful nature.

Similarly, Sarah recognized the meaningful qualities invoked on her students as result of implementing Peace Works curriculum in her program. She recognized how the program enhanced the social skills component of her program via training students to be more conscientious about and intentional about caring for others. Sarah suggested how the program embraces 'I Care' rules such as listening, helping, and being more positive when she stated,

> We do different activities with them to teach them listening. And then there is a set of 'I Care' rules. So, it's not rules that say "no you can't do this, no you can't do that.' It takes out the 'no' and it uses words like 'hands are for helping, not hurting.' So instead of saying 'no you're not supposed to be fighting,' we say 'no what is our rule? Hands are for helping, not hurting.' So that curriculum I feel is

> more impactful for our kids because it's not 'no, no, no.' It's saying it in a different way to be more caring.

Sarah emphasized how utilizing Peace Works helped her to veer away from negative connotations, such as constantly utilizing the word 'no' and focus on more productive connotations. Implementing the 'I Care' rules helped her to change the dynamic of her program by transforming student language, thoughts and actions. Sarah found the Peace Works program to be more helpful, positive, and impactful than utilizing negative disciplinary strategies.

Subtheme 3: Practicing self-care played a key role in preventing burnout for site coordinators. Participants found incorporating self-care in the form of self-affirmation, motivational processing, and knowing when to back off as essential components of working as a site coordinator. Most of the participants stressed the importance of self-care practices and explained the type of self-care they utilized to keep centered. Maintaining a self-care regimen was found to be enriching and refreshing to site coordinators when they found themselves in need of it. Each participant recognized how working in this field contributed to feelings of being burned out and drained. However, they stressed the importance of recognizing negative feelings in themselves and utilizing coping skills to remain effective in their program implementation.

Jasmine emphasized the importance of self-care to revitalize herself in order to continue functioning at an optimal level while working as a site coordinator. She explained how important self-care was, because as a site coordinator, "you can get burned out very easily through either compassion fatigue or burnout." Jasmine described how burnout could prevent a site coordinator from having the compassion needed to be

empathetic and understanding to the plight of students and families. Per Jasmine, site coordinators experiencing compassion fatigue or burnout can "really do yourself and your students harm if you're not taking care of yourself mentally, even physically. Because it's all connected." Jasmine identified how failing to engage in self-care practices may contribute to unproductive behaviors and thoughts that could negatively impact the student and the site coordinator. She alluded to the importance of maintaining a healthy mental and physical regime to prevent burnout as key to surviving in the field.

Similarly, Raine indicated that self-care was "most important for people working in the field." Throughout her interview, Raine's "take care and focus on yourself" approach suggested how she not only helped students gain clarity on what was most important, but also applied these practices in her own life. Raine explained how she balanced her approach to self-care with her own survival in this field when she stated, "and so as I'm teaching self-care, I do a lot of self-affirmations for myself." Her use of self-affirmations as tool for encouragement helped her understand her purpose, remember her passion, and gain the strength needed to work towards positive outcomes with her students and families. Raine explained how working in this field could sometimes feel like trying to "move mountains." However, through the use of self-affirmations, she continued to find strength and clarity in her abilities to improve behavior and conflict management skills of her students.

Camille also indicated using self-talk and her connection with her religious beliefs as a means to reduce her frustration to better serve students during challenging moments. She explained how she found strength and compassion for students demonstrating antisocial behaviors through her connection with her religious beliefs.

These beliefs appeared to be significant enough for her to set aside her own negative feelings and continue to serve the student with the care she would for the higher power she serves. As stated, Camille described how she used self-talk during a frustrating interaction with her student by "reminding myself that I have to do this as if I were doing this for God." That simple yet significant understanding and relationship she shares with a higher power provided the comfort and strength to realize that the student require more patience and mercy than she was initially willing to extend. Camille demonstrated how self-talk and the connection to her religious beliefs allowed her to diffuse her stress to better serve the student.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the thematic findings extracted through the IPA data analysis process as outlined in the previous chapter. The participant responses provided direct answers to the research questions of this study and aided in developing themes. The six superordinate themes provided an in depth understanding of the lived experiences of seven CiS site coordinators implementing SEPIP with a conflict management component to at-risk students in high need South Florida schools which included (a) commitment to identifying and addressing barriers and meeting needs, (b) hard work, perseverance, and patience, (c) counteracting negative school climate, (d) recognizing impact of risk factors, (e) rewarding experience, and (f) produced positive outcomes.. The findings, supplemented with participant quotes, provided an entryway in the professional and personal, for some, experiences of the CiS site coordinators. The themes facilitated a process to develop the essence of their lived experiences through analyzing data that reflected their direct responses. Chapter five will discuss the findings

of this research in relation to the research questions, literature, and theories regarding the phenomenon studied. Additionally, implications for future research and contributions to the field of conflict resolution will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative IPA study was to explore the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators implementing SEPIP with a conflict management component in high need South Florida schools. This study focused on the components of the program tailored to improving the problematic behaviors and conflict management skills for students at risk of school failure for a variety of reasons. The researcher utilized an IPA approach to explore the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators working in this capacity, and learn how participants found meaning and made sense of those experiences (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews and a field journal to capture the rich data critical to IPA research. The semi-structured interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher in preparation of obtaining a deeper understanding through the lived experiences of CiS site coordinators working to improve the behaviors and conflict management skills for at-risk students in their assigned schools. Through their responses, participants were able to provide insight into their lived experiences, identify found meaning, and determine how to make sense of their experiences implementing SEPIP with a conflict management component, and highlighting their perspectives of the transformational impact on the conflict management skills of at-risk students. This chapter will provide a summary of the study results, present the limitations of the study, determine the implications of findings and recommendations for future research, as well as offer contributions to the field of conflict resolution, before concluding with a summary of the entire research project.

