Moral Reasoning of Chronically Disruptive Pre-adolescent African-American Males in an Urban Elementary School Setting

Larry Ellison
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Abstract
The purpose of the study was to explore the moral reasoning of a small group of chronically disruptive pre-adolescent African-American male students in an elementary school involved in an intensive, interactive intervention intended to stimulate in moral reasoning. The participants for this study exhibited challenging behaviors in the school setting. The researcher was interested in obtaining the participants’ perception of their lived world related to self, school, and home. The study explored whether there were significant changes in the moral reasoning of the participants after participating in an intervention, and if so, what were those changes? The study also explored what themes were prevalent in the participants’ lives as described in their own words during the intervention. This case study explored an understanding of social phenomena from the individuals’ own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what the students perceive it to be (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The students were engaged in semi-structured interviews for the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the interviewees’ lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena. The interviews come close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview, it has a purpose and involves a specific approach and techniques. The interview sessions were recorded, scripted, and coded for subsequent analysis of meaning, and information was gleaned to identify emergent themes.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department
Executive Leadership

First Supervisor
Jason Berman

Second Supervisor
Ruth Harris

Subject Categories
Education
Moral Reasoning of Chronically Disruptive Pre-adolescent African-American Males in an Urban Elementary School Setting

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

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May 2011
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Brenda, who encouraged me to move forward when I pondered to end this journey before its completion. I am aware of the sacrifices she made so that I could obtain this degree and I am forever grateful.

To my children, Jamie, Tiphani, Cristie, Carrie, and Corie who all should understand what can be accomplished with faith, support, and perseverance. I wish them happiness and success in all of their pursuits.

To my brother, Bob, and sisters, Gladys, Catherine, and Vera (bless her soul) for extending a sense of support, love, and care to their baby brother.

This is also dedicated to the memory of my parents: H.V., who instilled in me the value of an education and Robert Lee, who through example taught me the value of hard work.
Acknowledgments

There are many people who have given of their time and patience to help through this journey. I would like to express my gratitude to my Committee Chair, Dr. Jason Berman, and to my Committee Member, Dr. Ruth Harris, for their support as members of my dissertation committee.

I would like to acknowledge the members of Cohort 3, in particular, Idonia Owens, Wendy Fritz, Dana Boshnack, Darcy Smith, Jennifer Wilson, and Veronica Barber for our work together. I would also like to thank all of the professors in our cohort for imparting their knowledge during this long and arduous but remarkable journey.

In addition, I would like to thank the following people for their input and support: Dr. Cheryl McGuder Holloway, Dr. Edward Yansen, Dr. Deasure Matthew, Dr. Karen Sangmeister, Dr. C. Michael Robinson, Dr. Jeanette Silvers, Dr. Brandon Keavney, Dr. Andrew MacGowan, Dr. Concetta Lucchese, Dr. Michael Christman, Dr. Celine Olgin, Betsy Christiansen, Diane Lucas, Joan Arthur, Ann Brown, Kevin Klein, Ivelisse Cosme, John Carr, Dwayne Postell, Nadia Marzouk, Elia Marcus and Jean Louise Mahar.

Finally, a special thanks to the students who participated in this study. They were sincere participants, and it is my hope that they will continue to be included and valued for what they can bring to their own education.
Biographical Sketch

Larry Ellison is currently the Principal in an urban school district. Mr. Ellison attended the State University of New York at Oswego from 1971 to 1975 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and obtained his Teacher Certification in Social Studies in 1975. He attended the State University of New York at Brockport from 1976 to 1980 and graduated with a Masters of Science degree in Education; he obtained his Certificate of Advance Study in Education Administration in 1980 and School Administrator and Supervisor certificate in 1990. He attended St. John Fisher College in May of 2008 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mr. Ellison pursued his research on the moral reasoning of disruptive pre-adolescent male students in an urban elementary school environment involved in an interactive intervention intended to stimulate moral reasoning under the direction of Dr. Jason Berman and Dr. Ruth Harris and received his Ed.D. degree in May 2011.
Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the moral reasoning of a small group of chronically disruptive pre-adolescent African-American male students in an elementary school involved in an intensive, interactive intervention intended to stimulate in moral reasoning. The participants for this study exhibited challenging behaviors in the school setting. The researcher was interested in obtaining the participants’ perception of their lived world related to self, school, and home. The study explored whether there were significant changes in the moral reasoning of the participants after participating in an intervention, and if so, what were those changes? The study also explored what themes were prevalent in the participants’ lives as described in their own words during the intervention.

This case study explored an understanding of social phenomena from the individuals’ own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what the students perceive it to be (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The students were engaged in semi-structured interviews for the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the interviewees’ lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena. The interviews come close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview, it has a purpose and involves a specific approach and techniques.

The interview sessions were recorded, scripted, and coded for subsequent analysis of meaning, and information was gleaned to identify emergent themes.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Researchers have found disproportionate minority representation among students on the receiving end of corrective discipline practices. African-American male students are overrepresented in the use of disciplinary measures (Skiba, Petersen, & Williams, 1997). According to the Department of Education (1997) and Verdugo (2002), African-American children represent 17% of public school enrollment. Nationally, they constitute 32% of out-of-school suspensions. White students, 63% of enrollment, represent 50% of suspensions. A study by the Applied Research Center shows that Black children, particularly males, are disciplined more often and more severely than any other minority group. The U. S. Department of Education (1997) reveals that almost 25% of all African-American male students were suspended at least once over a four-year period. Whether or not the disparities are intentional or unintentional, the numbers are alarming.

This chapter focuses on the statement of purpose, problem statement, significance of the study, research questions, definition of terms, and a summary of the remaining chapters.

Statement of Purpose

This study explored the moral reasoning of a small group of chronically disruptive, pre-adolescent African-American male students in an elementary school involved in an interactive intervention intended to stimulate growth in moral reasoning. The study applied Kohlberg’s moral reasoning theoretical framework that speaks to the premises that (a) children’s thinking is derived from their experiences, which include
understanding of moral concepts such as justice, rights, equality, and human welfare; (b) for moral growth to occur, there must be open discussions that promote fairness and cognitive conflict exposure that is stimulated by other high-level stage reasoning; (c) a sense of empowerment to develop rules must be established; and (d) it is critical to the development of a higher stage community (Power, Higgins & Kohlberg, 1989).

Statement of the Problem

Disruptive student behavior interferes with the instructional process by negatively impacting classroom instruction. Students who are viewed as continually disruptive to the educational setting are frequently removed from the classroom. While removing the disruptive student may benefit the other students, it falls short of maximizing the education of the disruptor.

Oliva and Pawlas (1997) state that both teachers and school administrators agree that discipline is the most serious problem faced by teachers, and the adequate control of a class is a prerequisite to achieving instructional objectives and safeguarding the psychological and physical well-being of students. According to Sautner (2001), students with behavioral problems face significant barriers to success in school, home, and community environments. Disruptive behavior has been defined as:

…behavior that interferes with the student’s own learning and/or the education process of others, requires attention and assistance beyond that which traditional programs can provide or results in frequent conflicts of a disruptive nature while the student is under the jurisdiction of the school, either in or out of the classroom (Sheets, 1996, p. 87).
Over the years, the schools’ response to disruptive behavior has been to send the student to detention, paddle the student, or suspend the student from school. These methods have been ineffective in changing student behavior (Morris & Howard, 2003). Sautner (2001) states that alternative discipline strategies must incorporate the learning and behavior need of each child with the desired outcomes if they are to correct maladaptive behaviors.

The district where this researcher is employed is committed to the critical goal of significantly improving the pattern of disruptive student behavior in the school setting. Achieving this goal requires that educators carefully think outside of the box in attempting to bring about significant change in the area of student discipline. Engaging students in real-life discussions about their reality through their lens in the areas of school, self, and home is worthy of consideration. Noguea (2007) states that it is rare for a school to seek student input on matters related to discipline, even though student buy-in is essential if schools are to succeed in creating an environment that is conducive to learning.

Significance of the Study

As an urban educator with more than 35 years in the field as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, lead principal, and former member of the Superintendent’s cabinet, this researcher’s professional experience suggests urban schools have a unique set of problems, including but not limited to student discipline and how educators respond to students who exhibit problematic behavior.

The researcher is the principal in the school who seeks to employ alternatives to better understand and engage disruptive African-American boys in the educational
process. Using effective methods to increase engagement may prove to be beneficial to these students and their peers. The researcher intends to use the information from the study to better understand the choice behavior of the participants, told in their own voices, to gain insight about their lived world to develop problem-solving strategies.

The researcher works in an urban school district in Upstate New York. The urban district examined its protocols in response to students with behavioral concerns. The district implemented school-wide behavioral management programs, suspended students from school, and implemented an alternative-to-suspension initiative to keep students in school rather than suspending the students from school. This study approached the problem from another angle beginning with soliciting feedback from students’ lived world. Noguera (2007) states that soliciting and responding to the perspectives of students can serve as another means of insuring quality control, and unlike so many other reform strategies, this one costs nothing.

**Theoretical Framework**

Discipline in school settings is typically referred to as classroom management. Classroom management approaches focus on efficient ways of establishing order in the classroom but generally include little if any guidance on how to foster moral or character development (Power, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the researcher uses Kohlberg’s moral reasoning framework to explore this subject.

Kohlberg believed and was able to demonstrate through studies that people progressed in their moral reasoning through a series of stages (Crain, 1985). Kohlberg believed that moral development occurs through social interaction (Barger, 2000). According to Kohlberg, the goal of education is to provide stimulation for students to
attain a higher level or stage of development rather than remaining at the present level of functioning (Power, Higgins & Kohlberg, 1989).

Kohlberg’s studies concluded that there was a relationship between moral climate and individual moral development. Moral climate influences moral development if certain conditions are present: open discussions that promote fairness, cognitive exposure stimulated by other high-level stage reasoning, and a sense of empowerment to develop the rules (Power et al., 1989).

Kohlberg’s theoretical framework includes three levels and six stages of moral development. The levels and stages of the theory are (a) preconventional morality (stage one: obedience and punishment orientation, and stage two: individualism and exchange orientation); (b) conventional morality (stage three: interpersonal relationships orientation, and stage four: law and order orientation); and (c) postconventional morality (stage five: social contract orientation, and stage six: universal principles orientation).

Studies were conducted regarding the relationship between moral climate and individual moral development (Power et al., 1989). Moral development was viewed as progression through an ordered sequence of stages. According to Kohlberg (Power et al.), the goal of education is to provide stimulation for students to attain a higher level or stage of development rather than remaining at the present level of functioning. Kohlberg believed stimulation of growth from one stage to another was sufficient for children’s moral development.

The development of moral character (Giroux & Purpel, 1983) is in large part a sequential and progressive growth of basic principles of moral reasoning and their application to action. Within this approach, each stage includes the core values of the
prior stage but defines them in a more universal, differentiated, and integrated form incorporating movement from personal concerns for punishment and reciprocity to concerns for justice in a broader social context. Although all children go through the same stages of development in their moral reasoning, children’s development may stop or become fixed at any one of the six stages as determined by their moral environment. An important part of that environment is moral dialogue, including interaction around moral questions, especially with people who are at adjacent, higher stages of moral development. In Kohlberg’s moral dilemma (Power et al., 1989) discussion approach, the teacher facilitates reasoning, assists students in resolving moral conflicts, and ensures that discussions take place in an environment that contains the conditions essential for stage growth in moral reasoning (Leming, 1993). Leiman and Duveen (1999) state:

. . . epistemic authority is held to be legitimate independently of any social relation, whether a claim to knowledge is held to be legitimate can be determined only through processes of social interaction, discourse and debate. Hence epistemic authority possesses a power to influence judgment because it reveals a truth which can be assessed for its legitimacy only within an inter-subjective framework (p. 560).

This study is a proposal to bring student voice to an area that has been troubling for years. Noguera (2007) notes that students may very well have ideas and insights adults are not privy to and could prove to be very helpful to improving schools if adults were willing to listen.
Research Questions

The following research questions helped guide this mixed methodology case study:

1. Were there significant changes in moral reasoning of the students after participating in an intervention, and if so, what direction were those changes?

2. What themes were prevalent in the students’ lives as described in their own words during the intervention?

Definition of Terms

School discipline

Refers to students complying with a code of behavior often known as school rules. These rules define the expected standards of student behavior. The term also applies to the punishment that is the consequence of transgressions of the code of behavior.

Disruptive behavior

Conduct that interferes with the student’s own learning and/or the education process of others.

Moral reasoning

Adhering to ethical and moral principles of right and wrong; relating to duty or obligations; pertaining to those intentions and actions of which right and wrong, virtue and vice, are predicated, or to the rules by which such intentions and actions ought to be directed.

Epistemic authority

To have more knowledge on a subject whereas to influence the opinion of another individual.
Student voice An opportunity for a student to provide input regarding a circumstance where a decision will be rendered.

Phenomenological To examine perceptions to acquire knowledge.

approach

Summary of Remaining Chapters

A summary of the remaining chapters includes a brief description that outlines the contexts of each chapter. Chapter 2 reviews the existing knowledge and current research pertaining to the moral reasoning of students and student discipline. This chapter includes the historical perspective, methodologies, case studies, and limitations and gaps in the literature. Chapter 3 explains the general perspective in relationship to the research questions, context and participants, data collection and analysis procedures, and a summary of the methodology used in the study. In Chapter 4, each research question is presented with an explanation of how the findings addressed the research questions using students’ quotes as the primary data source that includes unplanned benefits and a summary of the findings. Chapter 5 discusses and interprets the results to delineate the implications of findings, study limitations, recommendations for future research or actions based on findings, and summary of this dissertation in its entirety.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This review of literature is divided into six sections. First, an introduction provides a summary of school discipline in public schools. Second, a summary of Kohlberg’s moral reasoning theoretical framework is given. Third, an overview of moral education examines complex debates surrounding contemporary character education. Fourth, moral reasoning and student discipline case studies are provided. The fifth section outlines a gap in the literature. Finally, the chapter closes with a summary statement.

School Discipline in Public Schools

School discipline in the United States schools has been characterized as a major concern of the general public for more than 20 years (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 2007). The purpose of the annual poll is to inform educators and policy writers of the public view of issues in public education. Teachers and administrators agree that discipline is a serious problem faced by teachers, and the adequate control of a class is a prerequisite to achieving instructional objectives and safeguarding the psychological and physical well-being of students (Oliva & Pawlas, 1997).

For the purpose of the study, school discipline references disruptive student behavior. Disruptive behavior is defined as behavior that interferes with the student’s own learning and/or the education process of others; requires assistance beyond that which traditional programs can provide; or results in frequent conflicts of a disruptive nature while the student is under the jurisdiction of the school, either in or out of the classroom (Sheets, 1996).
The use of the word *discipline* has strong connotations for educators and parents. It brings about images of an individual being weak, strong, good, and bad. It has serious ramifications for those in the field of education. It is not possible for a single individual to deal with all of the complex issues related to school discipline. It takes the efforts of all stakeholders (Rosen, 2001). According to Power (2008), “discipline in school settings is typically referred to as classroom management. Classroom management approaches focus on efficient ways of establishing order in the classroom but generally include little if any guidance on how to foster moral or character development” (p. 139).

Media reports of increased violent juvenile crime, teen pregnancy, and suicide have caused a concern for moral behavior in our country. There is a growing trend toward linking the solution to these and related social problems to the teaching of moral and social values in our public schools (Nucci, 2008).

According to Borba (2001), several concerns such as how badly youth treat one another; substance and alcohol abuse; youth violence; the rising disrespect for parents, teachers, and authority figures; the rise of incivility; and increased vulgarity have generated an alarm about our children in today’s society. Peer cruelty is becoming a major issue in the schools. Nearly 160,000 children miss school each day for fear of being bullied by their peers; the potential for physical injury is high.

Discipline is regarded as a response to misbehavior and as having to do with various techniques for correction and punishment. Assumptions about children’s nature influence the approaches that parents, teachers, and other adults use regarding discipline (Power, 2008). If a child is viewed as being good, discipline practices are lenient and
oriented toward the child’s development. However, if the child is seen as impulsive and selfish, the practice is strict and oriented to control (Power).

Discipline practices educate for moral development when they recognize that children are active learners by making children partners in their own education. Research on parenting indicates that disciplinary practices are most effective when caregivers communicate expectations for behavior with reasons for why a behavior is right or wrong (Power, 2008).

Students with behavioral problems face significant barriers to success in school, home, and community environments (Sautner, 2001). Schools’ responses have been to send students to detention, paddle the student, place student in an in-school suspension room, suspend the student from school (Morris & Howard, 2003), and implement school-wide behavioral models in the curriculum to improve behavior (Bennett, 1995; Elias et al., 1997; Lickona, 1993; Wynne, 1997).

The Public Agenda Survey indicates that 70% of the teachers surveyed say their schools have serious problems with student discipline (Johnson, 2004). Ninety-seven percent of the teachers state that good student discipline is a prerequisite for a successful school (Public Agenda Poll, 2004). Eighty percent of the teachers polled said that they could teach more effectively if they did not have to spend so much time dealing with disruptive students, and in the same poll more than 40% stated they spend more time keeping order in the classroom than teaching (Johnson). Disruptive student behavior increases significantly between the fourth and sixth grades (Barnhart, Franklin, & Alleman, 2008).
Why focus on boys? Boys make up 80% of our discipline problems. Of children diagnosed with behavioral disorders, 80% are boys. Of high school dropouts, 80% are young males. Young men now make up less than 44% of our college population (Eckholm, 2006; Gurian and Stevens, 2005).

The struggling, dysfunctional, and failing students for whom parents and teachers request extra academic help are mainly boys (Gurian and Stevens, 2005). The children who bring down the state and federal test scores are mainly boys. The children who lash out against the educational system are mainly boys. The children with whom our teachers feel the least trained to deal with are boys (Eckholm, 2006; Gurian & Stevens, 2005).

Our educational system does many things well, yet nearly every classroom has one or more young boys in it. They act out against other boys, against adults, and against girls. Some of these boys turn anger at school and life into violence that is played out with guns or fists in school cafeterias or classrooms (Gurian & Stevens, 2005).

Why focus on African-American boys? Demographics in the literature show that the students who are identified as the most disruptive to the educational process in public education in the urban setting are males, are African-American, and are from a low socio-economic background (Civil Rights Project, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba, Petersen & Williams, 1997; U. S. Department of Education 1997; Verdugo, 2002).

African-American boys are more likely than other males (a) to be identified as learning disabled and to end up in special education classes, (b) not to participate in advanced placement courses, (c) not to perform as well as other boys in math and science, and (d) to perform below grade level on standardized tests (Gurian and Stevens, 2005).
Pedro Noguera, Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard, reported that whereas 90% of black males surveyed strongly agree that they would like to succeed in school, only 22% responded that they work hard to achieve good grades, and 42% strongly disagreed that their teachers supported them or cared about their success in school (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000).

Black suspension rates exceeded rates for White students. The burden of suspension and expulsion falls most heavily on poor Black males (Skiba and Peterson, 1999). A recent study by the Applied Research Center shows that Black children, particularly Black males, are disciplined more often and more severely than any other group (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000). African-American boys have the greatest problem in respecting authority figures (Kunjufu, 2005).

The U.S. Department of Education’s (1997) report reveals that almost 25% of all African-American male students were suspended at least once over a four-year period (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000). The phenomena such as over-representation in special and remedial classes, suspensions, expulsion, and other indicators of school failure can have cumulative and disastrous effects on African-American males (Kunjufu, 2005; Townsend, 2000).

When boys are allowed to spend unsupervised time on the street, it further jeopardizes their social success. Suspended and expelled boys are at greater risk for encountering the legal system (Kunjufu, 2005; Townsend, 2000). In America’s inner cities, more than half of all Black men do not finish high school. By their mid-30s, 6 in 10 black men who had dropped out of school had spent time in prison (Eckholm, 2006).
Moral Reasoning Orientation

Kohlberg’s theory of moral reasoning (Power, Higgins & Kohlberg, 1989) proposed that children’s thinking was derived from their experiences, which include understanding of moral concepts such as justice, rights, equality, and human welfare. Kohlberg’s framework built upon that of his mentor, Piaget.