Summary of Results

The findings of this study appear to support several findings associated with previous research on school-based intervention or school-embedded positive intervention programs for at-risk youth. Additionally, some new findings were contributed during this research. Participant responses were organized by this researcher into six themes regarding participant experiences with implementing SEPIP with a conflict management component within high need South Florida schools. The six superordinate themes abstracted from the data of this study were (a) commitment to identifying and addressing barriers, (b) hard work, perseverance, and patience, (c) counteracting negative school climate, (d) recognizing impact of risk factors, (e) rewarding experience, and (f) producing positive student outcomes. The themes of this study facilitated the process of determining the essence of the participants' lived experiences. At the core of their experiences is working from the heart. They consider their work as "heart work" rather than hard work. Additionally, the findings of this study supported the existing literature associated with student misconduct and youth violence.

Theme 1: Commitment to Identifying and Addressing Barriers and Meeting Needs

The first theme that emerged from the study was participant commitment to identifying and addressing barriers to school success for at-risk students in their schools. Participants indicated identifying barriers to school success and meeting needs as their primary focus in serving their students. Their commitment to identifying barriers and meeting needs produced a remarkable relationship to HNT by both Maslow and Burton. Maslow's human needs theory was fully supported throughout this study, as participants indicated identifying and addressing barriers and meeting needs as their

primary focus in supporting students and families. Previous researchers highlighted how factors associated with low socioeconomic status and unmet needs negatively impacted individuals, families, schools, and communities (Mallett, 2016; Raposa et al., 2016; Valois et al., 2017). Participants recognized the significance in first identifying and addressing their student's hierarchy of needs before any progress would be made towards improving behavior and conflict management skills. Additionally, Morgan et al. (2014), Valois et al. (2017), and Slattery and Meyers (2013) provided an explanation of how unmet needs contribute to poor school performance. In their human needs argument, Price (2013) suggested that learning to understand the nature of conflict via addressing unmet needs was a vital component in resolving and managing conflict. Therefore, participants embraced strategies deemed helpful in improving student school success through their commitment of eliminating barriers and addressing human needs.

Domitrovich et al. (2017) argued for the importance of meeting the needs of at-risk students and improving school climate via SEPIP. Participants utilized a hands-on approach to providing essential needs for students and families. They actively engaged in preparing themselves for meeting student needs via diligently working with community stakeholders, gathering resources, and being prepared to assist as needed. An emphasis was placed on removing any barriers to student school success, which included exploring all options to meeting both student and family needs. According to Maslow, in order for an individual to perform at their optimal level they must have their needs met (Maslow, 1943). Participants understood that school success was more difficult for students who lacked essential needs. As such, they implemented systems and provided resources to

purposefully address the needs of their students, which led as a way for site coordinators to foster opportunities for revelations of sensitive experiences.

Jones and Bouffard (2012) recognized the significant role schools played in youth social and emotional development. Guerra and Bradshaw (2008) advised of school prevention initiatives implemented as a means to ensure safety, provide essential support, and access to essential resources. Serving as additional school support, participants worked diligently to create an atmosphere which fostered opportunities for students to reveal sensitive experiences, freely express themselves and build a meaningful relationship with a trusted adult. They stressed the importance of maintaining an open-door policy within their workspace, allowing students to become comfortable enough to open up about individual, school, and family-related issues students may have to face. It is important to note that participants were serious about creating an inviting atmosphere while utilizing tools and strategies for students to embrace the safe space provided for open, nonjudgmental communication. Participants emphasized how students were their priorities and they worked hard to ensure students understood their role. However, fostering this atmosphere facilitated open communication and an understanding of being heard by a trusted adult.

Active listening served as a significant strategy utilized by participants to support opportunities for students to openly communicate with them. Participants understood a key component of their roles included using active listening via a skillset which enabled them to better serve their students. One participant stated “listening is a big thing. It’s a lot of kids feel that they don’t have any power because they’re children. And they’re screaming that they don’t feel adults respect their point of view or what they have to

say." They utilized active listening as a strategy to interpret what was being said, what wasn't being said, and what was being implied by students. This skill set included seeking to understand what was being verbally and nonverbally communicated by their students to properly meet needs, resolve conflict and improve essential skills. Pereira and Lavoie (2018) suggested students' need for proper school staff support when attempting to navigate social processes in school.

Theme 2: Hard Work, Perseverance, and Patience

The second theme emerging from the study was how SEPIP facilitators needed hard work, perseverance, and patience to succeed in high need schools. Thompson et al. (2014) recognized how high need school employees required additional support to combat poor behavioral and academic success. They suggested the need of intervention in the areas of violence prevention and academic improvement. Working in high need schools as a SEPIP facilitator presented with issues addressing their students' risk factors and low socioeconomic status. Mallett (2016) indicated that poverty negatively impacted the education outcomes of students such as difficulties in the areas of behavior, development, and social interaction. As a result of these difficulties, participants experienced feelings of frustration and discouragement as they worked to manage challenging with at-risk students in high need schools.