Piaget (1965) developed a two-stage theory of moral development. Younger children (i.e., 10-11 years old and younger) believe that rules are absolutes handed down by adults and cannot be changed. Older, more mature adolescents believe the more relativistic view that rules can be changed if everyone agrees and their judgments are based more on intentions rather than consequences. The levels and stages of the theory are:

1. Pre-conventional Morality
   - Stage 1: Obedience and punishment orientation – child must unquestionably obey rules by parents.
   - Stage 2: Individualism and exchange orientation – child understands there is not just one view handed down by adults. Individuals have different views and different interests.

2. Conventional Morality
   - Stage 3: Good interpersonal relationships orientation – individual needs to live up to the expectations of family, friends, and community.
   - Stage 4: Law and order orientation – laws must be obeyed and social order must be maintained.

3. Post-conventional Morality
• Stage 5: Social contract orientation – focus is on individual rights.

• Stage 6: Universal principles orientation – focus is on the rights of humanity.

As cited by Power et al., 1989, Kohlberg conducted studies regarding the relationship between moral climate and individual moral development. Moral atmosphere influenced moral development if the conditions were right. Four conditions need to be present in the environment for moral growth: open discussions that promote fairness, cognitive conflict exposure that is simulated by other high-level stage reasoning, a sense of empowerment to develop the rules, and the development of a higher stage community (Power et al.).

As cited by Power et al., 1989, Kohlberg conducted studies regarding the relationship between moral climate and individual moral development. Kohlberg’s research findings, insight, and theoretical formulations about moral thinking and development still permeate much of the current research in psychology and studies in education. Kohlberg’s influence (Turiel, 2008) was due to a number of empirically based articles and essays that were widely read and cited.

Proponents of alternative, developmental views believe that since moral reasoning results from movement through stages of development, affect should be formulated largely on the basis of human experience and should be open to question and change. During the 1960s, Kohlberg presented another response to the need for an education for morality. In a move away from the cultural transmission model that incorporated the direct instruction of the accepted values and principles of the social order for influencing behavior (Kohlberg and Mayer, 1972), Kohlberg’s emphasis was on the judgment or
reasoning aspects of moral situation (Sullivan, 1975). His approach was highly cognitive with the focus being on abstract debate.

Kohlberg viewed (Power et al., 1989) moral development as progression through an ordered sequence of stages. The goal of education, in his view, was to provide stimulation for students to attain a higher level or stage of development rather than remaining at the present level of functioning. He believed stimulation of growth from one stage to another was sufficient for children’s moral development.

The development of moral character (Giroux & Purpel, 1983) is in large part a sequential and progressive growth of basic principles of moral reasoning and their application to action. Within this approach, each stage includes the core values of the prior stage but defines them in a more universal, differentiated, and integrated form, incorporating movement from personal concerns for punishment and reciprocity to concerns for justice in a broader social context. Although all children go through the same stages of development in their moral reasoning, children’s development may stop or become fixed at any one of the six stages as determined by their moral environment. An important part of that environment is moral dialogue, including interaction around moral questions, especially with people who are at adjacent, higher stages of moral development. In Kohlberg’s moral dilemma (Power, 1989) discussion approach, the teacher facilitates reasoning, assists students in resolving moral conflicts, and ensures that discussions take place in an environment that contains the conditions essential for stage growth in moral reasoning (Leming, 1993).

As a result of Kohlberg’s research, moral development could be objectively and scientifically defined in terms of progress through the stages of moral reasoning.
Kohlberg’s approach to moral development provided parents and educators with an objective means to identify a student’s progress through the stages of moral reasoning. Kohlberg’s message has a powerful appeal to parents and educators who were unhappy with value clarification’s empty neutrality and disturbing relativism, (Lickona, 1991).

Moral Education

Beginning in the early 1980s and extending through the 1990s, there was a resurgence of character education (Bebeau, Rest, & Narvaez, 1999) as a response to a growing perception that American society was in a state of crisis, moral decay, or serious decline. In 1997, President Clinton’s State of the Union address indicated the socialization concern: “Character education must be taught in our schools. We must teach children to be good citizens” (Bebeau, Rest, & Narvaez, 1999, p. 18).

One of the more important and controversial issues raised in public education is the role of schools and their leaders in promoting students’ social and moral development (Bates, 1995; Lickona, 1991; Nucci, 1989). According to Beach (1991), the consideration of incorporating an ethical education within public schools has created both “crisis and opportunity” (p. 313). Unfortunately, the politicized and sometimes harsh tone of debate over moral education (Nodding, 1988) has tended to cloud larger concerns for the need to promote intrinsic change to students’ thinking and behavior.

The 1960s and 1970s gave rise to a celebration of the dignity and autonomy of the individual, the civil rights movement, a concern for the rights of women, and a new respect for the child as a person. It was within this changing social context that the values clarification program was created by Raths, Harmin, and Simon in 1966. The orientation of the values clarification program was subjective with the focus on the individual as the
key decision-making unit. Through the practice of asking clarifying questions to encourage students to examine and clarify values associated with a specific problem, the teacher’s role was to encourage and support students to be in close touch with their feelings and attitudes, thereby achieving a sense of personal confidence and well-being (Lickona, 1993). An attempt to avoid predetermined standards and to encourage open discussion and inner reflection without reference to any particular intellectual or moral paradigm (Purpel, 1991) were the distinguishing components of the values clarification program. This approach counseled against adults directly instructing children in right and wrong or trying to influence their value positions (Lickona, 1991). Authority, in general, was suspect with personal freedom the reigning societal value. Values clarification offered schools in an increasingly pluralistic society a way to talk about values while preserving their value neutrality. At best, values clarification raised some important value issues for students to think about and encouraged them to reflect on a value they professed. Since there was no requirement to evaluate one’s values against a standard, and no suggestion that some values might be better or worse than others, the focus of this approach as well as Kohlberg’s was on thinking skills rather than moral content (Lickona, 1991).

Criticisms of both approaches indicate that value clarification on position of ethical neutrality on the part of teachers and administrators is impossible and irresponsible (Beach, 1991), while cognitive development theory centered on stimulating students’ moral development by moving through stages rather than developing strategies to be used during times of conflict and stress (Beach, 1991; Kohn 1997). Specially, Noddig (1984) indicates that Kohlberg’s theory represents a hierarchical description of
moral reasoning rather than a model for moral education. Lickona (1991) argued that the focus of both programs was on reasoning skills rather than moral content.

In a move away from approaches positioned on the belief that morality is best achieved through transmission from adults to children, Lickona’s (1991) character education program reflects a concern for the individual in the context of developing moral behavior. Lickona moves from thinking skills to concern for moral content through the identification of shared core values and identifies a comprehensive approach to character education involving all aspects of schooling, including development of a caring community. Lickona maintains that as constructive learners, students must be afforded opportunities to demonstrate moral action in an environment where core values are modeled by school personnel and supported by parents.

Maintained within this approach is an imperative for the teacher to use the creation and enforcement of rules as opportunities to foster moral reasoning, self-control, and respect for others (Lickona, 1991). Although representing a move away from moralistic approaches, Lickona’s program aims to promote a set of values that presumably lead to students’ developing moral behavior (Elias et al, 1997) rather than to development of cognitive strategies to promote intrinsic changes to students’ thinking and behavior.

As a result of changes in society that have impacted an overall decline in personal and public ethics and morality, programs for promoting students’ social and moral development appear to be the issue at the heart of school reform (Ryan, 1993.). There are two main perspectives on how schools are to accomplish this goal. The first perspective is that of character educators (Bennett, 1994; Ryan, 1993) who define morality in terms
of norms, and effect moral development through indoctrination and inculcation of specific values and principles. The second perspective is that of cognitive researchers (Benard, 1993; Elias & Clabby, 1999; Elias et al. 1997; Sylwester, 1994) who view moral action as demonstrated by social awareness and human welfare and exercised around the use of skills and strategies to promote human welfare. Nucci (1989) indicates that construction of these concepts is fostered by education emphasizing reflection, perspective taking, conflict resolution, and autonomous choice.

Inherent within an education to promote students’ social and moral development is recognition of important connections among self, relationships, and morality. Piaget (cited in Nucci, 1989) states that “Apart from our relationships to other people, there can be no moral necessity” (p. 159). Additionally, a researcher (Bernard, 1993), indicates that schools interested in improving student character must shape and monitor the equality of students’ life in school. Similarly, schools must provide a nurturing school climate that supports children’s developing caring relationships in the context of improving the quality of all interactions (Bernard; Starratt, 1994). In consideration of the importance of developing caring relationships, schools must recognize that students need to practice ethical behavior in order to gain an understanding of the meaning or ethics (Starratt).

Throughout the decades, goals for education have included socializing students to become responsible and productive citizens. The history of moral education has gone through cycles when either its representation as the teaching of virtues or the teaching of principles has predominated (Rich, 1991). Bennett (1994) argued that moral education was considered crucial for the success of a democracy and that popular education would be the means for developing and shaping character (Doyle, 1997; Huffman, 1993; Ryan
1993). Through discipline, the teacher’s good example, and the curriculum, schools in the early days of the republic set out to develop character as well as literacy (Lickona, 1993). One of the purposes of the common school movement was to continuously repeat the qualities of character necessary for the survival of the democracy (Bennett, 1994). Pledges, membership in clubs, and codes of conduct were introduced into all facets of school life as a means to encourage students to adopt specific values (Leming 1993).

The vision of the public school (Lickona, 1993) as the transmitter of a shared public morality held sway into the 20th century during which time the combination of the powerful forces of logical positivism, personalism, pluralism, and secularization occurring in public life all served to erode the consensus supporting character education in schools. Gradually, large numbers of people began to lose sight of common values and to think of morality as a matter of private preference or choice (Lickona, 1988a). As a result, many public schools abandoned formal attention to character education beginning in the late 1960s (Huffman, 1993). Additionally, in 1996, several cultural changes, including the United States Supreme Court’s decision to outlaw school prayer, served to create an even larger division in the relationship between character education and public schools (Starratt, 1994).

Since the early days of our nation, schools (Lickona, 1991) remain charged with the responsibility of imparting character education as well as academic education for students. Until recently, calls for school reform have focused on academic achievement through additional attention to increased testing, teacher preparation, and structures for shared decision making. With renewed interest in the role of schools to promote students’
social and emotional development, today’s schools must prepare students to be smart as well as good (Lickona).

A new call for reform (Bennett, 1994) that includes a revival of interest in programs to promote students’ social and emotional development is a result of concern over the social disarray reflected by destructive youth trends in our society. The decline of family and the parallel troubling trends in youth character may force many schools to include moral education as part of the current public school agenda. One response to the void left by Simon and Raths’ values clarification program and Kohlberg’s moral dilemma discussion approach is a new character education movement suggesting programs identifying specifics values. An education for good character has returned to its historical place (Ryan, 1993) in the tradition of educating students for conscience and character. This movement is a throwback (Purpel, 1991) to the old character education approach that focused on socializing and indoctrinating students to conventional norms of good behavior.

Distinguishing features of these programs included the use of elaborate codes of conduct and group activities in school clubs (Leming, 1993) as the primary means to teach character. Schools attempted to integrate such codes into all aspects of school life, and student clubs utilizing the power of peer influence were created to encourage students to practice virtues such as self-control, good health, kindness, sportsmanship, self-reliance, duty, reliability, truth, good workmanship, and teamwork (Leming).

Lickona (1991) indicates that it is possible for schools to address an education for conscience and character within the context of basic assumptions about the rights of all people. Lickona indicates that ethical literacy requires knowing moral values such as
respect, responsibility, honesty, fairness, compassion, and courage that define all the ways of being a good person. These researchers believe that educators have the responsibility to recognize the importance of shared ethical values and to provide opportunities to develop students’ respectful and responsible behavior.

A constellation of cultural changes have contributed to the pattern of social problems seen in today’s youth (Elias & Clabby, 1992). Changes in family structures as well as pervasive and violent messages portrayed regularly on television (Scherer, 1996) have served to sedate the moral conscience of many youngsters. Yet despite recognition of these concerns, negative responses to and arguments against the suggestion that schools assist families to provide an ethical education for youngsters are being expressed by some educators, politicians, and families.

Presently, theories of children’s learning and development that underscore the use of cognitive strategies to foster meaningful changes in adaptive functioning (Elias & Clabby, 1992; Sylwester, 1994) are being suggested to promote students’ social and moral development. Elias and Clabby report that even though former approaches had some impact on skill acquisition, long-term retention and generalization have been less successful. Efforts at social and emotional learning (Elias et al., 1997) have taken a broader focus by emphasizing active learning techniques, generalizing skills across settings, and developing social decision-making and problem-solving skills that can be applied in many situations.

As a result, cognitive researchers (Bernard, 1993; Elias et al., 1997; Elias & Clabby, 1992; Sylwester, 1994) indicate that students need a relevant curriculum for instruction in decision making and cognitive strategies as well as opportunities in and out
of school to practice application of the skills for managing conflict in pro-social ways. Similarly, factors such as the curriculum for social and emotional development being integrated into the life of the school (Goleman, cited by Pool, 1997) as well as recognition of the synergy created when everybody contributes to the whole (Durkheim, cited in Nucci, 1989) are being acknowledged for their importance in promoting an effective program to develop students’ social and moral development.

Historically, the American public has had concerns that run the gamut of a developmental and behavioral continuum. Problems along the developmental spectrum can be real and urgent; the focus in public schooling is on failure of primary self-regulation and discipline (Bebeau, Rest, & Narvaez, 1999).

There are numerous voices (Bennett, 1995; Kilpatrick, 1992; Lickona, 1991; Wynne, 1997) that call for character education as a means for countering youth anomie and anarchy. They speak to the failures in the primary socialization of many of our nation’s young people and then provide suggestions for direct teaching of moral values. The concern is for basic morals in preventing young people from doing irreversible harm to themselves and others.

There appears to be a growing need on the part of both parents and educators to assist young people in their quest to make wise moral decisions. As cited in Binet (2004), authors such as Bear, Richards, and Gibbs (1997); Lapsley (1996); Lickona (1991); and Nucci (2001) have highlighted the need for socio-moral education in schools and have outlined plans to assist teachers whose goal is to foster moral development within the school setting. As Nucci argues, “The goal is to provide teachers with some guidance for
how to engage in domain-appropriate moral education that will complement, rather than compete with, teachers’ more general academic aims” (p. 169).

Case Studies and Limitations

Moral reasoning. The moral reasoning case studies in this paper speak to the moral choices of students. In these studies, the educators in the schools have used moral dilemmas to help address behavior concerns.

Manning and Bear (2002) examined the relations between specific types of moral reasoning and teacher-reported overt aggressive behaviors, such as hitting, stealing, starting fights, breaking in line, teasing, and saying mean things to peers. To determine moral reasoning, the subjects were asked, “Why shouldn’t you hit others?” After an initial response, the subjects were asked, “Why else shouldn’t you hit others?” The set of questions is asked to examine and sort initial responses from those who require additional thought. Subjects were 203 students (108 boys, 95 girls). The study indicated that overtly aggressive boys demonstrated more concern for the imminent consequences of their behavior on themselves and less concern for the psychological consequences of their actions on others than nonaggressive boys. The researchers used qualitative and quantitative methodologies to conduct this study, as intelligence tests and students questions were used to obtain the results.

There were a number of limitations in this study. First, a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between moral reasoning and aggressive behavior cannot be obtained until both forms of aggression are taken into account. Failure to detect significant effects between aggressive and nonaggressive girls in the study may be due to failure to assess the form of aggression commonly exhibited by girls. A second limitation
concerns the assessment of overt aggression by teachers but not by peers or blind observers. Teacher ratings of aggression have been shown to correlate significantly with ratings by peers (Pakaslahti & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2000) and observations by trained observers (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000). Future studies should include ratings of aggression from multiple sources. A third limitation involves the failure to determine whether students considered the six aggressive behaviors they were asked about to be immoral. It is possible that they considered at least some of the behaviors to belong to the social-conventional or personal domains, rather than the moral (see Nucci, 2001 for a review of domain theory). When students perceive behaviors as falling outside the moral domain, they may be less inclined to act in accord with moral standards and thus strong relations between moral reasoning and behavior should not be expected (Nucci). Final limitations relate to the small amounts of variance in aggressive behavior that were explained by moral reasoning and the insufficient power that was obtained in some analyses. Future studies are likely to explain more variance and achieve more power if variables other than moral reasoning are also used to predict aggression.

Binet (2004) examined two distinct moral reasoning interventions: an interindividual intervention, in which students discussed moral dilemmas, and an intraindividual intervention, in which students individually reflected on moral dilemmas. Ninety-seven sixth and seventh grade students were administered pre- and post-test measures of the Socio-moral Reflection Measure. Participants were randomly assigned to either treatment (moral) or placebo (non-moral) conditions. The results indicated no difference in moral reasoning between students in the two experimental groups and indicated that students in both experimental groups made significant gains in moral
reasoning compared with students in placebo groups. The researchers used qualitative and quantitative methodologies to conduct this study. The reliance on questionnaire methods to assess children’s moral reasoning and securing funds to hire staff to facilitate the moral reasoning discussions were limitations in this study.

Murray-Close and Crick (2006) investigated elementary school children’s moral reasoning concerning physical and relational aggression was explored. A total of 639 (336 girls) fourth and fifth graders were recruited from elementary schools for this study. Fourth and fifth graders rated physical aggression as more harmful than relational aggression but tended to adopt a moral orientation about both forms of aggression. In addition, the children reported that physically aggressive behaviors were more likely to result in harm for the victims than relationally aggressive behavior. Gender differences in moral judgment of aggression were observed, with girls rating physical and relational aggression as more wrong and relational aggression as more harmful than boys. Girls were more likely to adopt a moral orientation when judging physical and relational aggression, and girls more often judged relational aggression than physical aggression from the moral domain. Moral reasoning about aggression was associated with physically and relationally aggressive behavior. The results indicate that children tend to adopt a moral orientation about aggression, but that they differentiate between physical and relational aggression in their moral judgments. The researchers used qualitative and quantitative methodologies to conduct this study.

This cross-sectional study focuses exclusively on the social cognitions among children in late elementary school. Future research would benefit from an examination of potential developmental differences in children reasoning about rational and physical
aggression across different developmental periods (e.g., early childhood, late childhood, and adolescence). Although the conceptual basis and interpretation of the present study emphasized how children’s moral judgments may translate into aggressive behavior, it is also possible that aggressive children develop unique patterns of moral reasoning about aggression to justify their conduct. To identify cause and effect, longitudinal and experimental designs in which different causal models could be compared would be particularly useful. Another limitation is the reliance on questionnaire methods to assess children’s moral reasoning about aggression. The scenarios used may not capture the full range of physically aggressive conduct. Finally, future research exploring children’s moral reasoning about physical and relational aggression would benefit from the inclusion of additional cognitive factors (e.g., language ability and working memory) that evidence indicates play an important role in children’s moral reasoning and aggressive conduct.

Bibou-Nakakou, Kiosseoglou, and Stogiannidou (2000) focused on teachers’ perception of school behavior problems and preferred classroom management actions in this qualitative study. Two hundred elementary school teachers (between 23 and 45 years old) were evaluated with a questionnaire comprising assessment of causal attributions and goal-directed behavior on the part of the teachers when dealing with classroom misbehavior problems. The findings indicated that off-task behavior fell significantly more in the external pupil-related category in comparison to those they agreed upon with respect to the silly antics. Disobedience was attributed to internal pupil-related explanations significantly more than the off-task behavior. Internal student-related attributions were those most frequently adopted by the teachers, even though teachers’
explanations varied significantly across school problems. Misbehavior-related attributions were significantly associated with teachers’ preferred practices. Results support the application of psychological principles to educational practice through an understanding of teachers’ discipline-related theories.

The sample was narrow in this study. The results were based on questionnaire measures. Results derived from the utilization of questionnaire format may not be an accurate reflection of teachers’ actual use of various alternatives for coping with misbehavior or their perceptions of the extent of disruptive behavior. Actual classroom observation and multiple measures should be considered for future research in this area.

*School-wide behavior support.* The discipline case studies in this paper speak to the problem of disruptive students. In these studies, the educators in the schools have implemented school-wide behavior support systems and office referrals to help address the disruptive behavior.

Evin, Schaughency, Matthews, Goodman, and McGlinchey (2007) evaluated the impact of the primary and secondary behavior support at the school-wide level through school-wide positive behavioral support (SWPBS) in this quantitative study (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005). The SWPBS is a process through which schools improve services for all students by creating systems wherein intervention and management decisions are informed by local data and guided by intervention research. The example is drawn from a larger project in which area regional school-district consultants and university researchers partnered with four elementary schools, students 6-12 years old, in an effort to enhance each school’s capacity to implement evidence-based practice and decisions at primary and secondary levels to promote behavioral
competence. The project incorporated promising strategies and tools designed to promote and sustain the use of evidence-based practice and data-driven problem solving. Continuous progress monitoring of systemic variables and student behavioral outcomes (e.g., office-referral data) helped to guide systemic reform efforts. Reductions were noted in the number of student discipline problems, and improvements were noted in critical features of school-wide effective behavior support at a system level.

There are several limitations in this study. Scholars recommend buy-in (>80% of school staff) as a prerequisite for school reform (Horner et al., 2005; Slavin, 2004) and a three-year commitment before undertaking a SWPBS initiative (Sugai et al., 2002). The schools considering adoption of SWPBS activities should assess their readiness for change and stakeholder buy-in prior to embarking on the change initiative (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2003a). Social validity alone is insufficient to ensure implementation (Noell et al, 2005). Both time and support seemed to contribute to successful implementation and institutionalization of evidence-based intervention (EBI) in later project years (Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Elias et al, 2003). Adapting interventions that are focused on principles (e.g., define expectation for behavior) rather than specific practices (e.g., schools should adapt specific rules) and systematically evaluating their utility on an ongoing basis provide a means for adapting practices and systems (Grimes & Tilly, 1996).

Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, and Feinberg (2005) described the effects of whole-school positive behavior support on discipline problems and academic outcomes of students, ages 6-12, enrolled in an urban elementary school. In this qualitative and quantitative study, the whole-school model was designed through technical assistance consultation with teachers who emphasized (a) improving instructional methods; (b)
formulating behavioral expectations; (c) increasing classroom activity engagement; (d) reinforcing positive performance; and (e) monitoring efficacy through data-based evaluation. As compared to a pre-intervention phase, the whole-school intervention was associated with decreased discipline problems (office referrals and school suspensions) over the course of several academic years. Student academic performance, as measured by standardized tests of reading and mathematics skills, improved contemporaneously with intervention.

Financial costs of developing and sustaining whole-school PBS cannot be overlooked. However, the monetary advantages include administrative time devoted to disciplinary incidents (Scott & Barrett, 2004) and fewer out-of-district (private) educational placements for high-risk students (Putnam, Luiselli, Sennett, & Malonson, 2002). Other limitations occurred, such as the accuracy of recording information during the pre-intervention phase, whereas accurate reporting was a mainstay once the intervention was implemented. Changes in student population from year to year, seasonal influences, and inconsistently applied criteria by staff all were limitations in the study.

McCurdy, Mannella, and Eldridge (2003) described a case study of a school-wide positive behavior support model implemented in an ethnically and racially diverse innercity elementary school, with students ages 6 to 12. School-based professionals and behavioral health-care consultants worked together to address the increasing rates of student disruptive behavior. Significant reductions were evident in both the overall level of office discipline referrals as well as the most serious office referral, student assaults.
The researchers used mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) to conduct this study. One limitation of the study was the conclusiveness of evidence emanating from a case study, as opposed to a true or quasi-experimental design.

Nelson, Martella, and Marchand-Martella (2002) evaluated a comprehensive, school-wide program based on an effective behavioral support approach for preventing disruptive behaviors in elementary schools, ages 6 to 12. The program consists of five main elements: a school-wide discipline program; one-to-one tutoring in reading; conflict resolution; a video-based family management program; and an individualized, function-based behavior intervention plan that were developed through a consensus-building participatory process. Seven elementary schools in one district were studied for two years. Comparisons between target students (i.e., those who exhibited disruptive behaviors) and criterion students (i.e., those who did not exhibit disruptive behaviors) indicated positive effect on the social adjustment and academic performance of the target students. The researchers used qualitative and quantitative methodologies to conduct this study.

There were many limitations to this study. A control group was not used in this study. The project had a contrast group, but there were pretreatment differences. There was a high level of student attrition. The impact of transience is unknown. The extent to which these results can be generalized to other school districts is unknown. Future replications would need to be conducted to verify external validity. Maintenance of the project without supporting funds is questionable. Schools involved in the project had financial and staff support. Whether schools can the project in the absence of such supports is unknown.
Office disciplinary referrals. In this qualitative study, Nelson, Benner, Reid, Epstein, and Currin (2002) examined the extent to which K-5th graders (ages 5 to 12), who met the borderline and clinical cut-off scores on the Teacher Report Form (TRF) received one or more office discipline referrals, determined the level false negatives that would occur if one used office discipline referrals as an early screening device. The relatively high levels of false negative suggest that the use of office discipline referrals as an early screening device may fail to identify relatively large numbers of young children in need of interventions and supports. This issue appears to be even more pronounced in the case of students who are experiencing internalizing-related problems.

The sample of children was drawn from primarily a low-SES elementary schools in one geographic location and may not be representative of the general population of public school children. The convergent validity of office discipline referrals was examined with only one social adjustment measure. Teachers were asked to complete the TRF rating forms on several students at a time when the school was focusing on behavioral issues via a whole-school process. This may have influenced the teachers’ rating of children’s behavior. Finally, teachers did not use any established criteria for completing and submitting an office discipline referral, and no formal system was used to monitor the fidelity of the office discipline referrals.

McIntosh, Chard, Boland, and Horner (2006) provide descriptive data on the rates of office discipline referrals and beginning reading skills for students in grades K-3 for one school district that is implementing a three-tier prevention model for both reading and behavior support. In this quantitative study, students in the district are provided a continuum of reading and/or behavior support based on screening measures that indicate
response to universal, targeted, and intensive support. The results provide initial support for the practice of implementing a school-wide academic and behavioral system to reduce incidences of academic and behavioral challenges. The data indicate that the combined efforts of universal behavior and reading interventions are working.

There was only one district studied, and no comparison with a district school-wide reading and behavior programs. The students studied were in grades K-3 only. Behavioral problems increased over time from school entry to high school (Walker & Sprague, 1999), but it is still unknown whether combined school-wide systems produce similar effects beyond third grade.

Putnam, Luiselli, Handler, and Jefferson (2003) conducted two descriptive studies in a public elementary-middle school to illustrate frequency of office referrals as an evaluative data source. Study 1 was a behavioral assessment of office referrals to determine the types of discipline problems confronting school personnel and the distribution of referrals among teachers, students, and grade level. The participants were 592 elementary students in grades K-6. The results indicated a need to develop effective behavior support strategies for classrooms and individual students who had the largest percentage of office referrals at the elementary school. In addition, the majority of the teachers did not make frequent referrals; it was most efficient to intervene with those who initiated the most referrals. In Study II, a fifth-grade class that had the most office referrals in the school received whole-class and individual-student interventions that produced a decrease in the number of referrals. These findings support use of office referrals as a readily available index by which to identify school discipline problems, design interventions, and evaluate outcome.
Each study did not include reliability and validity assessment of the office referral data. A more rigorous control over the implementation of behavior support interventions must be established.

The descriptive study of Rusby, Taylor, and Foster (2007) collected school disciplinary referrals (SDRs) data on a sample of first-grade students who were at risk for developing disruptive behavior problems and created a universal sample from 20 schools in this quantitative and qualitative study. Most SDRs were given for physical aggression, and the predominant consequence was time out. As expected, boys and at-risk students were more likely to receive an SDR and to have more SDRs than were girls and the universal sample. A large difference between schools regarding the delivery of SDRs was found. A zero-inflated Poisson model clustered by school tested the prediction of school-level variables. Students in schools that had a systemic way of tracking SDRs were more likely to receive one. Schools with more low-income students and larger class size gave fewer SDRs. The SDRs predicted teacher rating, and to a lesser extent, parent ratings of disruptive behavior at the end of first grade. Practitioners and researchers must examine school-level influences whenever first-grade discipline referrals are used to measure problem behavior for the school-level influences whenever first-grade discipline referrals are used to measure problem behavior for the purpose of planning and evaluating interventions.

Adequate information about individual and school-wide intervention taking place in the schools was not collected. Second, students were lacking in the reports of positive supports offered or incentives for positive behavior.
**Gaps in the Literature**

Despite the increasing evidence that teachers’ beliefs influence their ways of understanding and acting in the classroom (Davis & Sumara, 1997), the nature and origin of teachers’ representations concerning classroom behavior have not been thoroughly searched. More research needs to occur (Manning & Bear, 2002) regarding aggressive boys and girls in understanding imminent and probable consequences between the two groups. As cited in Murray-Close (2006), Arsenio and Lemerise (2001) state that continual research needs to occur to explore whether children’s values and moral understanding are associated with aggressive conduct. Few studies have examined elementary school children’s moral reasoning about physical versus relational aggression and investigated the relation of such judgments to children’s involvement in aggressive conduct.

The advantage of discipline referrals (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000) is that they are already collected in most schools and provide an efficient source of information for documenting whether reform efforts result in systems change. Office discipline referrals are one approach (Nelson, Benner, Reid, Espstein, & Currin, 2002) that educators could use as a guide in the development and selection of a secondary, and tertiary prevention program; as an outcome measure with which to assess the effectiveness of those programs; and as an early screening procedure to identify children who might benefit from secondary and tertiary programs. Despite the utility of office discipline referrals (Putnam, Luiselli, Handler, & Jefferson, 2003) as an evaluative measure, previous research on this topic has not been extensive. Rusby and Taylor (2007) state that the collection of information on student disruptive behavior problems in schools
by recording and monitoring discipline referrals has potential for being useful in prevention efforts. But, Rusby and Taylor corroborate previous research in stating that little research on the utility and validity of school discipline referrals in elementary schools has been conducted.

Nelson, Martella, and Marchand-Martella (2002) state that the effective behavioral support (EBS) model has shown to increase schools’ capacities for creating positive, teaching and learning, environments and for reducing the occurrence of problems. As cited in McCurdy, Mannella, and Eldridge (2003), most applications of school-wide Positive Behavior Support models have focused on suburban or rural schools in an effort to assess the overall impact on student behavior (Lohrmann-O’Rourke et al., 2000; Taylor-Greene, et al., 1997). Relatively few applications (Scott, 2001; Turnall et al., 2002) have been reported in the research literature specifically addressing the needs of schools in larger urban areas where there is a greater ethnic and cultural mix of students, more students from impoverished environments, and a greater predominance of antisocial behavior school-wide.

Summary

As discussed, much has been written about moral reasoning and student discipline in the elementary school. The body of literature suggests that researchers and educators are seeking alternative methods in working with students. Murray-Close and Crick (2006) state that understanding of when and why children believe that aggression is morally wrong may allow practitioners to intervene and reduce children’s involvement in such conduct.
Given the importance of early detection of risk for behavioral problems, it is imperative that practitioners and researchers have a clear understanding (Rusby and Taylor, 2007) of the nature of the way in which problem behaviors are measured in young children. School discipline referrals are typically used to measure problem behavior in the school setting. Systematic tracking of school discipline referrals is recommended for problem solving and planning of behavior management and support at the school level (Sugai et al., 2000). It is important to collect multiple measures of problem behavior for identifying individual students in need of intervention, selecting appropriate interventions, and evaluating intervention effects. School-wide behavior support may hold promise as a model for urban schools dealing with the negative influence of antisocial behavior.

Research suggests (Manning & Bear, 2002) that aggressive students do not lack awareness of the consequences that their misbehavior has on themselves. Teaching a moral reasoning component might enhance the effectiveness of violence prevention and intervention programs by making the consequences of students’ actions on others more prominent. Therefore, creating a climate where students exhibit pro-social behavior and inhibit antisocial behavior out of concern for others, rather than out of fear of punishment, may be beneficial. In these troubling times (Borba, 2001), parents and educators need far more if they are to succeed in helping their kids not only think morally but also act morally. Unless children know how to act, their moral development is defective. After all, we’ve always known that the true measure of character rests in our actions—not in mere thoughts.
This review of the literature has looked at the history of programs for promoting students’ social and moral development within schools and their lingering impact on current issues for implementation and practice. Additional themes have been reviewed in order to present a context within which to consider this research. They include a summary of school-wide behavior support models, office disciplinary referrals in schools, how office referrals can be used to predict the behavior of students, and what interventions to use to improve the negative behavior.

The literature identifies boys, particularly African-American boys, as those who have the most disruptive issues in schools. Of the 80% male students who get into trouble, a disproportionate number of the African-American students are eventually labeled as learning disabled. Statistical outcomes of this degree lead to conclude that the current system is not just falling short of meeting the needs of African-American boys, but woefully failing to do so. Hence, it leads to the design of a purposeful, deliberate intervention that would be different from what we understand to be the current daily life experiences of these boys. Chapter 3 identifies the plan of action that will be used to explore the moral reasoning of a small group of chronically disruptive African-American boys in an elementary school involved in an interactive intervention intended to stimulate growth in moral reasoning.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the exploratory case study used to obtain information of the lived world of pre-adolescent males in an urban elementary school setting in the context of self, school, and home. Informed by Glatthorn and Joyner (2005), the explorative case study was designed during the investigation to involve a group of chronically disruptive males in an intensive interactive intervention, hereafter referred to as the boys’ discussion group, to stimulate growth in moral reasoning.

This chapter includes six sections. The first section provides a general perspective that identifies the problem statement as part of the introduction. The second section offers in-depth information on the research context, while section three provides a description of the research methodology. Section four presents detailed procedures of the quantitative and qualitative data, information, and tools to be used in data collection. The fifth section describes the data collection and formal analysis of data used. The final section concludes with a summary of the chapter.

General Perspective

This case study used a phenomenological approach that looked at the progression of pre-adolescent African-American male students’ moral reasoning over a six-week period. Linked to Kohlberg’s theoretical framework, this study was intended to stimulate growth in moral reasoning. The rationale for conducting such a study is that there are numerous interventions in schools that purport to tell us what disruptive children need, but none of them emanate from the voices of the children themselves (Nelson, Benner,
Reid, Epstein, & Currin, 2002; Putnam, Luiselli, & Handler, 2003; Rusby & Taylor, 2007; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). This study proposed to capture the voices of pre-adolescent African-American male students in an urban elementary school setting related to their lived world.

Research Context

*Urban school district.* The study took place in an urban school district in Upstate New York, hereafter referred to as the District. According to the District’s website, it had a student enrollment of 34,000 in grades pre-k-12, of which 2,000 were in pre-K; 17,000 were enrolled in grades K-6; and 15,000 in grades 7-12. There were 16,300 males and 15,800 females in the district. The student ethnic profile consisted of 65% African American; 21% Hispanic; 12% White; and 2% other. Additional demographics consisted of 88% of the student population was eligible for free/reduced lunches, of which 50% of the schools have a poverty rate of at least 90% (highest poverty rate among NYS Big 5 districts); 17% were special needs; 8% were English Language Learners; and there were 35 different language groups.

The District included 55 pre-K sites, 39 elementary schools, 19 secondary schools, 1 program for Young Mothers, 1 Family/Adult Learning Center, 3 Parent Information and Student Registration Centers, 1 Customer Service Center, and 1 Parent Education/Training Center.

The District prepared and delivered 11,000 breakfast and lunches daily; provided transportation for 28,000 students to and from school daily; provided support (including transportation) to more than 3,200 students who attended a combination of 100 private, parochial, and charter schools, urban-suburban sites, and home-schooling; and employed
approximately 5,300 employees of which 3,600 were teachers, 250 administrators, and 1,500 support personnel.

*Elementary school.* For the purposes of confidentiality, the study took place in an unidentified elementary school, hereafter referred to as the School. The participants were referred to by fictitious names. There were approximately 1,200 students in grades pre-K-6. There were 555 males and 512 females students who attended the school. The ethnic breakdown consisted of 75% African American, 20% Hispanic, 4% Caucasian, and 1% other. The school had a poverty rate of approximately 91%. Approximately 18% of the students had Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and 20% were English Language Learners. The rate of student attendance was about 91%. There were 419 students suspended from school in the 2006-2007 school year.

Approximately 65% of the students lived in the school neighborhood, and approximately 25% lived in neighborhoods more than a mile and a half outside of the school. Students who lived more than a mile and a half were bused to school and back home. There were approximately 106 teachers; 94 support personnel, and 5 administrators.

According to the New York State Report Card, the School was in good standing. The annual yearly percent targets set for the school were accomplished in the academic areas of English Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

*Research Design*

This mixed methods explorative case study involved six pre-adolescent African-American male students in the School who were sent to the office, three or more times, with disciplinary referrals. This study explored the students’ moral reasoning before and
after they participated in an intensive interactive boys’ discussion group intended to stimulate growth in moral reasoning over a period of six weeks.

With signed consent of parents and students’ assent statements, students met two times per week for 140 minutes with two trained and experienced school professionals who served as facilitators. The investigator, who is also the school principal, was present for all sessions. The boys’ discussion group sessions consisted of six modules, each with two sessions. Modules involved students in discussions regarding sense of self, educational and future aspirations, and family relationships.

The researcher and facilitators provided student guidance in a warm, safe, secure, and caring environment. Providing a trusting and supportive group environment facilitated discussion and disclosure with peers. The study drew upon students’ first-hand experiences with school structures, practices, and interactions with adults and peers in and outside of the school setting. The sessions were recorded, scripted, and coded for subsequent analysis of meaning.

This study used qualitative and quantitative methodologies with a focus on collecting data during group sessions with sixth-grade students in the School setting. The natural setting for data collection was the school where the participants attended. Data tools included (a) Instructional Climate Inventory (ICI): the survey was used as a pretest to capture students’ perception of the school climate and again at the conclusion of the study to capture the students’ perception of the discussion group sessions; (b) Moral Theme Inventory (MTI): the instrument was used for pretest and post-test purposes to capture the moral reasoning of the participants; and (c) Assessment of Adolescent Behaviors and Attitudes Towards School/Community (AABATSC): the questionnaire
was used to support the structure of the interview format. The questions drawn were used as discussion prompts in the interview sessions.

Field notes were used to provide contextual understandings that emerged from group interactions. The researcher identified patterns and themes that occurred during the discussion sessions.

For the purpose of this study, sample size consisted of six participants who are African-American male students in the sixth grade and between the ages of 11 and 13 years old. Participants attended the school where the study occurred. The student sample was drawn from a pool of students who were in the sixth grade and had three or more disciplinary referrals to the office in a six-month period. The pool consisted of 21 students. From this pool, six students were randomly selected to participate in the study. Parents signed consent for student participation and the students signed assent statements.

*Instruments Used in the Study*

The instruments for data collection consisted of Instructional Climate Inventory pretest (see Appendix A); Moral Theme Inventory (see Appendix B); Assessment of Adolescent Behaviors, Attitudes Towards School and Community questionnaire (see Appendix C); and Instructional Climate Inventory post-test (see Appendix D). The data set collected was used for future analysis.

The Instructional Climate Inventory (ICI) assesses students’ perceptions of school climate and was validated on students in grades 3-12 (Braskamp & Mahehr, 1988). The instrument consisted of 20 multiple-choice items with 5-point Likert scale scoring. For purposes of this study, the ICI was modified to include 10 questions. The ICI has been shown to assess the students’ perceptions of the school climate. The decision to use 10
questions was informed through a consultative process with people, such as experienced counselors and national researchers in the field who were qualified to make reasonable judgments and provide solid advice on this subject.

The Moral Theme Inventory (MTI) provided a measure of moral development that was used with young subjects to test the moral thinking of children (Narvaez & Bock, 2001). The MTI consisted of four stories about moral dilemmas. The instrument was modified for this study. Two of the four stories were used. Each story presented aspects of ethical sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and action. Each story had a complex moral message. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used to rate the theme choices. The data collected was to make comparisons by the use of a test-retest reliability to find if there were changes in the moral thinking of the students.