Participants explained that challenging moments included seeking buy-in from staff and students, conflicts related to students prone to poor behavior and conflicts and having to persevere in spite of how emotionally drained or frustrated they felt. While discussing frustrating moments, one participant described how difficult it was trying to break through barriers of at-risk students,

> It's very hard working with kids that have bad behavior, who doesn't want to listen. Kids who don't listen, that's very hard. Because regardless what you say to them, they tend not to listen and they want to be like 'it's my way or the highway'... it's very hard. So, it takes some time. It really takes some time for you to get through to them.

Participants expressed how at-risk students present with difficult behaviors that could be stressful for them.

Additionally, participants emphasized how varying degrees of support from school employees impacted their program implementation. Those receiving great support highlighted how it helped them to better serve their students. However, participants with limited or varying school support expressed their frustrations and struggles with working to support their students while facing issues such as not being able to reach their students or lacking the means to submit program data due to missing essential information they were not privy to as non-school board employees. Goodman-Scott et al.'s (2018) study on school counselor use of social stories indicated implementation obstacles, such as a lack of support from staff or time to implement the process efficiently. Participants recognized how collaborative relationships with parents played a significant role in student success. However, some participants struggled to obtain working relationships with parents to serve as an active change agent in their children's lives.

Theme 3: Counteracting Negative School Climate

The third theme emerging from this study was how participants struggled to counteract negative school climates. Students who present with high needs could have decreased academic performance, school engagement, and familial and peer relationships

(Tolan & Larsen, 2014). The factors associated with high need students and schools play a pivotal role in school climate. Bushman et al. (2016) indicated that individuals who exhibit difficulties in the area of self-control have the tendency to be more aggressive and impulsive. These individuals are more prone to engage in violent acts and delinquent behavior. Therefore, poor behaviors and conflict management skills created a negative school climate requiring intervention. Chung and McBride (2015) acknowledged the negative impact on school settings due to struggles and complications associated with at-risk adolescents.

Participants highlighted difficulties they experienced while working to counteract poor school climates of their high need schools. They explained situations where they served as mediators between students and staff due to typical behaviors associated with at-risk students and faculty lacking the patience and skills to diffuse conflict rather than engage in them. Additionally, inconsistent disciplinary practices led participants to inquire about the utilization of positive evidence-based practices to manage poor behaviors in high need schools. Inconsistent disciplinary actions were presented as one participant stated "they have this no tolerance for certain things, I just feel that it's not effective in changing behavior and it's like a pipeline. It just keeps coming and it keep coming and there's no resolution." On the contrary, a different participant addressed the need for stronger or more effective disciplinary practices when she stated,

> Basically, from what I understand, we can't do anything. So, if we had a behavior problem, before we could put them in time out or we could do some exercise or something like that with them. We're not allowed to do any of those things… there's no consequences for the behavior problems.

The inconsistency in disciplinary practices contributed to the negative school climates as it failed to provide consistency for students and participants struggling to create positive school changes.

Theme 4: Recognizing Impact of Risk Factors

The fourth theme that emerged from this study was how participants recognized the negative impact environmental and individual factors had on poor behavior and conflict management skills. Slattery and Meyers (2013) found community violence and low parental monitoring could be attributed to the development of both overt and covert antisocial behaviors in youth. Therefore, learned behavior stems from modeled behavior, attitudes and consequences reinforced at home, in schools, and in communities as outlined by Bandura (1977, 1978). Individual factors such as temperament and peer affiliation were found to be indicative of problematic and antisocial behaviors in youth (Slattery & Meyers, 2013). Accordingly, Beach (2014) advised that problematic behaviors stem from poor self-esteem, lack of will to achieve educational goals, or substance use and abuse.

Participants acknowledged the role environmental factors played in their student's poor behavior and conflict management and how their learned behaviors could impact their decision making and communication. Which was supported by Bushman et al. (2016), who acknowledged how student difficulties with self-control, aggressiveness, and impulsive behaviors could lead to violence, delinquency and other problematic behaviors. Additionally, Vogel and Kelly (2015) found SLT appropriate for explaining youth exposure to violence serving as a coping mechanism for avoiding and expressing uncomfortable experiences. This researcher recognized the connection between existing

research and how participants understood the impact uncomfortable experiences or situations had on their students. Participants stressed the importance of being aware of situations their students could be facing, which led them to be more compassionate when supporting them.

Positive relationships and connectedness presented as a theme within existing literature as being impactful in creating positive change for youth. Maslow (1943) recognized the importance of belongingness and love as an essential need for individuals, whether they involve intimate, familial, or platonic relationships. Participants expressed being intentional in creating meaningful relationships and connections with their students and understood its importance.

Hollingshead et al. (2016) acknowledged how teachers positively impacted student participation and relationships through the use of verbal praise. This positive approach focused on fostering environments to build caring relationships, establish high expectations and create opportunities for meaningful participation. Participants recognized how creating positive environments and connections while recognizing risk factors enabled more meaningful collaboration for this very vulnerable population.

Theme 5: Rewarding Experiences

The fifth theme emerging from this study was how participants embraced the rewarding experience of "heart work." The need for self-fulfillment and self-actualization included the process of feeling of reaching potential and listed as the most important need (Maslow, 1943). Participants expressed feeling fulfilled, enriched, and satisfied professionally and personally because of the ability to help others meet their needs, reach their goals, and achieve positive progress. They expressed how "heart work" has

impacted them personally when learning to embrace implemented strategies and coping skills to be effective in their roles. The participants emphasized feelings of gratification being a change agent working to transform the lives of their students, families, and schools.