The Assessment of Adolescent Behaviors and Attitudes Towards School and Community (ABATSC) questions were divided into three sections. The survey asked participants to share experiences and feelings about themselves, their school, and home (Children’s Institute, 2001). The survey was modified and used as discussion prompts during the intervention. This self-report instrument is developmentally targeted for upper elementary and middle school students. The instrument adapted scales from a number of empirically validated instruments including the Charles F. Kettering School Climate Inventory (Johnson, Johnson, Gott, & Zimmerman, 1997), the School Life items from the National Education Longitudinal Study (National Center for Education Statistics, 1988), and Search Institute’s Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors (Leffert et al., 1998).
**Study Procedures**

A case study seeks to interpret meanings and relationships that blend a description of events with analysis of them (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). One of the main characteristics of qualitative research is its focus on intensive study of specific instances of a phenomenon in its natural setting that are of interest to the researcher (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005). For the purpose of this study, the natural setting was the School. This study made use of paper and pencil inventories, field notes, and interviews, all which was intended to get a comprehensive understanding of the study.

*Participants in the study.* Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight. Therefore, a sample must be selected from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998) (see Berman’s notes, p. 46). Purposeful sampling in the study consisted of this investigator seeking to work with a group of boys in the sixth grade with profiles of being chronically disruptive in the School.

Sample size consisted of six participants who are African-American males in the sixth grade and between the ages of 11 and 13 years old. Sixth-grade teachers identified male students with three or more disciplinary referrals to the office between September 2009 and March 2010. The pool consisted of 21 students. From this pool, six students were randomly selected to participate in the study. If a parent withdrew a student, the researcher selected another student from the pool who was randomly identified and placed on a student eligibility to participate list.

The reason for a small group is that it provided for a psychologically safe and intimate setting. The small group gave students a chance to speak, be heard, and talk.
more about their lives. There may not have been such quality of interaction with a group size of 21.

The discussion group consisted of six boys viewed as disruptive. The group was planned for six weeks. The participants were randomly selected from a pool of students viewed as disruptive. Informed parent consent was obtained for the boys to participate in the study and students signed assent statements. The boys and their parents were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. The discussion group occurred during the third marking period of the school year. The students met two times per week for a total of 12 sessions. Each session was for 70 minutes. There were three adult facilitators. The sessions were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The discussion group included three facilitators. The first co-facilitator, who took the lead, is an employee in the District and works in the school as a school social worker. The co-facilitator is Caucasian, possesses a Masters degree in Social Work, a Certified Social Work (CSW) certificate, a License Masters Social Work (LMSW) certificate, and has worked in the field for 35 years. The second co-facilitator is an employee of a local hospital and works in the school-based health center as a primary therapist at the School. The co-facilitator is African-American, possesses a Bachelors degree in Psychology, and has worked in the field for 10 years. The third co-facilitator is an employee of the District, principal of the school, and researcher conducting the study. The co-facilitator is African-American, possesses a Masters degree in Education, holds a Certificate of Advance Study (CAS) in Education Administration, a School Administration and Supervision (SAS) certificate, and has worked in the field for 36 years.
The co-facilitating approach was used to engage the students. Co-facilitating involves two or more certified professionals who contract to share responsibility for a single group of students in a single workspace for specific content or objectives with mutual ownership, pooled resources, and joint accountability (Friend & Cook, 2009). This approach was incorporated into the design because the facilitators took on different responsibilities during the delivery of the intervention. The facilitators were responsible for planning the sessions and conferring with each other before each session. There was an understanding that if group consensus could not be reached on any issue, the investigator would decide the next step. All of the facilitators interacted with the students. The facilitators used specific strategies from a combination of models that included (a) one leads, one observes; (b) one leads, one assists, and (c) tag team facilitating where the facilitators shared in facilitating the group.

Parent recruitment. Parents of the students were provided information about the study and why their children were identified to participate in the study. Parents were told that this was a research project where the principal was seeking to find out what changes occur to their children’s moral reasoning after participating in a boys’ discussion group over a period of six weeks. Parents were told that their children’s honest feedback would help inform this study. The role of the facilitators and the weekly modules were explained.

The students in the study were randomly selected. Parents were informed that a student would be dropped from the study if he missed three consecutive sessions and another student would be recruited to join the group. Parents gave consent (see Appendix E) for their children to participate in the study, were provided with the opportunity to
attend two meetings during the study for updates, were given the opportunity to meet more frequently if desired, and informed that they had the right to withdraw their child at any point during the study.

The parents were informed of the adults involved in the study who included the school principal, school social worker, and primary therapist. Parents were informed that the principal conducted the study and that the school social worker and primary therapist, in addition to the principal, facilitated the study. The principal and facilitators provided the parents with information regarding their qualifications to work with their children over the six-week period.

**Boys’ discussion group.** The intensive interactive boys’ discussion group sessions were planned so that students could use their own voice to talk about authentic issues and issues that arose that may have required moral judgment or ethical reasoning, and if so, the students had the opportunity to exercise their moral reasoning. For example, if somebody talked about how you took my stuff or you hit me or you did something I didn’t like, I had an opportunity in those session to reason through why I hit you back or if my mother told me to hit you back why that was important to me.

The agenda was determined through a consultative process in which the researcher exchanged or solicited the views of experienced professors, counselors, and school psychologists in the local community as well as national researchers whose work is engaged on topics of this nature. A typical session involved students assembling in the meeting area before entering the meeting room. Facilitators explained the purpose of each session. After the first session, each session began with a check-in. This was an opportunity for the students to bring up things that were happening in their lives that
might have needed to be discussed in the group. Students responded to preselected interview questions framed on the topic. Students participated in structured activities. Each session concluded with a check-out. Check-outs allowed students to share how they felt about the activity and the topic, allowed the students to give feedback to each other, and allowed the facilitators to assess the level of understanding of the topic with such questions as: What was the point of the day’s activity? What did you learn? How might this be applied in your life?

The study occurred during the third marking period of the school year, between February 2010 and April 2010, at the participants’ school. Facilitators met with the participants two times per week for a total of 12 sessions over a period of six weeks. In order to protect the identity of the participants, each student was assigned a code. Sessions were recorded and transcribed. Detailed notes, identification of themes, and data coding were used for analysis.

Facilitators and participants introduced themselves. Facilitators read a scripted introductory statement to all of the students about the purpose of the session. An assent statement was read to the students (see Appendix F). Participants were encouraged to honestly share their thoughts and feelings in each session. Facilitators used a weekly lesson format to guide each intervention session (see Appendix G). During each session, the weekly format was written on a large sheet of chart paper and posted on the wall for all of the students to refer to as necessary.

*Group discussion modules.* Group discussion modules were arranged in the order of establishing group norms, sense of self, school, and family. Modules were arranged in this order so students understood the purpose of the intervention and to establish group
norms to govern their behavior. The trusting-building and communication module helped build positive relationships among the group. Allowing students time to bond with each other helped cause them to be open in sharing information and increased the possibility to participate in future module activities that focused on school and family.

The boys’ discussion group sessions consisted of modules that were based on elements from the SPARK (SPARK is not an acronym) program. The program uses group process methods to develop interpersonal skills to build competence in troubled youth (Waterman & Walker, 2009). Sessions are interactive and activity based. The first module (see Appendix H) focused on the purpose of the group and group norms. Students were administered two pre-tests: Moral Theme Inventory and Instructional Climate Inventory survey. The second module (see Appendix I) centered on the students’ sense of self. Facilitators elicited students’ perceptions by engaging them in conversations about themselves. The third module (see Appendix J) centered on anger management and regulating emotions. Facilitators involved students in a discussion where they recognized and managed their angry feelings. Students used hands-on activities to better understand the concepts. The fourth module (see Appendix K) focused on peer pressure. Facilitators engaged the students in a discussion and activities about using alternatives in resisting peer pressure and examining relational aggression. The fifth module (see Appendix L) concentrated on educational and future aspirations and family relationships. Students participated in discussions and activities to help them take steps to improve in school and establish reasonable educational and future aspirations. The sixth module (see Appendix M) centered on family relationships. Facilitators used hands-on activities to help students engage in discussions accept their families and the personal traits that are similar to those
of family members. The module included administration of the MTI and ICI posttests and reflected on the intervention experience.

**Approvals and confidentiality.** This research study required approvals from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at St. John Fisher College, the school district, and the local hospital. The boys’ discussion group sessions started after the receipt of all approvals and the signed parent consents.

The group sessions occurred in a private location in the school setting. All of the information collected during the boys’ discussion group session was kept confidential and will be destroyed after three years.

**Data validation.** Validation of qualitative research is an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as described by the researcher and participants. Qualitative researchers use the term credibility rather than validation (Creswell, 2007). Clarifying bias, member checking, and descriptions were techniques used to bring credibility to the research findings.

The clarification of researcher’s bias (Creswell, 2007) is important in the initial phase of the study so that the reader understands the position of the researcher and any bias or assumption that impacts the inquiry. The researcher is the principal in the building that the participants attended and was a participant observer. An assent statement was read to each participant prior to the start of the interview. The statement acknowledged the researcher’s position and asked each participant for honest responses despite the position of the researcher in the school.

Creswell (2007) considers member checking critical for establishing credibility of the findings. Member checking seeks feedback from the participant’s viewpoint of the
credibility of the findings and interpretations. The data was gathered, interpreted, and analyzed for accuracy and credibility.

Descriptions were used to describe the participants and the school environment. Detailed descriptions provide the readers with a context for the readers to transfer information to other settings. Because the proposed sample population in the study was small, a detailed description of the study’s site, participants, background, and data analysis provide credibility to the findings and conclusions.

*Data Collection*

The Instructional Climate Inventory (ICI) pretest and post-test were administered to the six participants in the study. The ICI provided feedback on the participants’ perceptions of the school and group climate in the environment. The Moral Theme Inventory (MTI) was administered to the participants as pre/post-tests. The MTI provided information about the moral reasoning of the participants before and after the intervention sessions. The interview data was obtained from the participants’ responses to questions drawn from the Assessment of Adolescent Behaviors and Attitudes Towards School/Community (AABATSC) questionnaire. The data was collected and organized in files and stored in computer databases for future analysis.

The researcher created summary notes, categories, and codes. The data was organized into themes by examining the participants’ responses. According to Creswell (2007), the researcher becomes the teller of the story by using in-depth narratives. This was the case in scripting and telling the story of the participants in the study. The information was used to better understand the choice behavior of the students in their
own voice to gain insight about their world to develop problem-solving strategies for these students.

Triangulation. Triangulation was used as one of the validation strategies to ensure credibility of the study. According to Creswell (2007), triangulation is a process that involves corroborating evidence from difference sources. Patten (2007) agrees that triangulation is a technique that uses multiple sources to obtain data on the research topic. The researcher collected sources of evidence, such as peer debriefings. Peer debriefings provided an external check of the research process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the role of peer de-briefer as an individual who keeps the researcher honest. The researcher discussed the findings with colleagues and academia professors who hold doctorate degrees.

Summary

This exploratory mixed method case study examined the world of a small group of pre-adolescent African-American male students viewed as repeatedly disrupting the school environment. Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, and process of one or more individuals. Cases are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data-collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). Case study methodology was appropriate for this study because it allowed for a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explored in depth in an intimate way the essence of the boys’ experiences about a phenomenon as described by them. The extensive knowledge of the boys’ life world provided the investigator with a uniquely rich context for interpreting their conversations.
Since the participants are children, there were inherent limitations. Children may be reluctant to talk about painful events and are easily led by the questions of adults and may provide false information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It is important to use age-appropriate questions, refrain from asking long and complex questions, and avoid posing more than one question at a time. Barriers between children and adults may be bridged when interviewing children in natural settings. Interviews with children may preferably take place within the context of some other task, such as drawing, reading a story, role playing, or watching a video (Kvale & Brinkman). Although there are limitations, the interviews with children allow them to give voice to their own experiences and understanding of their world. For the purpose of this study, on-site support staff (social workers and psychologists) were available to provide counseling assistance if any of the interview questions were found to be emotionally challenging for the study participants.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter reports information from surveys, questionnaires, and interviews that helped to obtain students’ perceptions of their lived world through their lens. Subjects were administered the Moral Theme Inventory (MTI), Instructional Climate Inventory (ICI), and questions from the Assessment of Adolescent Behaviors and Attitudes Towards School and Community (AABATSC) questionnaire. The SPARK program provided activities to help structure interviews. The interviews resulted in three emergent themes that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Research Questions

The investigation focused on two research questions:

1. Were there changes in moral reasoning of the students after participating in boys’ discussion group sessions over a six-week period, and if so, what direction were those changes?

2. What themes were prevalent in the students’ lives as described in their own words during the intervention?

Results

Instructional Climate Inventory. The Instructional Climate Inventory (ICI) was initially administered as a pretest to assess the students’ perceptions of the school climate and reissued as a post-test to assess the students’ perceptions of the intensive, interactive discussion group in which they had participated. The results are presented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2:
Table 4.1

*School ICI Pretest [n=6]*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total raw score</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>227</td>
<td>37.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Raw score is based on 10 questions.
Table 4.2

*Group ICI Post-test [n=6]*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total raw score</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>269</td>
<td>44.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Raw score is based on 10 questions.

All six students took both the pretests and post-tests administered. A total of six students were included in the analysis of the ICI data. The instrument was composed of 10 questions. On a scale where the highest rating score was 50.0, the students’ rating score for the rating score for the school climate was 37.83 (Table 4.1) and the group climate was 44.83 (Table 4.2). The overall results showed that students favored to work in the group atmosphere compared to that of the whole-school atmosphere.
Moral Theme Inventory

The Moral Theme Inventory (MTI) instrument measured the moral reasoning of children. The instrument was administered as a pretest and post-test. The results are presented in Table 4.3:

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Stand. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>89.00</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>87.67</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of six students were included in the analysis of the MTI data. All six students were administered pre and post-tests. The mean score on the pretest was 89.00 with a standard deviation (SD) of .53. The mean score on the post-test was 87.67 with a standard deviation of .83. Upon repeated administration of the MTI, the means and SD hardly differed. It was concluded that no meaningful change in students’ moral reasoning could be attributed to the group experience.

Assessment of Adolescent Behaviors and Attitudes Towards School/Community

Questions from the Assessment of Adolescent Behaviors Attitudes Toward School/Community (AABATSC) questionnaire were used to help structure the interviews. The data gathered involved the students in discussions about (a) sense of self, inclusive of anger and peer pressure; (b) educational and future aspirations; and (c) family.
**Semi-structured Interviews**

Through conversations, we get to know other people and get to learn about their experiences, feelings, hopes, and the world they live in. The kind of conversation below focuses on qualitative research interviews. The research interview is based on the conversations of daily life. A semi-structured life world interview is a form of research interview. It is defined as an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale, 1996). Interviews were conducted to study the subjects’ understanding of the meaning in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world. Table 4.4 outlines these sessions by week.
Table 4.4

*Weekly Intervention Sessions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Instructional Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Inventory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moral Theme Inventory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sense of Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sense of Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anger Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anger Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Peer Pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Educational and Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Family Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moral Theme Inventory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inventory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The semi-structured interviews were centered on the subjects’ responses to questions used as prompts to engage the students during the discussion group sessions. The interview sessions were conducted for six weeks for a total of 12 sessions. The sessions were led by three trained professional facilitators. The facilitators were coded as
F1, F2, and F3. The interviews focused on the students’ self, anger management, peer pressure, educational aspirations, and family relationships (Table 4.4). “The subjects of our conversations reflect what we consciously or unconsciously consider important, what we believe in, what we value” (Smith, 2008, p. 195). Students’ conversational narratives are presented in order of topics discussed and do not represent any particular preference of importance.

**Interview Questions and Narrative**

The interview questions and narrative report the students’ responses to interview questions as they each shared thoughts on a sense of self: anger and peer pressure, school/future aspirations, and family relationships. The narrative is presented in order of how the subjects were coded. The order does not represent any particular preference of importance, time of interview, or significance to the study. The questions used to help frame the interviews include, but are not limited to:

*Sense of self.* The primary questions included:

1. Do you like yourself?
2. What makes you sad?
3. Do you feel like you have someone you can talk to when you are feeling sad?
4. Do you have to give something in order to be happy?
5. Is it hard to make friends?
6. How does it feel being you?

*Sense of self and anger.* The primary questions included:

1. At what point do you become angry?
2. What do you think of when you become angry?
3. What would you do if you were walking down the hall and another student trips you?

4. What would you do if a person cut in front of you in the lunch line?

5. Are we expected to be treated differently than how we treat other people?  

*Sense of self and peer pressure.* The primary questions included:

1. When you think about peer pressure situations, what are you being asked to do?

2. Do you feel you will be approached to join a gang?

3. How do you keep from joining a gang?

*Educational/future aspirations.* The primary questions included:

1. Is it important to do my best in school?

2. Does everybody feel that they always do their best?

3. What gets in your way of doing your best in school?

4. Do you have personal goals about education?

5. Do you get encouragement at school?

6. What do you see yourself doing in middle school?

7. What do you want right now in your life?

*Family relationships.* The primary questions included:

1. Who are you like in your family?

2. If there’s something you could change about your family, what would that be?

3. Do your parents give you help when you need it?
Student Profiles

M1. M1 was a 12.2 year old sixth grader. He lives with his mother and two siblings. He has a positive self-image. He stated, “I don’t like myself. I love myself.” He shared that he is unique. He noted that he feels sad when “girls break up” with him. He expressed that he felt sad when his stepbrother moved away and when he lost money. When it comes to making friends, he indicated that it was not hard for him to make friends. He indicated that his family makes him happy and being “thanked for accomplishments.” He revealed about a time when he cleaned the house for his mother but was not given any credit for what he did. He stated:

Like I cleaned the whole house for my sister for mother’s day – my mom’s – the house was a mess cause we had to clean – new years – and my mom was going to make us clean like at 12 that night. So I didn’t feel like waking up, so I just asked my sister if she wanted to clean up and we did the whole house. When mom got home she didn’t even give us a thank you. She walked in went to her room, fell asleep. I’m like, that’s wrong.

M1 indicated that he become angry when people are “drilling” on him and taking his stuff. He stated that he becomes scared when he becomes angry. When presented with two scenarios that could lead to anger, M1 shared that if he were tripped by someone he would “hit the person” and if he were cut in line, he would “push the person out of line.” M1’s response to the question, Is it important to do your best in school was “you do the best at school and you get best grades, and you try to get a scholarship to college.” When asked if he did his best he responded, “No.” He indicated that “other kids bullying and fighting” in the classroom get in the way of doing his best. M1 noted that his personal,
long-range goal is to become a football player. He commented that his mother encouraged him to stay in school. He mentioned that in middle school he sees himself in “honors class.” M1 responded that he looked like his mother and brother. He did not indicate that he would change anything about his family. He indicated that he felt support from his mother. When it came to discipline, M1 shared that his mother “hits” first and ask questions later. He shared that his mom hits him and his response was, “why are you hitting me, I didn’t do anything.” He shared:

Say you got some ice cream and another kid walks in, takes the money, runs out and you’re the only one left in. Like all you took the money, we’re going to bring you home, tell your mama. You go home and tell your mama, you’re mom start whomp, whomp, whomp and beat you up for no reason. And then at the end she be like, now what happened?

M2. M2 is a 12.8 year old sixth grader. His household consists of his mother and sister. At the time of the study, M2’s mother was incarcerated for abusing drugs. M2’s 21-year-old sister is his legal guardian. He presented a positive self-image. He stated that he likes himself. He shared that it felt “cool” being who he is because of having a certain style. M2 shared that he looks like his 30-year-old brother. He did not indicate that he would change something about his family. He talks to his grandma when feeling sad. He stated that he does not find it hard to make friends. M2 shared that “winning contests” makes him happy. He mentioned about the time he won the spelling bee contest. M2 shared that he “becomes angry when people stare” at him. He indicated that, if tripped by someone, he would ask the person if it were on purpose. M2 referenced that lots of people “get robbed and kill others in relating his response to the question, When you think
about a peer pressure situation, what are you being asked to do? He indicated that he had been approached to join a gang. M2 stated that “people go out and try their own little group to call family.” M2 stated that when doing your best in school, you “don’t settle for less.” When asked if he always did his best, he responded, “No.” He shared that teachers encouraged him at school. His long-range goal consisted of “playing football and getting better in his artwork.”

M3. M3 is an 11.10 year old sixth grader. He lives with his mother and four siblings. When asked, Do you like yourself, he presented a positive self-image as he shared that he likes himself. He shared that nothing makes him sad. He responded that he talked to counselors when feeling sad. He commented that he did not find it hard making friends. M3 commented that he becomes angry when “people step on his shoes and bother his family.” He indicated that he thinks of “running away when he is angry [because of] not being treated fairly.” He stated that if tripped [by someone] he would “chase the person.” When asked, Are we expected to be treated differently than how we treat other people, M3 responded, “They don’t care about us. Like if you get into a fight and somebody sees you getting beat up, they just sit there and watch you get beat up.” He said that he, too, had been approached to join a gang. M3 shared that it is important to do his best in school. He shared as did the other five students that he did not always do his best. His personal goals consisted of being on “honor roll” and attending “college.” In middle school, he mentioned that he hopes to get good grades. M3 commented that he looks like his brother. He did not indicate that he would change anything about his family. In response to a question by the facilitator about personal property being returned
and later discovered not to work, M3 responded, “My mom is going to come outside and kick and then smack him to get my property back.”

*M4.* M4 is a 12.10 year old sixth grader. He lives with his mother and two siblings. He expressed a positive self-image by indicating that he likes himself. He indicated that nothing made him sad. He shared that he talked to his sister when he needed someone to talk to when he felt sad. He indicated that it was not hard making friends. He noted that he is happy when he is thanked. M4 informed the group that he “hits and yells” at people when he becomes angry. He mentioned that he thinks of “fighting” when he is angry. He said he would yell at a person if tripped. M4 shared that he would “throw the person in the garbage” if the person cut him in line. M4’s response to the question, *When you think about peer pressure situations, what are you being asked to do,* was to steal, fight, and rob. He shared that he had been approached to join a gang. He shared that to stay out of a gang, “you run.” M4 confided in the group that he thought of “joining a gang when he was fighting a lot. He indicated that his impression was the gang would give him protection but he said, “No.” M4 shared that he does not always do his best in school and that teachers encouraged him at school. He did not indicate that he would change anything about his family.

*M5.* M5 is an 11.7 year old sixth grader. He lives with his mother, stepfather, and sibling. M5 shared that he looked like his dad. He did not indicate that he would change anything about his family. He indicated that it felt good being himself. He indicated that nothing makes him sad. He commented that he did not have someone who he could talk to when feeling sad. M5 shared that winning awards for swimming made him happy. He shared that he won awards for swimming. M5 shared that he becomes angry when
“people talk too much and when people touched him.” When asked the peer pressure question regarding what are you being asked to do, M5 commented, “smoke.” Although not a question, M5 volunteered the comment that “people join gangs because they don’t feel loved and they want a brother.” M5 stated that you should “do your best to strive to achieve a goal. He shared that he did not always do his best. He commented that his personal goal was to “get a scholarship” to college. He indicated that teachers encouraged him in school. He hopes to play basketball in middle school.

M6. M6 is a 13.0 year old sixth grader. He lives with his grandparents, sister, and cousin. He expressed a positive self-image. He said, “I love me because there is nobody else like me.” He stated that “he is special because he has a special kind of swag.” He defined swag as “your personality, your style. He further explained:

There’s certain stuff you can bite on, like if somebody got a new pair of shoes and you like those shoes. Like you aren’t supposed to bite—you can buy those shoes but you got to show some of your life. You just can’t be having that pair of shoes. That’s wrong.

He shared that nothing makes him sad. He did not engage in the conversation about having to talk to someone when feeling sad. He did not participate in the discussion about whether it was hard to make friends. M6 stated that winning races in gym, being acknowledged for accomplishments, and being thanked for good deeds makes him happy. M6 noted, “Like if I do something for somebody and they don’t tell me thank you, then I’m not going to be happy. They are not going to be happy either.” M6 stated that he becomes angry when he has to “repeat himself and bullying little people.” He shared that he thinks of a temper tantrum and punching when angry. If tripped in line M6 responded
by saying he said that he would “yell or curse at the person.” His response to the question about getting cut in line was to “push the person out of line because the person just stepped in front of me. So I thought he didn’t respect me—so I would push him.” M6 shared that the peer pressure situations he thinks of is where people are asked to drink or engage in sex. He indicated that he had been approached to join a gang and shared to stay out of gangs, he noted: “You just tell them no and then you’re going to have to fight.” He indicated that if you tell someone, as what he did with his dad, it would help you stay out of a gang. M6 responded, “No,” to the question about always doing his best in school. He shared that “the behavior of people” got in the way of him doing his best in school. He commented on the relationship of good behavior and the possible impact of entering college:

If you get in trouble and start fighting and you fight a lot, and you’re sent to the principal’s office, and then when you do go to college or whatnot, they’re going to look at how many times you’ve been in the principal’s office, how many times you’ve blew up at school, then that’s going to affect your chances to get into a college.

M6 shared that he looked like his cousin. He did not indicate that he would change anything about his family. In response to the return of personal property that was later determined not to work, he said that his mother would resolve the situation by stating “my mom going to kick him, and tell him to get his mom.”
Emergent Themes

The themes that emerged from the interviews focused on the subjects’ opinions and perceptions about themselves, educational and future aspirations, and family influence. The three themes that emerged from the interviews include (a) fairness—student self-centered behaviors; (b) motivating factors for success, and (c) maternal influence as enforcer and defender.

Theme one: fairness—student self-centered behaviors. Many of the conversations focused on the treatment of people. The students talked about how people should treat them and, in return, how they would treat others. Five of the six students shared that if another student bumped into them they would respond by “hitting or pushing” the person. One of them said he would ask, “Why did you do that?” One of the students stated, “Talking does not do any good.” Four of the students mentioned the understanding that it is expected to do something in return if something is done to them. M6 shared, “He just stepped in front of me. I thought he didn’t respect me, so I pushed him.” M1 noted, “They are getting me back after I hit them, but they going to get into a fight then.” M6 said, “If I hit them, I expect them to hit me back cause I just hit them.” M6 adds that “You’re taught to believe you fight if someone even thinks they’re bullying you and that’s what you are going to do.” M4 said, “If they don’t listen to me, then I’m fighting.” M4 and M6 agreed that if you do not hit back when something is done to you, you are considered to be a “punk” and you are “going to get picked on every day.”

Theme two: academics and sports – motivating factors for success. Student conversations were divided between educational and future aspirations. Four of the students spoke on the subject of educational aspirations. M1 commented that in high
school he hopes to “be smart and [placed] in an honors class.” M3 stated that he wants to be “smart in class.” M2 shared that he hoped to “get better at my art,” and M6 talked about “getting good grades” in high school. The conversations regarding the topic of future aspirations centered on sports. All six students commented on this topic. M1 hoped to be a “major league baseball player.” M2, M3, and M4 shared that they want to be part of a “football team” in college or the National Football League. M5 and M6 indicated they wanted to be part of a “basketball team.” The students who mentioned college indicated a desire to play on the college football, basketball, or baseball team. All six students came with the understanding that in order to play sports in high school their grades must reflect that they are passing high school courses and that poor behavior can interfere with team sports in high school. Students understood that to play sports in college they had to be successful in graduating high school with good grades. Students understood that all professional athletes graduated high school and the majority of them were involved in sports in college. Conversations showed that students expressed that they value learning for academic reasons rather than for athletics.

Theme three: maternal influence as enforcer and defender. Four of the six subjects live in a household with the mother and siblings. One lived in a household with the grandmother, sibling, and cousin, and one lived in a household where there is a mother, stepfather, and sibling. The subjects provided information about their mother in the role of enforcer. Three of the subjects reported that mothers chastised them before asking questions. Questions followed after being chastised. M1 mentioned that his mother “beat you up for no reason and then at the end she be like now what happened?” M6 agreed that in his household “if she says no she means no. That’s what she always
tells me. I’m like ma… Nope. I said no. Ask me again…and I just leave before she even
finishes.” M6 further explained that “she doesn’t let you say nothing and then I’m afraid
to talk after she just beat me.” He said he is “use to it, that’s my mother.” M4 shared
peers give you a chance to ask questions before hitting but “if it is your mom, she isn’t
going to give me no chance to explain until she is done.” M4 commented that he
“wouldn’t dare hit his mother because she brought me in this world and she can take me
out.” The subjects talked a great deal about their moms as defender. When asked, in a
case when you are the victim, what would you do, M4, M5, and M6 responded that they
would inform their mom. When asked why would you tell your mother, M1 responded,
“To defend him.”

Summary

This chapter presented findings related to how young adolescent African-
American male students in an urban elementary school engaged in an intervention by
sharing their voices of their lived world. The students were administered the MTI
instrument and the ICI survey. Students were issued the AABATSC questionnaire that
revealed three themes. The MTI did not show a statistical difference between the pretest
and post-test. No significant changes in moral reasoning resulted for the boys’
participation in the discussion group. The ICI pretest and post-test survey revealed that
the students favored engaging in conversations in a group atmosphere compared to a
school atmosphere. The AABATSC questionnaire structured students’ conversations in
the areas of sense of self, school, and future aspirations and family influence. Three
themes surfaced as students disclosed information about their lived world: (a) reciprocity:
student self-interest, (b) athletics as a means to success, and (c) matriarch as enforcer and
defender. Chapter 5 will discuss results in terms of implications of the findings, limitations of study, recommendations, summary of the study, and closing with a final thought.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the moral reasoning of a small group of chronically disruptive pre-adolescent African-American male students in an elementary school involved in an interactive intervention intended to stimulate growth in moral reasoning over a six-week period. This chapter begins with implications of the findings followed by limitation of the study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and a summary of all five dissertation chapters.

Implications of Findings

Findings from this study presented in Chapter 4 support theory, professional practice, scholarly understandings, and decision-making in the field of teacher leadership.

*Moral Theme Inventory.* Moral Theme Inventory (MTI) measured the moral development of the subjects using theme stories. Subjects were administered the MTI pretests and post-tests. The results of the raw data showed three different student groupings. Two students increased, one remained the same, and three regressed. M4 and M6 appear to be much more invested in the intervention in comparison to the others. Both boys offered much verbal feedback that was evident in reviewing the transcribed interviews. M3 appears to be invested, but at times displays immature behavior and appears distracted, which may impact scores. M1’s immaturity level is evident during the intervention. Interviews show a need to redirect attention to keep M1 on the topic. M2 lacks attention during the group sessions as he is preoccupied with his drawings. M2 talks about dropping out of the study but changes his mind as the physical activities increased.
M5 appears to invest in intervention but attention span drifts toward physical activities. It is the hope of this investigation that from pretests to post-tests would show change. However, summary data hardly move from pretest and post-tests. Increasing the intervention period from a short period of time to a longer period may have made a difference in the data.

As noted in Chapter 4, the results of the MTI indicated that the means and standard deviation were roughly the same, suggesting that no meaningful change in students’ moral reasoning maturity could be attributed to the group experience. The very nature of maturity is evolutionary. The design that occurred over a period of weeks might look too ambitious. Although the study did not yield significant moral growth results, this does not mean the sessions were ineffective. The results may or may not be attributed to the participants’ maturity level and short timeline of implementation. It would be interesting to locate the participants a year later and meet with them regarding past conversations. The additional time for the boys to mature may or may not show to be beneficial to what was discussed in the group sessions. The study was grounded on the idea that an intensive, interactive group experience can have an impact on the boys’ moral reasoning. Let us not give up on the thought simply because we did not obtain the desired results the first time around.

*Instructional Climate Inventory.* The evidence suggests that the subjects bond, trust, and feel comfortable engaging in the group atmosphere compared to the school in general. The evidence argues that rather than using some of the conventional methods of discipline, such as peer isolation, chastisement, and denial of privileges, a better strategy towards acculturating students to school might be to bring students together, give them a
chance to trust each other, to like each other, and to form bonds with one another. In the intervention, students did not get into fights in the group and did not become competitive with each other. The group did not become a place where they exacerbated each other’s alienation of the school. The opposite occurred. Subjects appear to like each other, build trust, and show they care about each other.

In the literature review section, there was a reference where Kohlberg (Power, 1989) states that if there are going to be any changes to the boys’ moral reasoning, we are supposed to be able to provide a therapeutic environment for students that is safe and supportive. Some readers may challenge that statement and say, how did the researcher know such an environment was established? The researcher knows because the students completed an instrument that shows that they thought it was. In addition, and in the investigator’s judgment, this is what was done to provide a safe environment. Experienced adult facilitators were procured. Facilitators (a) listened to each student, (b) made sure each student had a turn, (c) helped students clarify, and (d) made sure nothing got out of control. Those are all the things they did to make it a safe environment. I know that does not prove that it was safe and secure for the boys. However, I did everything I knew how to do to make the environment safe.

Assessment of Adolescent Behaviors Attitudes Towards School/Community.

Questions from the Assessment of Adolescent Behaviors Attitudes Towards School/Community (AABATSC) questionnaire were used as prompts to initiate discussions with the subjects. Questions focused on the subjects’ self, educational and future aspirations, and family influence. The following data provides a quasi-objective summary of the subjects.
Students’ School Profile

M1. M1 entered sixth grade with a historically challenging and behaviorally difficult previous year. He lives with his mother and two siblings. M1 is a bright young boy with a reading level at grade level or above grade level. His is on grade level. He enjoys reading. He often requested to listen to his MP3 player and is a fan of music. He showed an interest in sports, especially enjoying swimming, football, and basketball. He would often play basketball with the boys in the classroom during free time. He “dated” girls throughout the course of the school year. He flirted with girls and appeared pleased to be dating them. He most likely was sexually active or contemplating it, as on one occasion a condom dropped from his pocket. He appeared embarrassed by the situation. When his mother was called, she explained it was probably his older brother’s. M1 engaged in a close circle of friends in the classroom. Despite their close relationship, that did not stop him from having arguments with his friend and violent threats against each other.

M1 was a natural leader in group activities and very much a comedian. During the course of the school year, he was nominated and elected to be President of the Student Government. He was quickly impeached of that position, however, due to his lack of self-control towards others. He maintained that he was set up by others and refused to take responsibilities for any action that led to his removal as president. M1 could be very emotional and shed tears when situations truly affected him. He rarely acted appropriately in unstructured settings. Whenever there was a substitute teacher in place, M1 would often act out creating problems that would result in him being referred to the main office. M1 at times carried a haughty disposition and would refuse to work
assignments. Teacher redirection was necessary to get him back on track. He periodically engaged in arguments with adults in the school, ranging from teachers to administrators. There was no limit to what he would argue about and with whom. He once engaged in such an intense argument with a teacher that she referred to him as “mental.” Despite his previous difficult years, M1 made some significant gains throughout his sixth grade year. While he continues to struggle to make appropriate choices at times and respect adults, he worked on self-control. M1 has the ability to decipher right from wrong, but the social pressures and influences surrounding him have a major impact on him that at times clouds his judgment. He enjoys academics when it comes easily for him but finds serious frustrations with tasks that require personal investment and extensive thought. M1 was a part of the school’s drum ensemble but was removed due to his poor behavior.

Through the duration of the school year, he lived with his mother, an older sister, and an older brother. His brother, entering the seventh grade, had become involved with criminal mischief that forced his mother to attend many court hearings. His older sister gave birth to a baby that also resided with M1. Although his father did not reside in the home, he was able to spend time with him. It appeared that while his parents were currently not residing together, they still engaged in an on-again, off-again relationship. M1’s mother attended school throughout the day at a local junior college and worked or went out with friends until late at night. M1 often put himself to bed late at night due to watching a movie, and his tiredness in school was evidence of a prior late night. As a result, he often complained of being tired in school. He often requested to call his mother during the school day and she was usually not available to speak with him. When contacted, his father appeared to be more of the disciplinarian than his mother. When
items were due at school, his parents would promise to follow through but did not carry
out their promises. M1 responded to his parents’ lack of parental follow through by
making excuses for them.

M2. M2 is a child with a lot of obstacles to overcome in his life. He was very hard
to get to know in the beginning of the year. He was absent from school, which made it
hard for him to bond with students and adults. M2 has an interest in sports and drawing,
and likes to hang-out with friends. He has many obstacles to overcome: mother
incarcerated for abusing drugs, father absent from home, and he blames his grandmother
for the separation of his mother and father. M2 is willing to work hard to please the
people who believe in him and whom he values.

M2 struggled in school. He was retained prior to sixth grade and was anxious
about whether he would fail sixth grade. He was viewed as a bully in school. He gets
frustrated with school work and easily gives up. He did not outreach for support in the
presence of his peers but was not as reluctant requesting support in the absence of his
peers. He responded best to positive feedback. He used drawing as an outlet for his
frustration. M2 spent time drawing when not engaged with academic subject matter. His
goal was to attend a local magnet school that focused on the arts, but his grades
interfered. He did not want to make poor choices but is easily influenced by negative
pressure. He shared apprehension about moving on to high school due to peer pressure
and the freedom of moving about the school environment.

M2 has a challenging home life. He does not have a relationship with his father
and his mother is incarcerated. He blames his grandmother for the separation of his
mother and father. He lives with his 21-year old sister who serves as guardian. M2 was
protective of his family and guarded about sharing information. Initially, he refused to share any information regarding his home. This changed as his level of trust increased, and he began to open up about his home life. He was both excited and reserved to discover that his mother would be released from jail by the end of summer. He had a concern about her returning to the use of drugs. He shared private thoughts of wanting her to stay in jail because it was really hard to see her strung out on drugs at home. M2 was embarrassed about his house and where he lived. His sister moved them to another area due to violence in the previous neighborhood. M2 was very happy about moving to a different neighborhood.

M3. M3 enjoyed playing football and basketball and often played basketball with other classmates during free time. M3 was below the average height of his peers but this did not interfere with his pursuit of engaging in playing basketball games with his friends. M3 tended to be more of a follower than a leader in most respects. He mainly followed M1, as they had a close friendship from their previous school year. The boys played on the same team for basketball and would discuss sports together. He rarely carried a book bag to school, and usually, the only item he ever carried to school was a basketball.

M3 read slightly below grade level but appeared to put forth an effort. He often would deny the behavior that led to being reprimanded and would pout and sulk. He had difficulty with facing the consequences and was argumentative. He enjoyed adult praise and often would point out his successes to adults to receive that positive feedback. He thrived on positive reinforcement. M3 engaged in arguments with other students. M3 has been known to use inappropriate language when involved in arguments with peers. His
conflicts consisted of bickering and name-calling, and he often used sexually abusive words. M3 used sexually abusive words generated by M1 to insult or upset others. M3 misbehaved during unstructured settings, such as when there were substitute teachers in the classroom. He was easily distracted by engaging in negative discussion with his peers and would need redirection. M3 was a part of the school’s drum ensemble, but once M1 was removed from that activity due to poor behavior, he quit, too.

M3 resides with his mother and during the school year endured a move to a new home on Davis Street. Prior to the move, M3 was able to walk to school but after the move required bus transportation. His mother allowed him to spend nights at his cousin’s house, a fifth grader. On those occasions, M3 would sometimes arrive to school late. His mother did not have vehicle transportation, and M3 was unable to participate in school functions unless he stayed with his cousin. His mother conducted telephone conversations in an attempt to get him to make better choices regarding his behavior.