Participants recognized their roles in student transformations in the area of behavior and conflict management. Each facilitator and coordinator were able to discern positive transformations in the students they supported and how they helped students to believe in their own abilities to make progress. Self-determination theory was supported in this study, as students were motivated via meaningful relationships, emotional support, met needs and celebrating gains, no matter the size. With SDT, Deci and Ryan (2012) explained how students can become intrinsically motivated by the internal and external social-contextual factors such as support, rewards, threats, evaluation, positive-negative feedback, competition, and choice provided by others. This suggests how participants helped students make improvements via positive relationships impacting their competence and self-determination. In essence, participants helped students become intrinsically motivated to behave and perform positively (Deci & Ryan, 2000b).

Subsequently, participants helped students become more comfortable expressing themselves appropriately as they learned essential communication and conflict resolution and management skills. Caprara et al. (2014) acknowledged how learning effective interpersonal communication skills (i.e. assertiveness, positive emotions, and positive peer interactions) was significant in improving prosocial behavior and reducing aggressive behaviors. Participants discussed how they were enriched by witnessing transformation in behavior, conflict, communication, and hope through their work. They

have worked to support students through conflicts involving family, peers, school staff, and others through learning to communicate appropriately. Participants indicated that their experiences were especially rewarding due to providing positive student outcomes.

Theme 6: Producing Positive Student Outcomes

The sixth theme emerging from this study was participant recognition of the pivotal role they played in producing positive student outcomes. Participants attributed positive student outcomes to working with an open heart, implementing peace and social skills programs, and practicing self-care. Existing literature produced themes of emotion regulation, skill building, and civic engagement when implementing comprehensive conflict resolution programs. Caprara et al. (2014) accredited improvements in prosocial behaviors and violence reduction to essential skill building in the areas of positive and negative emotion regulation, empathy, and perspective-taking. Perspective-taking consisted of recognizing the needs and perspectives of others. Participants attributed successes in these mentioned areas as positive school successes. They described student’s behavioral and conflict management improvements as communicating effectively, properly expressing themselves, recognizing mistakes, better decision making and resolution and management of conflicts.

Civic engagement was supported within this study as participants worked to instill values such as feelings of responsibility to others and communities as a means to reducing conflicts and problematic behaviors. Participant peace building program components stressed the importance of being kind, helping others, and treating others as one would expect to be treated. Additionally, they helped students to set goals and work towards making positive changes in their lives. Caprara et al. (2014) associated civic

engagement such as planning, goal setting and helping of others with positively improving prosocial skills and reducing aggressive behaviors. Participants actively role played with students to help them learn how to show kindness, empathy, and concern for others.

Participants recognized that the most impactful component of their program was implementing peace and social skills building programs. They acknowledged that incorporating peace building strategies and social skills training helped students to learn how to better treat others. S. W. Smith et al. (2002) emphasized the efficacy of comprehensive asset building programs that focused on areas such as conflict resolution, values, culture, school-wide positive discipline, and communication in creating positive changes in school culture (p. 580). Participants recognized that schools were unique, and that programs must be tailored to the needs, circumstances, and limitations of the school and students. Thompson et al. (2014) recognized that program effectiveness was largely impacted by environment constraints, scheduling, school needs, and implementation barriers. These factors played a pivotal role in participant program implementation challenges and frustrations.

Limitations of Study

Although conducting a qualitative IPA study was useful in obtaining rich information from the participants, and was adequate in capturing the essence of their experiences implementing SEPIP with conflict management components, there were limitations within the study. One of the limitations presented in the study was that participant experiences were unique to their job description and responsibilities as SEPIP facilitators. Working within the constraints of their organization may not reflect the

experiences of SEPIP facilitators working for other organizations. Therefore, their experiences may not be generalizable for all SEPIP facilitators. However, the responses provided by participants reflected richly insightful data supported by existing research.

Another limitation of this study was participants may have been selective in their responses to ensure a positive view of their current employment rather than providing an accurate response of their experiences. Their responses may have been communicated in a manner aligned with reducing the likelihood of offending individuals they work with and retaliation from the entities they serve. Additionally, all except two interviews were conducted via the telephone. Telephone interviews, although a viable option for conducting research, hindered the researcher from making visual observations of participant body language, eye contact, or facial expressions. Visual observations of participants provide essential contributions for interpreting what is or is not being conveyed.

Consequently, only gaining the lived experiences of these participants may not be reflective of pertinent experiences from other school stakeholders. Due to this research focusing on participants residing and working in the South Florida area, the experiences may differ from SEPIP facilitators from other geographical areas. Traditional for IPA studies, the sample size was considerably small when compared to other qualitative studies. Additionally, all participants were female; the perspective and experiences of male SEPIP facilitators may differ.

Implications of Findings and Recommendations for Future Research

Implications of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of SEPIP facilitators working to transform the behavior and conflict management skills of at-risk students in high need schools. Based on my research, it appears as though participants experienced a great deal of challenges while working to implement their SEPIP within high need South Florida schools; however, their work is rewarding, fulfilling and enriching enough to outweigh the negative components of their work. While speaking of their commitment to identifying and addressing barriers and meeting needs, participants highlighted their hands-on approach to serving their students, families, and schools. Participants expressed feelings of frustration and disappointment due to the high demands of their position, inconsistent levels of school support, and pressure to effectively implement programs without direct access to needed resources and data. They indicated having to maneuver through difficult situations, push through student resistance and manage overall problematic behaviors that were overwhelming and draining. They experienced challenging moments of students exhibiting poor attitudes, bad behaviors, and failing to make progress in spite of their support, having conflicts, and feeling as if they failed students they were not able to reach. Yet, participants overemphasized how their experiences of witnessing positive transformation of students who were written off by others.

Additionally, this study sought to learn of the meaning found by SEPIP facilitators in providing interventions with conflict management components to at-risk students. Their responses captured the true essence of this study as reflected by one

participant stating, "I call it heart work." Although participants emphasized the frustrating nature of their work, their commitment to serving their students in spite of the challenges reflected the importance of working from the heart. Participants emphasized how their work required having and maintaining an open heart to overcome challenges and be effective in producing positive student outcomes. However, they acknowledged the necessity for setting boundaries and practicing self-care to protect themselves from being burned out. Participants recognized that the helper requires personal maintenance to replenish themselves and prevent being depleted.

Participants found meaning in being intentionally supportive for students whose experiences and circumstances are the contributing factors in their poor behavior and conflict involvement. One participant highlighted how she recognized one of her students were "a product of… whatever she went through" which helped her to be more intentional in supporting the student. The intentional support was again reflected by another participant who stated, "I'm there to be that one person… to listen and to guide them a little bit differently." Participants found it rewarding to play an integral role in producing positive outcomes in their students.

It is of note that the participant who offered the most resistance during the recruitment phase was the only one who spoke to the specific gap of this research when she stated,

> I thank you for interviewing me in terms of making me think more about what I do. Because sometimes … they don't ask us how we feel, what's going on. So, it's important that the people in the field get enough support from the higher up because as we keep giving, we also need help.

The participant realized that it is rare for the voice of SEPIP facilitators to be heard, or for them to receive needed support while giving so much of themselves while in the trenches of supporting high need schools and students. The interview aided in her recognizing and embracing the need for SEPIP facilitators to provide their experiences to further help their students and advocate for themselves. In that moment I realized she found meaning from participating in this research based on the contribution it would make for all stakeholders.

Lastly, this study sought to learn from the perspective of SEPIP facilitators if the conflict management skills of at-risk students changed after being enrolled in the program. Participants recognized the integral role they played in producing positive changes in student conflict management skills. They provided several examples for students positively transforming their lives as a direct reflection of their hard work. When describing their role in student transformation, one participant emphatically stated "certainly, the transformation comes from me working with them and giving them information and skills to be able to resolve conflicts in a healthier way… being able to express themselves better." Participants unanimously recognized the effectiveness of implementing programs and curriculum focused on peace and social skill building. They emphasized how peace and social skill building programs helped to "create and change the climate of the school… and help resolve conflicts with kids." Participants identified comprehensive programs with conflict resolution components as a key factor in the positive student outcomes. They stressed how the programs promoted peace and facilitated opportunities for students to learn key skills such as treating others with respect, being kind, and choosing to speak more positively.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study hold important implications for SEPIP facilitators and other school stakeholders. In spite of the limitations, the participants of this study presented a wide range of lived experiences regarding implementing SEPIP with conflict management components to at-risk students in high need South Florida schools. The findings provide significant insight to understanding CiS site coordinator experiences in hopes of facilitating opportunities for bridging gaps between all stakeholders. Further research is needed to gain a larger understanding of SEPIP facilitator experiences in this field to improve program implementation efficiency. Additionally, future research should be conducted via in-person interviews to truly capture the body language, facial expressions, and eye contact of participants.

This research indicated the need for more efficient communication between all stakeholders to reduce top down barriers. Implementation of collaborative meetings could serve to reduce or eliminate service barriers, increase effective communication and improve relationships between all stakeholders including school and program administrators, SEPIP facilitators, and school staff. There is also a need to obtain funding for effective conflict resolution components such as the PeaceBuilders program heavily promoted by participants to aid in improving student behavior and conflict management skills. Additionally, work must be done to ensure positive experiences of SEPIP facilitators working with at-risk students in high need schools to promote a school environment fostering positive outcomes for all. Lastly, research of this nature would vastly benefit from learning the experiences of students participating in these programs, SEPIP facilitators in other areas, and SEPIP facilitators from other organizations.

Incorporating a quantitative methodology component as a mixed methods study could also provide a wealth of information in the future.

Contribution to Conflict Resolution Field

The contribution of this study to the field of conflict resolution could aid in understanding the lived experiences of SEPIP facilitators working to positively transform the behavior and conflict management skills of at-risk students in the fourth largest school district in the U.S. This research provided an understanding of participant experiences and how they serve as change agents for at-risk students in high need schools. Participants identified peace building and social skill building programs as the most impactful component of their programs. The rich data obtained in this IPA study provide significant details of SEPIP facilitators experiences to aid current and similar school districts and non-profit organizations with key information to either replicate, adjust, and expand SEPIP to fit the needs of high need schools and their at-risk students. It further implicates the need for collaboration between program administrators, school administrators and service providers to ensure SEPIP facilitators are properly being considered when decisions impacting their work is being made.