M4. M4 came to sixth grade with an extremely difficult fifth grade year behind him. He had spent the majority of his fifth grade year in the in-school suspension room and was notorious for his short fused temper, his stubborn attitude, and his violent nature. He argued with adults, engaged in physical altercation with students, and gave his mother a difficult time. He enjoys playing basketball and listening to music. He looks at himself as a comedian, but his humor was misunderstood by adults. While he enjoys his sense of humor, adults find it annoying and disrespectful. M4 dresses simple and does not appear consumed with recent fashion trends, although M4 does follow the trend of saggy pants. There was a point in the school year when he was obsessed with wearing the same gray hoody. This became an issue with teachers when he was asked to remove the hoody from
his head and he refused to do so. M4 had issues with other students in the school that led to verbal and physical threats. M4 claims that he does not look for trouble, but regardless, trouble seems to find him. M4 did not “date” as much as M1 and M6. Throughout the school year, he spoke of one girlfriend but was not openly flirtatious with girls. Most of his interactions with the opposite sex tend to be that of a bullying nature. He picked on girls, teased them, and would push or touch them in a way to annoy them. M4 had an unusual patch of gray hair on one area of his head and was often ridiculed because of it by his peers.

M4 does not function well in an unstructured setting and was referred to the office for behaviors in unstructured environments where he questioned authority and broke rules. These behaviors resulted in removal from the classroom and placed in the in-school suspension room. He is not flexible with change even when prepared in advanced. M4 generally does not adhere to the school norms. He prefers to sit back and only interacts on his own terms. He is easily frustrated and is not self-motivated to finish tasks he does not enjoy or finds too difficult.

M4 currently resides with his mother, younger sister, and younger brother. His parents are currently separated. His father, with whom he has occasional contact, lives in another city. His mother is actively involved in his schooling in terms of his behavior and some of his academics. She is open with staff regarding her son’s current and past behavioral issues in school. He attends church regularly and shared how thankful he is for having God in his life.

M5. M5 had been a student here for the past two years and has never repeated a grade. His attendance was above average. He attended the city recreation center and was
an active member of the basketball team. He was a natural leader on the basketball court as playing basketball is his joy and passion.

M5 has significant strengths in the academics but demonstrates difficulty with organizational skills and staying on task. He requires individual attention from teachers to keep him organized and prepare him for assignments. M5’s behavior is more appropriate with adults than peers. He will work with teacher-driven contracts to participate in school-wide programs and activities. He wants to be seen as responsible and trustworthy by adults but does not display the same characteristics when interacting with his peers.

M5 lives with his biological mother and stepfather along with a younger sibling. His mother demonstrated involvement in school and appeared at major school functions and conferences with teachers. His family situation had been stable and provided a positive environment for him. He expressed a sense of pride in his family and enjoyed sharing stories about special family moments with others.

M6. M6 came to sixth grade with significant behavioral problems from previous grades. He is consumed in getting his opinion across and challenging authority in mainstream thinking. M6 has difficulty maintaining his anger and is easily set off by the behavior of others. He carries the notion that others trigger his anger, and they should refrain from doing so in order to curve his reaction. He rarely sees the error of his own ways and is quick to argue with others. He has stated that he can feel his “blood boil and his blood pressure rising” when others bother him. He has been known to be unresponsive when trying to solve a conflict between him and another student.

During the school year, M6 faced a traumatic tragedy of his cousin drowning. The incident was extremely horrifying to M6 in that the days prior to his cousin drowning, he
asked his grandmother to take him for a visit with him. His grandmother ignored his request. As a result, both he and his grandmother express guilt for the drowning and not taking time for the visit. After the burial, M6 refused to talk to school counselors, social workers, or any staff about the incident and kept his emotions under lock. Eventually, he was able to move on from the tragedy, but obviously, he remembered and longed for his cousin. He focused on dating girls.

Through the course of the school year, he enjoyed “dating” girls in his grade level and thrived on the flirting exchanges among the girls. He often referred to his good looks and charming personality as his best features. He dated an older girl at one point during the school year and it was discovered that they were exchanging rather racy text messages to each other during the school day. He enjoys a variety of sports, especially football and basketball. He plays for a local football league during the summer and part of the school year. Performing dance moves that correlate with popular music is also an activity he enjoys.

M6 finds his joys in some sports, girls, and music. M6 is passionate about the activities that interest him. During his year of sixth grade, he made significant progress in terms of his maturity and his ability to function despite not getting along well with everyone and not liking everything about school. He requires reminders that the world does not revolve around him and that he needs to take into consideration the feelings of others.

M6 has below grade level skills and these are a reflection of his lack of ability to put forth effort in topics that are challenging for him. While he has more potential, he carries the attitude that he is too “cool” for school. M6 enjoys activities that are
nonacademic. He enjoys the ability to show his independence and trustworthiness on tasks that are nonacademics. He does not perform well in unstructured settings where he challenges the authority and carries a haughty disposition. He believes at times that he can do no wrong and that other adults should show him respect before he gives it in return.

M6 has resided with his maternal grandmother, younger sister, and younger cousin for over one year. M6’s grandmother is readily available when needed to discuss concerns with his academics and behavior. He is close to his younger sister, and they behave in a fashion that is normal of siblings: constant bickering, name-calling, and the occasional fight. While they may engage in nonproductive activity, they are very protective of one another and will come to the defense of one another if they get into trouble.

Emergent Themes Findings

Results of the conversations revealed three themes: (a) fairness: student self-centered behaviors, (b) academics and sports as a means to success, and (c) maternal influence as protector and defender. The first theme, fairness: student self-centered behaviors, students appear not to operate from the golden rule concept of do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Students appear to have reversed this concept and operate from the position do unto me and I will do unto you. Subjects appear to want to see how others treat them before they determine how they will treat them in return. Students’ moral reasoning appears to align with Kohlberg’s model that speaks to the preconventional level: stage two (Powers, 1989). Individuals in this stage operate from the premise of you scratch my back and I will scratch yours. Subjects pointed out in
conversations that they will not treat others how others want to be treated until others treat them how they want to be treated. Subjects mentioned that if they committed a wrong against another student, they expected that person to commit a wrong again them in return. Individuals were considered to be weak if they did not retaliate for a perceived wrong done to them. Others would exploit this weakness to their advantage by bullying the child who appears weak.

In the discussions regarding the second theme, *academics and sports as means to success*, group members identified academics and sports as identifiers of success. In exploring students’ perceptions, the boys can identify high school as a necessary step and possibly college.

The topic of sports as an ideal for masculine achievement was evident in discussion. Athletic aptitude seemed to offer a sense of competence with which students could readily identify. Conversation regarding sports appeared as a conduit to bond group members and to offer a connection to family life and community experiences. In identifying sports as a professional career, students saw it as a way to gain personal fame, achieve a sense of independence and take on the role of benevolent caretaker for their families. In identifying sports figures as the ideal male, students perhaps rationalize the physical aggression and competition that is part of lives as culturally sanctioned in sports. It was interesting to note that many of these students appeared to lack a prominent male figure as role models in their lives. Perhaps, sports figures became a natural substitute.

One plausible explanation for the relationship between academics and sports for many young, Black males resides in their environment. These boys are not able to identify role models who have been successful due to academic achievements. They
gravitate towards sports heroes who are more tangible, real, and easier to imitate. The sports side of the successful equation is more graphic, more relatable, and more glamorous than the academic side of the success equation.

Academic rewards and accomplishments are often more intrinsic than extrinsic. Academics offer intrinsic rewards and long-term extrinsic rewards. It takes a long time to see the benefits of one’s academic success compared to those of sports, which offer short-term extrinsic rewards. That conflict most likely is the crux of the issue. Pre-adolescent boys gravitate towards sports because it is immediate.

The boys are as naive about the adult work world as any peers their age. The boys possess dreams to become sports stars not because they do not have an interest in the educational process, but because they are children and do not know the endless opportunities in the adult world. They are over exposed to sports figures and under exposed to successful adults in other professional arenas. In time, they will understand that they most likely will not grow up to become sports stars.

The theme that resonates is that they believe in success. Remember, sports as a vehicle for success is plastered all over our culture, just turn on the television, open a newspaper, or a magazine. In other words, because sport stars are the focus in the media and demonstrate a wealth and level of social status that is envied, they become a superficial and distant icon of future success. Sports stars were part of the boys’ discussions as examples but do not have any real concrete influence on their day-to-day existence and choices. Adults must have authentic conversations with children and see the world through their eyes. For the adults who get this wrong, they interpret the data as these kids do not care about school. They only care about sports. But, that is kind of
alienating because there is more to the world than sports and that is the world that needs
to be exposed to them. What the boys are telling us is very human and is shared among
all. We all want to feel self-worth. We all want to feel that we have a sense of
accomplishment. We all want to feel that we are making a contribution. That is the part
that transcends the fact that they are 11-13 years old.

What resonated in the conversations with the boys was the theme of academics as
a means to future success. Student statements regarding academics include, but not
limited to: In responding to the question, what do you see yourself doing in middle
school? M1 commented,

I see myself in honors and very smart in high school. I think I will have to do my
best on every sheet and test. You do your best at school and you get the best
grades, and try to get a scholarship to the school that you want to attend.

M2, stated, “I see myself getting better at my art.” M3 shared, “I will be smart in class. I
want to get good grades and get on the honor roll.” M4 and M6 stated that poor behavior
will “affect” your chances of getting into a college. When responding to having a
personal goal, M5 commented that his goal was to “get a scholarship.” When responding
to completing classroom assignments, M6 stated, “I know the work. I’m going to have
good grades to go to college.” There are intrinsic academic motivating factors as evident
by their statements when they say that they would like to get good grades, be in honors
classes, and work hard to keep good grades.

The third theme, maternal influence as enforcer and defender, shows that results
of the study reveal five of the six subjects live in a female-headed household and one of
the students live with two parents, a biological mother and a stepfather. The study reveals
that the students show a positive self-image and felt the support of their mothers. Subjects reveal that mothers administer harsh consequences. Three of the subjects indicate that consequences are issued by mothers before attempting to find out what happened. Five of the subjects indicate that lack of a father figure in the home does not bother them. Students relating stories about their mothers appear to agree with Kohlberg’s theory that connects to preconventional level one, stage one thinking. Students’ anecdotal stories corroborate the work of Kohlberg’s stage one level of development (Power, 1989). In this stage, individuals focus on the direct consequences of their actions on themselves. An action is perceived as morally wrong because the perpetrator is punished. “The last time I did that I was smacked several times so I will not do that again.” The worse the punishment for the act is, the worse the act is perceived to be. This can give rise to an influence that even innocent victims are guilty in proportion to their suffering. Students appear to operate from a position of fear of consequences—issued by the maternal household figure. Statements such as “my mother hits first then asks questions later” or “my mother means no when she says no” or “my mother said she brought me into this world and she can take me out of this world” and therefore, “she should not be questioned.” Another subject states, “Do not enter the house if someone took your property because my mother will tell you to go back out and fight the person to get my property back.” Failure not to have one’s property when entering the house resulted in unpleasant consequences, usually hitting.

Discussion and implications of findings. The findings revealed that there was no meaningful change in student moral reasoning as a result of their participation in the intensive, interactive discussion group. However, emergent themes revealed that the
participants felt understood and affirmed in working in a small group in comparison to their interactions in a large school environment. The data showed that students had a more favorable impression of the group than of the school climate. This is attributed to their perception of working with caring facilitators and having opportunities to freely express themselves compared to their experience of the school atmosphere where they were not afforded much respect and where adults tend to treat them as though they are bad students. The group experience validated the students’ feelings of being cared for, supported, respected, and belonging (relatedness).

The researcher entered the subjects’ world and brought the subjects into a safe environment where subjects talked to each other with skilled facilitators. Interviews revealed that the subjects felt misunderstood and were not getting what they needed from adults. The first implication is how can a school staff be educated to have a better understanding of what the boys’ lives are really like and how meaning is attributed in their lives so conversations can begin with children that are real? The second implication shows how critical it is that teachers, administrators, and school staff engage with students. This study revealed that students in the sixth grade tend to work cohesively with their peer group where social rules are unique them. At times, these social rules are often in conflict with the expectations of the school personnel. Finally, the findings indicate that the students seem to gravitate toward their small peer group where the values and expectations that are unique to that group are clear. They do not gravitate or move easily to the larger school community.
Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, the results cannot be generalized beyond the six boys because case study results are not widely generalizable. The intention of a case study is to delve intimately into their lives. Even if they had this sort of theme as *mother as the defender and protector*, in their lives, does not mean it may be true in the lives of other peers. It may be true in the lives of other kids, but we do not know if it true. A second limitation was that most discussions with students occurred in the context of the here and now due to the predetermined structure of the sessions. Conversations were framed around the here and now events in their lives. This does not preclude the possibility that there are other themes that are important that just did not come out. Since the sessions were structured, this predetermined that there were certain areas that were going to be discussed. Since it was predetermined, it means the themes that came out are nested or dependent upon the themes that were chosen to be discussed. This leaves open to question what other themes might have come out if the discussions were free flowing without any particular agenda. Finally, the study was conducted in the school where the researcher is the principal. Even with these limitations, the exploratory nature of this investigation yielded findings that make important contributions to current and future discussions on the socialization in the subjects’ lived world.
Recommendations

According to Martin and Vaughn (2007), cultural competence refers to “an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence comprises four components: (a) awareness of one’s own cultural worldview, (b) attitude towards cultural differences, (c) knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and (d) cross-cultural skills” (p. 31).

The purpose of this section is to make recommendations for future research study that will add to the general body of knowledge. First, developing cultural competence of both students and adults in the field of education can be valuable. Students need to be taught cultural competence so they can discern appropriate skills to use in various environments instead of using peer group skills in all settings, which can lead to conflicts in the adult world. Train educators in the area of cultural competence to provide them with the knowledge and skills to work effectively with children of all backgrounds and social classes. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures whether the people are adults or children. In urban school districts where the teaching staff is predominantly White and the students are predominantly African-American and Latino, cultural competence is critical for school success.

Second, adding an opportunity for a physical activity to the group sessions resulted in increasing the boy’s engagement. The boys became a more cohesive group. The students encouraged each other to be on time so they could more quickly get to the preferred activity. Eventually, the boys enjoyed the discussion time as much as they
enjoyed the physical activity. Pairing an activity that students appeared to be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with and an activity they enjoyed served as a means of motivation.

Third, since these boys are heavily influenced by professionals in the field of sports and entertainment, the school should consider saturating the school environment with African-American professionals in the fields of technology, business, science, and law enforcement. This would increase the boys’ awareness of other African-American role models in professions other than those of sports and entertainment.

Fourth, since the boys spoke highly about the maternal influence in their lives, schools should develop a plan for engaging the maternal influence with their son, such as implementing a mother-and-son group. Finally, since mothers play such a critical role in the boys’ lives, and the elementary schools are so female dominated, it would be worthwhile to conduct professional development where the focus could be on the relationship between mother and son.

**Conclusion**

This study explored the moral reasoning of a small group of chronically disruptive pre-adolescent African-American male students in an elementary school involved in an intensive interactive boys’ discussion group intended to stimulate growth in moral reasoning.

The study occurred in an elementary school in a large urban district. Using random sampling, six participants at the sixth grade level participated in the study. The participants were African-American males viewed as disruptive based on receiving three or more disciplinary referrals to the office.
Data collection for the study consisted of administering the Moral Theme Inventory (MTI), Instructional Climate Inventory (ICI) survey, and Assessment of Adolescents Behaviors and Attitudes Towards School/Community (AABATSC). A qualitative and quantitative case study design was used to investigate the factors contributing to students’ perceptions of their lived world. In order to find major themes related to the changes in moral reasoning, several data sources were used that included paper and pencil tests, interviews, and field notes. Triangulation of the data revealed three emergent themes: (a) fairness: student self-centered behaviors, (b) academics and sports as a means to success, and (c) maternal influence as enforcer and protector.

The study did not discern information about students’ moral reasoning but unexpectedly discovered a world of the subjects where peer-level socialization of norms, values, and expectations are different from the conventional school setting. The results of this study, although limited by the number of participants, suggested that further research is warranted regarding the socialization of the lived world of students.

Chapter 1 presented the problem statement, theoretical rationale, significance of the study, and purpose of the study. The purpose of the study focused on a small group of African-American sixth graders identified as disruptive. The study was to determine whether or not there were any changes to the students’ moral reasoning after participating in intensive group sessions over a period of six weeks. The problem statement focused on disruptive student behavior interfering with the instructional process. A small percentage of the student population identified as disruptive students negatively impact classroom instruction for the remaining percentage of the students in the school. The researcher intended to use the information from the study to better understand the choices in
behavior through the voices of the participants about their lived world and to develop problem solving strategies. Kohlberg’s theory of moral reasoning served as the framework for the study.

Chapter 2 provided a review of the existing literature supporting the need for further research. The research showed that a disproportionate number of African-American males experience more severe forms of discipline, suspension, or expulsion from school (Gurian & Stevens, 2005; Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000; Kunjufu, 2005; Skiba and Peterson, 1999; Townsend, 2000). This study supported the idea that work needs to be done in the area of student discipline, and it needs to connect to the lived world of the students experiencing the phenomenon.

The review of the literature on moral reasoning showed that much has been written about moral reasoning. The body of literature suggested that researchers and educators are seeking alternative methods to working with students. Murray-Close and Crick (2006) stated that understanding of when and why children believe that aggression is morally wrong may allow practitioners to intervene and reduce children’s involvement in such conduct.

Research suggested that aggressive students do not lack awareness of the consequences that their misbehavior has on themselves. Teaching a moral reasoning component might enhance the effectiveness of violence prevention and intervention programs by making the consequences of students’ actions on others more prominent. Therefore, creating a climate where students exhibit prosocial behavior and inhibit antisocial behavior out of concern for others, rather than out of fear of punishment, may be beneficial (Manning & Bear, 2002). Unless children know how to act right, their
moral development is defective. Enhancing children’s moral intelligence is our best hope for getting them on the right course so they do act as well as think right (Borba, 2001).

Chapter 3 provided an explanation of the methodology used in the study. The data collection method involved using surveys, questionnaires, and interviews to examine factors contributing to the moral reasoning of a small group of young adolescent African-American male sixth graders. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed for meaning.

Chapter 4 described the results of the mixed methods analysis of the study. The themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews focus on participants’ opinions of themselves and family. The results revealed three themes: fairness: student self-centered behaviors, academics and sports as a mean to success, and family maternal influence as enforcer and protector.

Chapter 5 presented additional discussion regarding the study’s general findings and implications and recommendations for future research. Limitations of the study and a summary and conclusion of the study are included.

In conclusion, findings of this study may carry implications for understanding the key experiences of students that may impact their behavior. The results of this study may provide scholars and educators with understandings of the lived world of African-American sixth-grade males in interacting with peers and adults that could lead to employing better strategies in negotiating and navigating between their lived world and the conventional environment.
References


Appendix A

Instructional Climate Inventory-School (modified pretest)

Directions: For each of the following, mark one answer.

1    2   3  4  5
Not at All  Just a Little  Somewhat  Pretty Much  Very Much

1. This school makes me like to learn. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Doing well in school gets the approval of my teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Other members of this school are trusted. 1 2 3 4 5
4. At this school, the teachers tell the students what is expected of them. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Doing well in this school will help me with my future education. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I'm proud to go to this school. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I do my best in this school. 1 2 3 4 5
8. Teachers and students in the school really trust one another. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I feel like I belong in this school. 1 2 3 4 5
10. Teachers at this school treat students with respect. 1 2 3 4 5
Appendix B
Moral Theme Inventory

Moral Psychology Laboratory
Providing tools for ethical character development

MTI GUIDE
Guide for using the Moral Theme Inventory (MTI)

Version 1.1.1

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January 2001

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Purpose
Testing children for their moral thinking is difficult because of their relatively limited language, experience, and abstract thinking skills. The Moral Theme Inventory provides a measure of moral development that can be used with young subjects. A multiple-choice approach can identify broad developmental differences in moral thinking among children, and moral text comprehension can be used to measure these differences. This approach enables us to have some means of relating the performances of children and adults.

What is the Moral Theme Inventory?
The Moral Theme Inventory consists of four stories about moral dilemmas. Each story presents aspects of ethical sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and action. These are the four psychological processes or components necessary for completing an ethical action (see Narvaez & Rest, 1995; or see Narvaez, Endicott, Bock, & Mitchell, 2000). Each story has a complex moral message. After a story is read, there are four tasks that measure theme comprehension: (a) the rating of each of seven or eight theme choices for how well they match the theme of the original story (using a 5-point Likert-type scale), (b) the selecting of the two theme choices that best match the theme of the original story, (c) the rating of four vignettes for how close each one’s theme matches the original story’s theme, and (d) the selecting of the vignette that best matches the theme of the original story. Ten true-false questions about the story are used to measure reading comprehension and were used as a covariate in the analyses.