The implications of findings for the field of conflict resolution includes further research to obtain the experiences of students enrolled in SEPIP and their families to gain more in-depth data from their perspectives. Children and their families would provide greater insight into the program outcomes for the students from their own voices. Additionally, there is a need for further awareness and scholarly research on SEPIP facilitator experiences to strengthen the voice of service providers to make a larger impact within the field through their experiences. For example, additional research in

this field would be well served through a larger study of the CiS organization, as the organization serves several other states and cities. The field would benefit from having the findings of this study disseminated at conflict resolution and qualitative research conferences to further highlight the experiences of SEPIP facilitators and others in the field. The conflict resolution field may also benefit from practitioners collaborating with programs and school districts to develop and implement economically feasible peace building programs to improve conflict resolution/management skills of at-risk students and ultimately, school climate.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 provided a summary of the results from the IPA data analysis process which emerged into six major themes from the study. It discussed the findings of this IPA study of learning the lived experiences of SEPIP facilitators working to transform the behavior and conflict management skills of at-risk students in high need South Florida schools. The six major themes of the study were commitment to identifying and addressing barriers and meeting needs; the requirement of hard work, perseverance, and patience; struggling to counteract their negative school climates; recognizing impact of risk factors and being intentional in their support; embraced the rewarding experience of "heart work"; and recognizing their role in producing positive student outcomes. The findings of this study produced an entryway into further studies to continue learning SEPIP facilitator experiences to create environment producing more efficient program implementation and higher incidents of positive student outcomes. The implications of this study highlight the need for learning SEPIP facilitator experiences as a means of getting a true understanding of barriers to their program implementation and the meaning

found by working in this capacity. Limitations of the study were thoroughly discussed. Lastly, the implications for future research and contributions to the field of conflict resolution were listed.

Summary

This IPA study set out to learn the lived experiences of SEPIP facilitators implementing programs with conflict management components for at-risk students enrolled in high need South Florida schools. The literature review presented a wealth of information regarding zero tolerance practices, SEPIP, SEPIP utilized within the South Florida school district, and factors considered effective in producing positive student outcomes. Over the course of the research, I found that while participants are providing an enormous service to the students in their assigned schools, they are met with varying levels of support and struggle against challenging school environments and students who aren't initially receptive of change. Yet, in spite of challenges, SEPIP facilitators are intentional in fostering meaningful atmospheres, connections and relationships with their students to produce positive outcomes. They found their work to be rewarding, fulfilling, and enriching to witness the positive transformations of the students they work with. With additional surveys of school-embedded programs, further research could more brightly illuminate better instructions, support, and outreach for individuals working in this field. Further research in this area would benefit school climate and improve job satisfaction of facilitators working in this capacity.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Memo

MEMORANDUM

To: Takia Bullock
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

From: Cristina Garcia-Godoy, D.D.S.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Date: February 4, 2019

Subject: IRB Initial Approval Memo

TITLE: Exploring the Transformative Potential of School Embedded Positive Intervention Programs in a South Florida school district– NSU IRB Protocol Number 2019-69

Dear Principal Investigator,

Your submission has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board under Expedited review procedures on February 4, 2019. You may proceed with your study.

Please Note: Stamped copies of all consent, assent, and recruiting materials indicating approval date must be used when recruiting and consenting or assenting participants.

Level of Review: Expedited

Type of Approval: Initial Approval

Expedited Review Category: Expedited Category 7

Level of Risk: Minimal Risk

Continuing Review: Continuing Review is due for this protocol on February 3, 2020. A continuing review (progress report) must be submitted one month prior to the continuing review date.

3301 College Avenue • Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314-7796
(954) 262-5369 • 866-499-0790 • Fax: (954) 262-3977 • Email: *irb@nova.edu* • Web site: *www.nova.edu/irb*

Changes: Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation using the Amendment Form.

Post-Approval Monitoring: The IRB Office conducts post-approval review and monitoring of all studies involving human participants under the purview of the NSU IRB. The Post-Approval Monitor may randomly select any active study for a Not-for-Cause Evaluation.

Final Report: You are required to notify the IRB Office within 30 days of the conclusion of the research that the study has ended using the IRB Closing Report Form.

Your study was approved under the following criteria:

- Consent Participants according to criteria of 45 CFR 46.116 and 45 CFR 46.117

Translated Documents: No

Please retain this document in your IRB correspondence file.

CC: Ransford Edwards
Robin Cooper, Ph.D.

Appendix B: Approval from Research Site

October 25, 2018

To Communities in Schools, Inc.

My name is Takia L. Bullock and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Conflict Resolution Studies at Nova Southeastern University working on my dissertation. I am requesting to interview your Communities in Schools Site Coordinators which will help to complete my studies. This study is required to fulfill my degree and will not be used for any other purposes or decision making by any organization. This study is for research purposes only.

The purpose of the study is to learn the experiences of your site coordinators regarding providing interventions with problem solving components to improve decision making/conflict management skills of at-risk students in South Florida schools.

What I would need from the program is for a letter, which I will prepare, to be sent to your site coordinators who directly service students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools advertising the study. In the letter I will provide information regarding the study and my contact information so employees interested in participating could schedule an hour-long interview. Additionally, I am requesting permission to post a flyer in your facility at the designated locations and bulletin boards to invite individuals to voluntarily participate in my dissertation research. This would, of course, be completely voluntary; no employee would be mandated to participate in the study, if this research request is approved. Administrators would not be asked to follow-up with employees or organize any interviews. This would all be organized by the researcher. The interview process will take place over the course of one month, pending scheduling goes smoothly.

Please respond in writing via email or with a signature on this request to indicate whether permission is granted and inform me of any conditions that may be required. I truly look forward to working with your organization.

Thank you,

Takia L Bullock

Takia L. Bullock, MSW
Doctoral Student
Nova Southeastern University

Please print your name and signature below if you approve this research to be conducted with Communities in Schools of Miami, Inc. by this researcher.