Participant Tasks
In the full test, there are four stories and five tasks after each story. Participants read along while an audio tape recording is played. After each story, the participants do the following.

(1) True-False Comprehension Questions. The participants answer 10 questions about each story. Some of the statements are (a) facts that took place in the story, (b) factual statements that did not take place in the story, (c) inferences a good reader would make while reading the story, and (d) incorrect inferences that a good reader would not make during the story.

(2) Vignette Rating. Participants rate four vignettes for how close each one’s theme matched the original story’s theme. A five-point Likert-type scale is used. There is one vignette with the same theme, one with the same actions, one with the same characters, and one with the same setting. Unlike in the message-choice task described below, the vignette rating task measures a more implicit understanding of the theme because the theme was not specified.

(3) Vignette Choice. Participants select the vignette that best matched the theme of the original story. This task also measures a more implicit understanding of the story by not requiring a word-based understanding of the themes.
(4) **Message Rating.** Participants rate each of seven or eight messages for how well they match the theme of the original story (using a 5-point Likert-type scale). There are messages that represent Stage-1 Kohlbergian thinking, Stage-2 Kohlbergian thinking, Stage-3 Kohlbergian thinking, a collectivistic orientation, and a complex word statement that is not the theme. The message rating task measures a recognition-type of theme comprehension.

(5) **Message Choices.** Then, participants select the two message choices that best match the theme of the original story from the list of choices just rated. This task measures their preference for presented themes.
NAME____________________________

PARTICIPANT NUMBER_______________

First, please complete the following information:

Your age_____________________________________________________

Your birthday_________________________________________________

Your grade in school_______________________________________________

Pick the one that describes you:  GIRL            BOY

Pick the ones that describe you:

___African-American
___Asian
___Hispanic/Latino
___Indian/Native American
___White/European American
___Immigrant
___Not from the United States
___Other__________________________________

Is English your first language
(or the main language you use at home)?   YES   NO
Kim

Kim pushed against the heavy boxes as they leaned towards her on the sharp curve. Her dad noticed that the boxes were sliding so he slowed down on the freeway ramp. Her dad had lost his job. They were moving to another city where jobs grew on trees. So people said. They were headed for Minneapolis.

The car was packed with everything they owned. The dinner table and chairs were on top of the car and on top of two mattresses. They gave away the old sofa and stuffed chair before they left Detroit. But, they still had the room-sized rug. It dropped off the roof over the back window. Every couple of hours they stopped to tighten the ropes and push the rug and mattresses back from crawling off the car.

Kim had her own box. It had her clothes, her favorite (and only) doll, the dancing ballerina jewelry box she got for her birthday, and the fancy gold vanity set she inherited from her rich godmother when she died. The comb had lost some of its teeth, but the brush and mirror still looked new.

She felt a punch on her arm. "Stop it, Martin!" Her little brother squirmed next to her, having gotten bored with rereading the one comic book he owned. He looked like his father, a Puerto Rican mix of many races—curly hair, blue eyes, olive skin. Kim looked like her mother, a Filipino-Chinese. She had almond eyes, straight dark hair and olive skin. Their parents had given them "good American names" so that they would not be teased in school.

"That looks like a good place," Mrs. Perez said softly as they found a small gas station with a grassy lot behind. Mr. Perez pulled into the gas station. "Everybody out for a stretch!" He didn't have to convince anyone. They all jumped right out.

As her dad filled the gas tank, Kim leaned against the car. Martin was off running and bouncing an old tennis ball in the grassy lot. She watched him for a moment thinking about whether or not to join him. She decided not to. She was tired of his company after sitting next to him in the car all day long.

"You should get some exercise, girl! Here take this $20 and go pay for the gas. You should get back $1.15."

Her dad was very careful with money. They didn't have much of it. They barely had enough for gas to Minneapolis. The only thing they were eating was baloney sandwiches made from day-old bread and thin slices of baloney. Not even any ketchup! They would buy a carton of milk and a carton of juice and pass them around while they ate the sandwiches. Martin always spilled. Mom said it was because he had a small mouth.

Once inside the gas station store, she eyed the potato chips at the counter but then looked away as her mouth watered. She handed the clerk the $20 bill. As the clerk opened the cash drawer there was a loud crash in the corner of the store. They heard a loud cry.

The clerk became alarmed. "It's my 3-year-old son." She had the 15 cents in her hand. She quickly reached for a bill, pushed it into Kim's hand and went running to help her son. Kim watched. The boy was alright. He had pulled down a stack of cereal boxes but didn't look hurt.

Kim went outside. Her father was playing catch with Martin and her mother was still in line for the bathroom. She looked at the change in her hand. Then, she looked
again. Instead of $1.15 she had $5.15. The clerk had given her a five-dollar bill instead of a one-dollar bill.

She thought of the candy that she could buy with the extra money. She could go in the store and pretend she had forgotten to buy fruit rollups, potato chips, and pop. The whole family could have a treat, something they rarely had money for. Or, she could go ask for change, give her dad the $1.15 and then save the $4 for herself. She wanted to buy a Teacher Barbie doll because she wanted to be a teacher when she grew up.

She couldn't decide; candy and treats now or save for the doll. Then, she heard her mother's voice in her head, "You are a Kwong. Kwongs know that the path to success is self-control. Don't do what your feelings tell you to do without thinking about it first. Stop and think. Plan for the future. What you do today affects all your tomorrows." Kim decided not to buy the treats.

She thought about the money. Then, she heard her father's voice inside her head from a time when his boss had given him too much money in his paycheck: "If you want to be a good person, you should always try to be honest. And you must always be honest because you are a Perez. We, Perez, are all honest, good people. Everybody knows that."

Was she being dishonest by keeping money put in her hand by someone she didn't even know? She would never see this clerk again. The clerk didn't know the Kwongs or the Perez family and they didn't know her. Did it really matter to be honest with people that you didn't know and didn't know you? She entered the store and went to the counter and held out the money to the clerk.

Later, when everyone was back in the car, Kim handed the money to her father. "Here's the change, Papá. She gave me too much but I gave it back." "Good for you, sweetheart, good for you." Mr. Perez started up the car and they drove out of the lot. Martin said, "Let's play alphabet--there's an 'A'!" "Okay, amorcito--I see a 'B'!" Kim responded. She smiled and felt grownup.

Take a moment to think about the message of this story. What do you think the author would like you to learn about getting along with others? Think about what would be the best lesson from this story about getting along with others.

PLEASE WAIT FOR THE INSTRUCTIONS TO MOVE AHEAD

111
Please read the following four stories. As you read each one, decide how well its message matches the best message from "Kim."

Story A
For summer vacation, Dawn was going to visit her Aunt Sandy who was sick. It would take three days to get there. Dawn prepared for her trip very carefully, making sure she had enough money for gas. She planned ahead for each stop she would need to make. On the second day of driving, Dawn noticed a gas station ahead. It wasn't where she expected it. She had planned to stop at the gas station 20 miles from there. Dawn looked at her gas gauge. She knew she had enough gas to make it the 20 miles but not much farther. She decided that she should get gas at this station just to be safe. She pulled over and filled the gas tank. While she was paying for the gas, the cashier told her that the gas station 20 miles away was closed. Dawn was glad she had stopped there.

Very much the same About So-so Different Very different

Story B
Rhonda helped her mother unload the bags of groceries from their car. They had spent the day picking up groceries for the poor. Now, at dinner time, they were delivering them to poor families. This family was the last one. After they took the groceries inside, her mother sent Rhonda back to the car while she finished inside. Rhonda reached to shut the trunk. Then she noticed a tiny bag in the corner that they had missed. She looked inside. It contained several chocolate bars. Her stomach growled. The candy would fit into the pockets of her big winter coat. The family wasn't expecting the candy, so they would never know if she kept it. But, it had been given for the family and, therefore, belonged to them. She ran quickly inside to deliver the bag.

Very much the same About So-so Different Very different

Story C
When Kim's family arrived in Minneapolis, they went to stay with Kim's uncle. Martin and Kim were happy to finally get out of the car. Kim took her box of things inside. Martin took his ball and comic book to show his cousins. The uncle and his family thought that Kim's family might be hungry. So, they made them a big dinner. Kim and her family ate until they were full and forgot all about baloney sandwiches. After dinner, Kim and Martin played games with their cousins.

Very much the same About So-so Different Very different

Story D
The Nicholson family was driving to Detroit. Theresa was not looking forward to moving. She didn't want to have to meet new friends, but she thought meeting new people would be better than hanging out with Chet, her brother. Chet was starting to bother her big time—especially after being in the car with him for so long.

Mr. Nicholson finally pulled off the highway so that they could eat dinner in a small town. They had an enjoyable meal at the town cafe. After receiving the bill for their food, Mr. Nicholson gave Theresa some money. "Sweetheart, will you please go pay the bill for our food? You should receive $4.50 back. Be sure to count your change." Theresa loved having adult responsibilities. She happily took the money from her father and went to pay the bill.

Very much  About  So-so  Different  Very different

Now, mark which of the four stories above has a message that most closely matches the best message of "Kim." You may look back at the four stories and what you thought of their messages.

Circle the title:  Story A  Story B  Story C  Story D

PLEASE WAIT FOR THE INSTRUCTIONS TO MOVE AHEAD
Below are several possible messages for "Kim." Mark how good a match each message is with what you think is the best message of "Kim."

1. Good children don't embarrass their parents.
   Very much  About  So-so  Different  Very different
   the same  the same

2. If you give up what isn’t yours now, your parents will reward you later.
   Very much  About  So-so  Different  Very different
   the same  the same

3. If you think of others first instead of your family, your family may suffer.
   Very much  About  So-so  Different  Very different
   the same  the same

4. Monetary interchanges need to be monitored scrupulously.
   Very much  About  So-so  Different  Very different
   the same  the same

5. Treat all people with honesty no matter what tempts you.
   Very much  About  So-so  Different  Very different
   the same  the same

6. You might get caught if you keep money that isn’t yours.
   Very much  About  So-so  Different  Very different
   the same  the same

7. You shouldn’t keep what isn’t yours even from strangers.
   Very much  About  So-so  Different  Very different
   the same  the same
Below, we list the possible messages again. Please CIRCLE the number of the two messages that you think most closely match the best message from "Kim." Circle two.

1. Good children don’t embarrass their parents.

2. If you give up what isn’t yours now, your parents will reward you later.

3. If you think of others first instead of your family, your family may later.

4. Monetary interchanges need to be monitored scrupulously.

5. Treat all people with honesty no matter what tempts you.

6. You might get caught if you keep money that isn’t yours.

7. You shouldn’t keep what isn’t yours even from strangers.

Make sure to circle only two messages from the list.

PLEASE WAIT FOR THE INSTRUCTIONS TO MOVE AHEAD
NAME_____________________________

PARTICIPANT NUMBER_______________

First, please complete the following information:

Your age_____________________________________________________

Your birthday_________________________________________________

Your grade in school_______________________________________________

Pick the one that describes you:  GIRL          BOY

Pick the ones that describe you:

___African-American
___Asian
___Hispanic/Latino
___Indian/Native American
___White/European American
___Immigrant
___Not from the United States
___Other__________________________________

Is English your first language (or the main language you use at home)?    YES   NO

INSTRUCTIONS

Today we do the same thing we did last time. Remember that we played a tape of a story. After hearing and reading the story, we asked you to think about the most important message of the story. Then, we asked you questions about the story. We will do the same thing today.
Jed waved goodbye to his mother, pulled the door shut, and sighed. He had a lot to do. But he was hungry so he went to the refrigerator and took the leftover pizza. He drank another quart of milk. He also ate some chocolate ice cream. He seemed to be hungry all the time. As he wiped his mouth on his sweatshirt, he thought that he should get started on the chores while his baby sister was still napping.

It was Saturday and his mother was off to her university class. She was taking classes to become a nurse. This was the weekend for his dad to be on duty as a cop. So Jed was in charge of the house for the next four hours. That included not only his sister, but making dinner, vacuuming the living room, cleaning his room, and brushing the dog—who was shedding hair all over the house. He was also supposed to prepare the cans and bottles for recycling—the pickup was on Monday. After taking some frozen chicken out of the freezer to thaw, he decided to brush the dog.

The dog followed him out the front door into the warm air. He was an old sheep dog. They called him "Dog" because he would come when they said it. Jed sat down on the steps and began to brush him. Dog cooperated by sitting on top of Jed's feet. Jed kept quiet so he could hear his sister, if she woke up.

When Jed was almost finished, Lance, his friend who lived across the street, came over tossing his football.

"Hey, Jed, want to play football? We're getting a bunch of kids together to play at the park."

"Naw, I've got chores to do."

"He's always working, Lance. But I'll play!" The call came from next door where Kou lived. Kou came out of his front door, "I'll go for a long one, Lance!"

Lance threw the football ahead of Kou as he dashed into the next yard. Kou dove and barely caught it. He was still learning the game after having arrived from Vietnam only a year ago. His throw was wobbly. "I have to work on it," he said as he sat down on the sidewalk.

"What do you have to do, Jed?" Lance asked.

"Oh, just some cleaning, dinner..." he mumbled.

"Wouldn't you rather go play? We could come back in an hour and you could do all that stuff then," Lance suggested.

"Yeah, but..." Jed couldn't think of anything to say. He really wanted to play football. It was always fun hanging out with friends and playing. Maybe he could just buy pizza for the family dinner. And he could clean his room Sunday night, instead of watching TV with the family. He started to brush the rest of the dog as fast as he could.

"I'll get my bike," Lance yelled as he ran across the street.

"Get your things. I will finish," Kou urged as he took the brush out of his hand.

Jed stepped inside and started up the stairs. Then, he remembered his sister. He would wake her up and take her along in the stroller. He went upstairs and into her room. She was sound asleep in her crib. He looked at his watch. She had been asleep for only an hour. She usually slept two hours. If he woke her up now, she'd probably be crabby the rest of the day. So what, he thought, his mother would have to deal with it.

He looked in the closet for the diaper bag and filled it with diapers, wetwipes and a change of clothes. He got a jacket from his room and then went back to the crib. He leaned over her, and then he stopped. He was supposed to be taking care of her. She
wasn't supposed to be doing things for him--like losing her nap so he could have fun. He stepped back. His mom was counting on him to take care of things. He put his jacket back and walked downstairs and outside. He sat down on the steps and took the brush from Kou. He started brushing the dog again.

"Aren't you going?" asked Kou.

"No, I can't. It's not fair to my sister if I wake her up."

Kou looked at him and nodded, "I understand."

When Lance came out of his garage, Kou called out. "I'll get my jacket, one minute!" Kou ran to his house.

"Let's go, Dog, time to do the recycling bins." Jed held the door while Dog lumbered in.

Take a moment to think about the message of this story. What do you think the author would like you to learn about getting along with others? Think about what would be the best lesson from this story about getting along with others.
Please read the following four stories. As you read each one, decide how well its message matches the best message from "Jed."

Story A
When Jed arrived at school for the first day of the year, his homeroom teacher asked him to help a new student get comfortable in the school. It turned out to be Kou's cousin who had just arrived in the country. He was in the same grade as Jed but Kou was in a different grade. That day in school Jed went from class to class and introduced Kou's cousin to his friends. They saw Lance in English class. The bell rang and the three of them went off to lunch together. They were all very hungry. Jed and Lance pulled out their lunch money. Jed noticed that Kou's cousin did not have any money so he bought a lunch for him.

Very much About So-so Different Very the same the same different

Story B
"Be sure not to wake up Angela while I'm gone. She needs to sleep for at least two hours. Bye, sweetheart!" Vinnie's mom called as she left for her weekly class. Now, Vinnie had the house to himself. He smiled and thought about starting his favorite activity—cooking. He decided to make spaghetti sauce. As he was working in the kitchen, the doorbell rang. Vinnie opened the door. It was his friend, Manolo. "Want to go to the mall?" Manolo asked. "Heather is driving." Vinnie liked to go hang out at the mall and he never turned down a chance. But, today he wanted to make a good spaghetti dinner. "No, thanks, I'm into cooking now. Later, okay?" Manolo left and Vinnie went back to the spaghetti sauce.

Very much About So-so Different Very the same the same different

Story C
It was a typical Saturday in Jonny's house. His mom was working in the basement and his dad was shoveling snow. Jonny did his homework and then felt like playing basketball. He set up a basket on the refrigerator and started playing with the Nerf ball. On one of his shots he bumped the kitchen table, knocked over the sugar bowl and broke it. His mother came in the kitchen and asked what had happened. Jonny told her that he had knocked over the sugar bowl. "Oh, were you cleaning the kitchen?" his mother asked. "No, I was playing basketball." His mother replied, "You know you are not supposed to play in here, but I am glad you told me the truth. I'll get you the broom."

Very much About So-so Different Very the same the same different

Story D
Megan looked out the window of the store where she worked. Her boss had left for an hour so she was in charge. She looked at the ice cream store nearby and got hungry for a strawberry cone. Maybe she could run quickly and get one. If she waited until after work, the shop would be closed. Megan checked her watch. Her boss would not be back for a while. She could run and get one and he would never know it. She grabbed the key to lock the door. As she headed for the door, she passed the stacks of soup and noodles she was supposed to be putting on the shelves. If she left her work undone, her boss might not ever trust her again. So, she put the key back and began to unpack the tomato soup.

Very much  About  So-so  Different  Very
the same  the same

Now mark which of the four stories above has a message that most closely matches the best message of "Jed." You may look back at the four stories and what you thought of their messages.

Circle one:  Story A    Story B    Story C    Story D

PLEASE WAIT FOR THE INSTRUCTIONS TO MOVE AHEAD
Below are several possible messages for "Jed." Mark how good a match each message is with what you think is the best message from "Jed."

1. Do the things that you have been told to do or you might get into trouble.
   😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
   Very much the same About the same So-so Different Very different

2. Nice kids do their chores.
   😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
   Very much the same About the same So-so Different Very different

3. Don't let temptations keep you from fulfilling your responsibilities.
   😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
   Very much the same About the same So-so Different Very different

4. Think of your family before friends.
   😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
   Very much the same About the same So-so Different Very different

5. Intermittently, relationships interfere with maintaining a sanitary domicile.
   😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
   Very much the same About the same So-so Different Very different

6. Plan your day so that you can do what you want to do.
   😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
   Very much the same About the same So-so Different Very different

7. Sometimes, you have to wait to do things you like because your work is more important.
   😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
   Very much the same About the same So-so Different Very different

Below, we list the possible messages again. Please CIRCLE the number of the TWO messages that you think most closely match the best message from "Jed." Circle two.
1. Do the things that you have been told to do or you might get into trouble.

2. Nice kids do their chores.

3. Don't let temptations keep you from fulfilling your responsibilities.

4. Think of your family before friends.

5. Intermittently, relationships interfere with maintaining a sanitary domicile.

6. Plan your day so that you can do what you want to do.

7. Sometimes, you have to wait to do things you like because your work is more important.

Make sure to circle only two messages from the list.

PLEASE WAIT FOR THE INSTRUCTIONS TO MOVE AHEAD
Appendix C

Assessment of Adolescent Behaviors and Attitudes Towards School and Community

Discussion Prompts About Self
1. Do you have someone to talk to?
2. Do you get a lot of encouragement from adults at this school?
3. It is important for me to do my best in school.
4. On the whole, I like myself.
5. I find it hard to make friends.
6. How do you feel about being you?
7. Do you have friends?
8. Are you disappointed with yourself?
9. Are you popular with other students your age?

Discussion Prompts About School
1. What do you like best about school? Why?
2. What do you like least about school? Explain.
3. What is your relationship with your teacher? Why.
4. Do you like your teacher? Explain.
5. What goes well for you at school? Why?
6. What are you good at in school? Explain.
7. What are some things you need help with in school? Why?
8. How safe do you feel in school? Why?
9. Do you think you will graduate from high school; from college? Why?

Discussion Prompts About Family
1. Do you get along well with your parents? Explain.
2. Do your parents give you help when you need it? Explain.
3. Do you feel useful and important in your family? Why?

Discussion Prompts About Community
1. In my neighborhood, I feel like I matter to people.
2. Adults in my neighborhood don’t care about people my age.
3. Adults in my neighborhood listen to what I have to say.
4. Adults in my neighborhood make me feel important.

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Appendix D

Instructional Climate Inventory-Group (modified post-test)

Directions: For each of the following, mark one answer.

1 Not at All 2 Just a Little 3 Somewhat 4 Pretty Much 5 Very Much

1. This group makes me like to learn. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Doing well in group gets the approval of my teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Other members of this group are trusted. 1 2 3 4 5
4. In this group, the facilitators tell the students what is expected of them. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Doing well in this group will help me with my future education. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I’m proud to be in this group. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I do my best in this group. 1 2 3 4 5
8. Facilitators and students in the group really trust one another. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I feel like I belong in this group. 1 2 3 4 5
10. Facilitators at this group treat students with respect. 1 2 3 4 5
Appendix E

Parent Informed Consent

I am conducting a research project trying to collect information from students to see if their moral reasoning changes after a period of time. This study will be limited to African-American male students in the sixth grade. I intend to use this information to improve how as a school we respond to disciplinary and behavioral problems that these students experience.

I am requesting your permission to allow your son to participate in this study. The students will meet two times per week over a period of six weeks for 60 minutes with trained professionals who will ask the students several questions around school, self, home, and community. In the group sessions, topics covered include: trust building, anger management, coping strategies, the importance of education, avoiding peer pressure, sense of self, and family relationships. The sessions consist of the students sharing perspective about their feelings, attitudes and beliefs, and experiences.

Students’ responses in the sessions will be kept confidential, except as required by law. The privilege of confidentiality does not extend to information about abuse of a child or neglect of a child. If the facilitators have reasonable suspicion of abuse or given such information, the facilitators are required to report to the authorities. If the facilitators believe that a student is at significant risk of harming himself, the facilitators will need to ensure the student’s safety by telling the child’s parent or guardian and the school counselor.
Participation in the study is voluntary if you agree to have your child participate.

You have the right to withdraw your child at any time. The researcher can be reached at
the number below if any questions or concerns about the sessions arise.

I give permission for my child to participate in the study, as described in this letter.

By signing this letter, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the consent form.

____________________________________              ________________________
Parent’s Signature and Date          Child’s Name

____________________________________          ________________________
Researcher’s Signature and Date          School’s Telephone No.
Appendix F

Assent Statement

I am being invited to participate in an Intervention Study that focuses on myself, school, and family. In the group sessions, topics covered include: trust building, anger management, coping strategies, the importance of education, avoiding peer pressure, sense of self, and family relationships.

I will be asked to respond to questions about things in my life. I can decline to respond to any question I do not wish to answer. If I am feeling upset at the end of the session, the facilitators will connect me with a counselor with whom I can talk about my problems.

What I say during the sessions will be kept confidential. This means that what I say will not be shared with my parents, teachers, or friends. The facilitators will not tell anyone what I say without my permission unless there is something that could be dangerous to me or someone else. If I indicate that someone is or has been hurting me, the leader will have to tell the people who are responsible for protecting children, so they can make sure that I am safe. If I indicate I am thinking about hurting myself, the facilitators will have to tell my parents and school counselors in order to keep me safe.

My parents/guardians or I can always call the researcher if we have any questions about the group. My parents/guardians can withdraw me from the group at any time. I have read this form and I understand it.

_____________________________                        _________________________
Student’s Signature      Date
Appendix G

Weekly Format

1. Introduction

2. Disclosure: This is a research project to explore the thinking of a small group of behaviorally challenged pre-adolescent African-American male students involved in an intervention over a period of time. Your honest feedback is important to this study.

3. Purpose: To engage a small group of boys, who have been sent to the office with disciplinary referrals, in discussions and activities to obtain the students’ perspectives related to self, school, and home.

4. Setting: School (private office)

5. Days of the Week: Monday and Thursday

6. Time Frame: 2:15-3:25

7. Modules will be explained and activities will be posted.
Module One focuses on establishing the purpose of the group. The ICI and MTI instruments will be administered. Students will engage in discussions regarding confidentiality, group rules, and identifying a group name.

Session One: Facilitators will inform the group that each session will begin with group warm-up. Facilitators say, “Module will begin by reviewing the lesson format that will be written on chart paper and posted on the wall. Today’s session will begin by going around the table and introducing ourselves. Each person will say their name. We have different topics we will cover in the groups. For each topic, we will spend part of the time doing some fun activities and part of the time discussing your opinions and feelings about the topics. We want this to be a place where we can all feel safe to talk about things that are important to us. Each person will be given the opportunity to tell the group something about himself. The reason for the activity is to give you an opportunity to talk about what you want in the group. There are planned activities, but sometimes things happen in people’s lives, and we want to be able to talk about those things, too.” Facilitators will request a volunteer to begin the session.

Facilitators will explain the purpose of the group. Facilitators say, “This is a research project for us to find out how students feel they have been treated in situations where they have been sent to the main office with a disciplinary referral. Your honest feedback is important to this study.” Facilitators will respond to any questions that students pose.
Facilitators will explain the Instructional Climate Inventory (ICI) survey and answer students’ questions. When all of the questions have been exhausted, the survey will be administered and collected.

Participants will engage in a discussion regarding confidentiality and demonstrate an understanding of the importance of confidentiality. Facilitators will distribute confidentiality contracts. Facilitators will say, “Do not sign the contracts yet. Confidentiality is important, and we want to make sure you think about this carefully before signing these contracts. In a group like this, it is important to have complete confidentiality. Who can tell what confidentiality means?” After a nearly perfect response, the facilitators say, “Right, confidentiality means that nothing that is said in this room goes outside of the room.” Students will discuss the importance of confidentiality. Facilitators will disclose their position on confidentiality by saying, “we also must keep everything that you say in here confidential. That means we will not tell anyone what you say in here. Now, there is one time when we will not be able to keep confidentiality. That is if we have reason to think that you or someone else is in danger—for example, if you tell us someone is hitting you or that you are thinking of hurting yourself or someone else. In that case, we will have to tell someone else what you said. This is because our first concern is your safety, and we need to make sure that you are safe. However, anything else you say in here will be kept confidential. Now, let’s read the contract carefully. Each student can read one sentence.” After the contract has been read, the students will be given an opportunity to ask questions. Facilitators say, “Now, think about this carefully. If you feel ready to sign a contract saying that you will keep everything said in the group confidential, please sign. If you are not sure, think it over this week and
sign the contract next week if you decide that you are willing to keep the group
discussion confidential.” Each member of the group will sign the Confidentiality Contract
by the end of module one.

The group will be given the opportunity to generate the rules and consequences
that will help govern the group’s behavior. Students will generate a list of rules. The
group will vote on the rules. Facilitators will not impose a rule except under extreme
circumstances. After the rules have been generated, the group will brainstorm a list of
consequences for not following the rules. Facilitators will record the list and the group
will vote for the consequences. The agreed-upon rules and consequences will be written
on chart paper and posted on the wall for the participants to refer to in each session.

Participants will engage in a discussion to identify a name for the group. The
selection of a group name will create a sense of belonging. The group will brainstorm a
list of names. Facilitators will record the information. The group will vote on the name of
the group. The group name will be written on chart paper and posted for the participants
to refer to during the sessions.

The sessions will conclude with the students writing in their journals. The writing
prompts include: What were your reactions to the group today? Was it the same or
different from what you expected? Do you have any suggestions that will help to improve
future sessions?

**Session Two:** The purpose of the session is to administer the Moral Theme
Inventory (MTI). The MTI instrument will be explained to the students. Students will be
told that they will be given the MTI which is an instrument that involves them reading a
story and completing four tasks: (a) answer 10 true-false questions about the story, (b)
rate four vignettes for how close each one’s theme matched the original story’s theme (a five-point Likert-type scale is used), (c) rate themes that match the story using a 5-point Likert-type scale (very much the same to very different), and (d) select the vignette that best match the theme of the original story. Facilitators will carefully lead the students through the directions and allow time to respond to the students’ questions. The MTI will be distributed for the students to complete. The instrument will be collected and scored for analysis.
Appendix I

Module Two

Module Two focuses on sense of self. This involves the students engaging in discussions that focus directly on themselves. They will be asked a series of questions that will give them the opportunity to reflect about themselves and share with the group.

Session One: The purpose is to involve the students in a discussion about sense of self. Students will be asked to provide feedback to questions about themselves. The questions include: (a) Do you have someone to talk to?, (b) I get a lot of encouragement from adults at this school, (c) It is important for me to do my best in school (d) On the whole, I like myself, and (e) I find it hard to make friends. Students will be involved in the Feelings Grab Bag game. The goal of this activity is to increase awareness of one’s own and others’ emotions. It gives the group members practice in identifying and reflecting feelings, which is an initial building block toward developing empathic ways of responding. The game is similar to charades with the following steps: (1) A student draws a feeling out of the grab bag; (2) The student acts out the feeling in front of the group, and members try to guess the feeling; (3) Once the feeling is guessed, the student tells a time he has felt that feeling; (4) Everyone else in the group gives an example of a time they felt the identified feeling. The game will be introduced to the students by informing them that we are now going to play a game to help us learn how to help each other with problems. Sometimes, it is hard to tell how someone else is feeling. We are going to play a game to help us practice recognizing different feelings in our friends. This game is called Feelings Grab Bag and it is kind of like charades. The facilitators will explain the game, if necessary. We have a number of feeling words in a bag. Each group member
will draw a word out of the bag. Each person will have the chance to come up to the front of the room and act out the feeling for the other group members. Everyone tries to guess the feeling. Once the feeling is guessed, the actor tells about the time when he felt that feeling. Each group member tells about a time he felt that feeling, too. The game continues until each person has a turn.

Session Two: The purpose of today’s session is to involve the students in a discussion about themselves. Students will be asked to provide feedback to questions about themselves. The questions include: (a) How do you feel about being you (b) Do you have friends?; (c) Are you often disappointed with yourself? Why?; and (d) Are you popular with other students your age? Explain.
Appendix J

Module Three

Module Three focuses on anger management and the regulation of emotions. Students will learn to recognize and manage angry feelings, develop emotion regulation strategies, and generate and practice alternatives to violence in dealing with anger and provocation. Students will be engaged in a series of activities to help them manage anger.

Session One: The purpose of today’s session is to engage the students in a discussion regarding anger management. Students will examine what kinds of situations make their temperature rise. In this activity, students are encouraged to explore internal and external triggers for their anger and what they do when they are angry. The metaphor of a thermometer is used. Students will examine what kinds of situations make their temperature rise, what body sensations and what thoughts help them know their temperature is rising and that they are getting angry, what thoughts help them know their temperature is rising and that they are getting angry, and what thoughts and actions they can use when angry that either escalate or de-escalate their angry feelings.

Facilitators will introduce the Anger Thermometer by handing out the Anger Thermometer sheet. A large thermometer will be drawn on chart paper. Facilitators inform the students that they are going to use the thermometer to help us know what makes us angry and how our body tells us when our temperature is rising. There are different degrees to which we can be mad as noted; (a) at the bottom of the thermometer, it indicates we are not angry; (b) one-third of the way up the thermometer, we are irritated; (c) two-third up the thermometer, we are really angry; (d) near the top of the
thermometer, we are enraged; and (e) at the top of the thermometer, we are in the danger zone of breaking the thermometer.

Students will engage in a discussion about anger triggers. Students will be given a two-sided thermometer with Triggers and Body Feelings on one side and Coping Thoughts and Coping Actions on the other side. Students will think of some things that make them angry and be instructed to write down at least one trigger or situation that annoys you (refer one-thirds up the thermometer chart), one that makes you angry, one that really makes you angry, one that make you about to explode, and one that blows your top. Students will share their responses. Facilitators will chart their responses.

Students will use the thermometer chart to discuss how our body reacts when we are annoyed, angry, really anger, about to explode, and blow our tops. Students will write down at least one body reaction for each thermometer point and share their responses for the facilitators to place on the chart paper.

Session will conclude with the students writing in their journals. Writing prompts include (a) How do you feel about today’s session? Why? and (b) Do you have any suggestions that will help improve further sessions?

Session Two: The purpose of this session is to examine typical responses to anger and to discuss alternatives in dealing with anger. The students will engage in an anger management activity called hot-headed and cool-headed thoughts and actions. On a chart paper thoughts will be written in one column and Actions in the other column. The students will brainstormed a list indicating what kind of thoughts we think of when we are angry and the kind of actions we do? The hot-headed and cool-headed activity will be introduced to the students. The facilitators will inform the students that most ways we
deal with anger fall into one of two categories; we will call these categories hot-headed and cool-headed responses. Hot-headed responses heat up the situation and cool-headed responses bring down the temperature. The students will categorize their previous responses.

The students will receive the Cool-Headed Thoughts and Actions sheet. The handout will be reviewed with the students with the focus on cool-headed coping thoughts. The students will discuss the types of cool-headed coping actions on the handout.

The session will conclude with the students writing in their journals. The writing prompts include (a) How do you feel about today’s session? Why? and (b) Do you have any suggestions that will help improve further sessions?
Appendix K

Module Four

Module Four focuses on peer pressure and bullying. Students will be involved in discussions and activities to practice alternatives to giving in to peer pressure and examining relational aggression.

*Session One:* The goal is to help students become aware of situations in which they may give in to peer pressure and to generate acceptable alternative strategies to *going along with the crowd.* The group members will be asked to generate situations in which they might encounter peer pressure. The students will be asked: (a) What is peer pressure? (b) What are some situations in which people encounter peer pressure?, and (c) When do people try to talk you into doing something you do not know if you should do? Facilitators will write the peer pressure situations on a chart paper.

The members will be asked to generate strategies to resist peer pressure. The facilitators will create a poster with the words *Strategies to Resist Peer Pressure.* The students’ responses will be written on the chart.

The session will conclude with the students writing in their journals. The writing prompts include (a) What is peer pressure?, (b) How are you going to resist peer pressure?, and (c) Do you have any suggestions that will help improve further sessions?

*Session Two:* This session focuses on educational aspirations. The students will be involved in discussions and activities that help them establish reasonable educational aspirations, address academic barriers, and identify steps to take to improve in school.

Students will engage in a discussion around career goals. The goal is to help students think about what type of career or work they want for themselves in the future.
Student will be asked to write responses in their journals. Facilitators will say, “Today we will discuss what you want to do when you have finished high school and how you can reach that goal. You are going to write your responses in your journals and share them with the group. The facilitators will ask the students the following questions: (a) What is your name?, (b) What do you want to do when you grow up?, (c) What is your backup career plan?, (c) What is your backup career plan?, (d) What education or training do you need to become what you want to be?, and (e) What education do you need for your backup plan? The students will be given the opportunity to share their career goals with the group.

The students will be involved in a discussion about school relationships. The students will be asked to provide feedback to the four questions about school. The questions include: (a) What do you like about school? Why?, (b) What do you like least about school? Explain., (c) What is your relationship with your teacher? Explain., and (d) Do you like your teacher? Why?
Appendix L

Module Five

Module Five focuses on family relationships. The sessions will help students understand and accept their families and the personal traits that are similar to those of family members.

Session One: The goal of the activity in this session is to help group members speak about family issues. The idea is to illustrate that everyone has feelings about and problems related to family and that it may help to share these feelings.

Students will participate in a family relationship activity called, Family Me Too Game. The facilitators will say, “Today, we are going to talk about our families. Our first activity is going to help us look at the things we like and things we wish were different about our families. Today, we are going to play a game. We are going to say things about our families that we like and that we wish were different. Remember that you want to say things that you think other people will have in common with you.”

“Let us start with things we like about our family.” Examples are: “My mom is a really good cook.” “My brother helps me with homework.” The facilitators will need to model the responses to begin the activity.

The students will be involved in a discussion about family relationships. The students will be asked to provide feedback to questions about family. The researcher will check to see if any patterns occur. The questions include (a) Do you get along well with your parents? Explain., (b) Do your parents give you help when you need it? Explain., and (c) Do you feel useful and important in your family? Why?
The session will conclude with the students writing in their journals. The writing prompts include: (a) Did you notice any patterns about families from our activities?, and (b) Do you have any suggestions that will help improve further sessions?

Session Two: Students will engage in an activity called, Personality Family Album. The goal of the activity in this session is to help group members connect with personality characteristics they share in common with family members. Facilitators will say, “Next, let’s talk about ways our families have influenced us. Family members have a strong influence on our personalities and the way we act. We hardly ever stop and think about the ways our families shape our personalities and make us the way we are. So, now we are going to play a game called Personality Family Album. We are going to go around the circle and ask each of you to describe two qualities that you have in common with someone in your family. We would like one of these qualities to be one that you like and one that you do not like. Describe how it makes you feel to have those qualities.” Ask for volunteers. If no volunteer, then the facilitators will begin the session. Go around the group until everyone has a turn.

Students will participate in an activity called, Ideal Family Movie. The goal of this activity is to help students think about how they would like their families to be. Facilitators will say, “We can choose our friends, but we do not get to pick our families. Our next activity is called Ideal Family Movie. If you were going to make a movie about your family, and you were the writer and director so you could make it the way you really wanted your family to be, what would you change about your family for the movie?” If the changes are reasonable, think out loud with the students by saying: (a) What might happen if you asked for the changes?, and (b) Is there something you can do to help make
the changes take place? If the changes are not realistic, reflect the student’s feelings with an empathic comment.

Students will engage in an exercise called, Who Can You Go to for Help? The goal is to assess family support. This is an exercise where students will be asked: (a) Who can you go to in your families for help when you have a problem or when you are upset?, and (b) How do you ask for help? If a student feels that no one in the family could understand or help, the student will be asked to identify another adult he trusts and to whom he could go for help.

Students will be involved in a discussion about family relationships. Students will be asked to provide feedback to questions about family. The researcher will check to see if any patterns occur. The questions include: (a) Do your parents ask you where you are going? How does that make you feel? (b) Do your parents ask you who you are with? How does that make you feel? and (c) Do your parents ask you where you go at night? How does that make you feel?
Appendix M

Module Six

Module Six focuses on post-tests and sense of loss. The sessions will involve the students being administered the MTI and the ICI survey. Students will reflect on the intervention experience, a sense of loss with the sessions concluding, and moving on.

Session One: The purpose of today’s session is to administer the MTI post-test to the students. The participants will read the second of two stories about moral dilemmas. Participants will complete five tasks after each story. Participants read along while an audio tape recording is played. The information will be collected and scored for analysis.

Session Two: The purpose is for students to complete a second ICI survey and engage in an activity called, Put-ups. The facilitators will remind the students that they were given a similar survey earlier that focused on the school. The students will be told that this time the survey focuses on the group. The survey seeks to obtain their perceptions about the group and that there are no wrong answers. They will be asked to respond to each statement by circling 1-not at all up to 5-very much. The survey seeks to obtain information from them about the sessions they participated in for six weeks. The survey will be passed out, administered, and collected after 10 minutes.

The goal of the Put-ups activity is to focus on positive connections between group members and to leave the members with a written reminder of their own special qualities. The facilitators will say, “Our last activity is a souvenir for each of you. It is so easy to give put-downs, but we rarely take time to give put-ups. So, today we are going to concentrate on put-ups. We have a sheet for each of you. We will go around the table, and each person will say one nice thing that they like about you. We will write these on
your sheet, and you can take it home at the end of the group. Who wants to begin? OK, we will start with [name of volunteer]. What is one nice thing you like about [name of volunteer]?” Write each statement on the sheet, then give it to the student.

Sometimes, students will say mean things. Refocus them on something nice that they like about the student. Ask, “Is that a put-up? Think of something positive that you like about [student’s name].” Sometimes, students will say things that may be taken as mean or nice. If this happens, ask the target student if he thinks it is nice and wants it written down. If it does not feel like a put-up to the target student, ask the person giving the feedback to pick something else that he likes about the individual.