Jeanne Tamargo — Print Name

[signature] — Signature

11/1/18 — Date

Appendix C: Consent Form

NSU IRB APPROVED:
Approved: February 4, 2019
Expired: February 3, 2020
IRB#: 2019-69-Non-NSU

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

General Informed Consent Form
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled
Transformative Potential of School-Embedded Positive Interventions Programs in a South Florida School District

Who is doing this research study?

College:	College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, Conflict Resolution Studies
Principal investigator:	Takia L. Bullock Bachelors of Social Work, BSW Masters of Social Work, MSW
Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair:	Robin Cooper, Ph.D. in Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Site Information:	Communities in School of Miami, Incorporated 12485 SW 137th Avenue, Suite 109. Miami, Florida 33186 Takia L Bullock 18501 NW 23rd Avenue Miami Gardens, FL 33056
Funding:	Unfunded

What is this study about?

This is a research study, designed to test and create new ideas that other people can use. This research study is to learn how Site Coordinators feel about their program helping at-risk students in high need South Florida schools behave and handle conflicts better. This study will tell if program workers feel at-risk students are making changes in their lives because of the program. The good thing about being in this study include helping other schools and organizations improve programs for students with behavior/decision making problems. This study will help people learn if positive

NSU IRB APPROVED:
Approved: February 4, 2019
Expired: February 3, 2020
IRB#: 2019-69-Non-NSU

programs help youth make better choices in their behavior and solving problems/conflicts.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because you are currently a Communities in Schools of Miami, Incorporated (CiS) Site Coordinator working in a high need South Florida school. This study will include about six people. It is expected that six people will be from this location.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

While you are taking part in this research study you will be interviewed one time. The interview will take no more than 90 minutes. If needed, an extra session may be scheduled to complete what's left of the interview questions.

Research Study Procedures – as a participant, this is what you will be doing:

The only requirement for this study is that you be employed as a Communities in Schools of Miami, Inc Site Coordinator. You will receive a telephone call to explain the what the research is about and how it will effect you as a participant. Consent forms will be sent via email for your signature. Once returned we will schedule an interview date and time. The interview will begin on the selected date/time. You will be asked questions about your beliefs on how the Bridges to Graduation and Beyond program, changes poor behaviors and help students resolve conflicts better.

Could I be removed from the study early by the research team?

Participants may be removed from the study if employment with Communities in Schools of Miami, Inc is terminated for any reason.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life. Risks might include emotional discomfort, feeling uncomfortable being audio recorded, loss of confidentiality, and student information protection. You may find some questions we ask you to be upsetting or stressful. If so, I can refer you to someone who may be able to help you with these feelings. To reduce the feeling of discomfort, the researcher will allow any extra time needed for you to gather yourself before continuing with the interview. Being recorded means that confidentiality cannot be promised. The researcher will keep all records locked in a password protected computer and a home office file cabinet and will destroy the recordings and all other records after three years,

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to reduce the possibility of any discomfort to you.

Risks	Probability	Risk Presentation	Magnitude of Risk
Psychological: Emotional Discomfort	Minimal Risk	Participation risk	The risk of emotional discomfort is low. It will only take place for a short period of time.
Psychological: Feeling uncomfortable being audio recorded	Minimal Risk	Participation risk	The risk of feeling uncomfortable with being audio recorded is low. It could last during the entire interview (no more than 90 minutes).
Social: Loss of Confidentiality	Minimal Risk	Participation risk	The risk of losing confidentiality is low. It could last for three years as it is the required time files and recordings must be stored.
Privacy: Student information protection	Minimal Risk	Participation risk	The risk of failing to protect student information is low. It could ls during the entire interview process (no more than 90 minutes).

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You have the right to leave this research study at any time or refuse to be in it. If you decide to leave or you do not want to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get. If choose to stop being in the study before it is over, any information about you that was collected **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?

If significant new information relating to this study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigator. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits from being in this study. We hope the information learned for this study will aid in helping school districts and similar programs with improving their programs.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?

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You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

How will you keep my information private?

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. Interviews will be conducted in a private location with the door closed, to make sure that the records remain confidential. Information such as repeating participant and student names during recordings, or any other mention of identifiable information will be limited. Participants will be assigned a study code before collecting data, including data collection instruments such as questionnaires, interview notes and field journal.

This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will not identify you. All confidential data will be kept securely in the researcher's home office in a password protected computer and locked file cabinet. All data will be kept for 36 months and destroyed after that time by shredding all documents and deleting all digital data files.

Will there be any Audio or Video recording?

This research study involves audio recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution. The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to or viewing the recording.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?

If you have questions now, feel free to ask me. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Primary contact:
Takia L Bullock can be reached at (305) 491-6104

If primary is not available, contact:
Robin Cooper can be reached at (954) 262-3048

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Research Participants Rights
For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369 / Toll free: (866) 499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

All space below was intentionally left blank.

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Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:

- You have read the above information.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

Adult Signature Section

I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent and Authorization	Signature of Person Obtaining Consent & Authorization	Date

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

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You're Invited to Participate in a Research Study

Be part of an important research study on school- embedded positive intervention programs

- *Are you a CiS of Miami, Inc. Site Coordinator working in a high need South Florida school?*
- *Do you implement a positive intervention program for at-risk students?*
- *Are you working to transform problematic behaviors and improve conflict management skills of at-risk students?*

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study on school-embedded positive intervention programs.

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of school-embedded positive intervention program facilitators regarding providing interventions with conflict management components to reduce problematic behaviors and improve conflict management skills of at-risk students in high need South Florida schools.

Participants must be currently employed with CiS of Miami, Inc. as a Site Coordinator assigned to a high need South Florida school. Interviews will be conducted in person or via telephone.

To learn more about this research opportunity, please contact Takia L Bullock at (305) 491-6104, or email tb211@mynsu.nova.edu for more information.

3301 College Avenue • Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314-7796
(954) 262-3000 • 800-672-7978 • Fax: (954) 262-3968 • Email: cahss@nsu.nova.edu • Web site: http:/cahss.nova.edu

Appendix E: Recruitment Introductory Email

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Dear CiS of Miami, Inc. Site Coordinators,

CiS of Miami, Inc. is being provided with an opportunity to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to learn of your experiences and perspectives regarding providing interventions with problem solving components to improve decision making/conflict management skills of at-risk students in high need South Florida schools. The study is particularly interested in the transformative nature of the Bridges to Graduation and Beyond program in reducing problematic behaviors and improving conflict management skills of at-risk students.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be interviewed. Your responses will help understand the transformative potential of positive interventions embedded inside of schools from the perspective of the individuals actually implementing the program.

There is minimal risk involved in participating in the study. There are no direct benefits to agreeing to participate in this study. Please understand that although you may not benefit directly from participating in this study, you have the opportunity to help school districts and similar non-profit organizations with improving their programs. If you have any concerns about risks/benefits of participating in this study, you can contact Takia L. Bullock at (305) 491-6104 and/or the university's human research oversight board (Institutional Review Board or IRB) at (866) 499-0790.

There is no cost for participation in this study. Participation is completely voluntary and no payment will be provided.

Information obtained in this study is strictly confidential, unless disclosure is required by law. All data will be secured in a locked file cabinet and on a password protected computer. Your name will not be used in the reporting of information in publications or conference presentations.

Participating in this study involves consenting to participate in an interview lasting no longer than 90 minutes in person or via telephone. In the unlikely event that the interview should require additional time, a follow up interview will be scheduled to conclude the interview.

To learn more information about this research opportunity, please contact Takia L. Bullock at (305) 491-6104, or email tb211@mynsu.nova.edu.

Thanks.
Respectfully,

Takia L. Bullock, MSW
Principal Investigator
tb211@mynsu.nova.edu
(305) 491-6104

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol Schedule

Hello, I want to thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and discussing your experiences and perspectives of delivering a positive intervention program with conflict management components within in a high need South Florida school. Just to remind you, I am recording this discussion because it will later be transcribed and analyzed by me. A copy of the transcript will be shared with you, for your review, to ensure that I accurately captured your responses.

I am hoping that this feels more like a conversation than an interview. I will ask you a series of questions. Please refrain from using personal names of students, coworkers, school employees or other identifiers. There may be occasions when I ask you follow up questions for further clarification. Please stop me at any time to ask questions, make a comment, take a break, or express any discomfort. Your cooperation in this study is truly appreciated and your comfort is extremely important to me.

Interview Guide

The first question will be about your role as a site coordinator.

1. Describe what you do as a Site Coordinator.
    a. Describe your overall experience working as a Site Coordinator.

The second set of questions will explore types of conflict, problematic behaviors and behavior transformation.

2. What are the problematic behaviors and type of conflicts you have witnessed and/or students have been referred to your program for demonstrating?
    a. Can you list examples of challenging behaviors you've encountered with students?
3. Have you had an experience(s) where you've noticed signs of behavior transformation in your student(s)? If so, can you describe?
4. Have you experienced a memorable moment in transforming student behavior and what did it feel like?
    a. A moment when you notices behavior changing in a positive way and it stood out to you.
5. Have you experienced a challenging moment in transforming student behavior and what did it feel like? How has this moment impacted your program delivery?

The third set of questions aim at understanding how your program implementation help in transforming behavior and conflict management skills of at-risk youth.

6. Is there a specific program component or intervention you believe is most impactful in transforming student behavior? Why?
7. Are there any program policies you perceive as challenging for impacting conflict management transformation in students served? Why?

Lastly, this set of questions discusses connections with school employees and parents in creating behavior transformation.

8. Can you describe your connection/experience regarding collaborating with parents of students in your program?
9. Can you describe your experience working with school staff and does it affect your program delivery?
    a. Administration?
    b. Student Services?
    c. Teachers?
10. What advice would you have for other program facilitators working in this capacity?

Thank you very much for your time and contribution to this study. I am excited about this research and truly appreciate you taking the time to meet with me. It is my hope that this research will positively impact the field of education and positive interventions.

Again, thank you.

Appendix G: Interview Questions

1. Describe what you do as a program facilitator (counselor, therapist, coach, mentor?)
2. Describe your overall experience working as a program facilitator
3. Tell me about the moment you noticed any sign of behavior transformation in a student or students
    a. How did you feel when this occurred?
    b. How often does this occur?
4. Describe your most memorable moment in transforming student behavior. When did you feel like you made a difference with your students?
5. Describe your most challenging moment in transforming student behavior. Describe how it made you feel? How has this moment impacted your program delivery?
6. Which program component/intervention do you perceive as most impactful to conflict management skills of students served? Why?
7. Which program policies do you perceive to be most challenging for impacting conflict management transformation in students served? Why?
8. Describe your connection/experience with parents:
    a. Tell me about your experience connecting with parents.
    b. How does collaborating with parents impact student transformation?
9. How do you feel about the relationship between program facilitators and school staff affect your program?
    a. Tell me about your experience working in your school
    b. Tell me about your connection with
        i. School administration
        ii. Faculty
        iii. Staff
10. What advice would you have for other program facilitators working in this capacity.