2018

Student Perspectives of Alternative Schools as Facilitators and Barriers for Positive Disciplinary Outcomes

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2018

Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

Inconsistent findings within the existing literature tend to confuse the ability of behavior-focused alternative schools to address behavior problems of at-risk juveniles. Recent studies have suggested that juveniles who successfully commit to greater self-regulation skills display both academic success and positive classroom behavior. Although self-regulation skills have been positively associated with behavioral success among juveniles placed in behavior-focused alternative schools, it remains unclear as to what aspects of these programs that juveniles experience as facilitating the development of such skills. This phenomenological study used semistructured interviews of 5 students in Grades 10 through 12 enrolled in a behavior-focused alternative school to improve the understanding of how juveniles experience and perceive alternative school programs as facilitating the development of self-regulation skills in promotion of positive behavior outcomes. Structural functionalist theory provided an appropriate lens through which data of juvenile experiences and perceptions of the functions of an alternative school program could be interpreted. Data analysis consisted of a process of open coding, categorizing, and interpreting data for meaning. The findings of the current study revealed that when aspects of alternative schools function to develop reasoning skills and a willingness to adhere to school standards, such functions may be beneficial in juvenile commitment to behavioral self-regulation. The data provided by this study may be valuable for stakeholders and policymakers in assessing the influence of behavior-focused alternative schools.

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Dedication

To my four greatest blessings, so far. I am every inch, a reflection of your love. Thank you for your unconditional love.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Carolyn Dennis and Dr. Marisa Bryant, for their assistance and support in helping me to reach this point in my academic career.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In this study, I explored the experiences and perceptions of juvenile participants of a behavior-focused alternative school in the development of self-regulatory skills. This study contributes to the conflicting and paucity of data on behavioral outcomes of alternative school participants. Such data may be useful to stakeholders and policymakers in consideration of such program's ability to influence discipline and delinquency outcomes among at-risk juveniles. In this chapter, I present an outline of the problem and specific objectives that I addressed, as well as its overall significance.

Background

Behavior outcomes among behavior-focused alternative school juveniles appear inconsistent within the literature. Participation in such schools is associated with both positive and negative behavioral outcomes for participants, according to the literature. Negative behavioral outcomes range from continued in-school disciplinary problems to community delinquency. Given the at-risk status of juveniles who attend behavior-focused alternative schools, this population is particularly vulnerable to coming into contact with the juvenile and/or criminal justice systems, thus perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline (Afacan, Perzigian, Justin, & Lequia, 2016; Free, 2017; Kennedy-Lewis, 2016; Vanderhaar, Munoz, Petrosko, 2014; Wilkerson, 2016).

The present study helps to fill a gap within the literature regarding juvenile experiences and perceptions of behavior-focused alternative schools as facilitators (enablers) and barriers (hindrances) for developing self-regulation skills. This will

provide data for stakeholders and policymakers in assessing the effects of behavior-focused alternative schools.

Problem Statement

The *school-to-prison-pipeline* is a phrase that is now commonly used by scholars to describe the relationship between school exclusionary practices and the juvenile and criminal justice systems. This is representative of the fact that school exclusionary practices increase a juvenile's likelihood of coming into contact with the juvenile or criminal justice system. In fact, juvenile arrests are 2.10 times more likely during months when they have been suspended or expelled from school as compared with juveniles who have not (Monahan, Vanderhei, Bechtold & Cauffman, 2014, p. 1116). Alternative learning programs vary considerably in their structure, target populations, and missions, according to both literature provided on the state's education website where the alternative school used in this study is located and literature provided by the U.S. Department of Education (Carver & Lewis, 2010). For instance, according to such sources, these programs may provide services in areas of academic remediation, mental health, nontraditional curriculum delivery methods or cognitive behavior change (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Although alternative learning programs range significantly, they all offer alternative educational settings for juveniles for whom traditional school settings have not worked and who otherwise may be excluded from school settings altogether under zero-tolerance policies. Although some alternative learning programs are located within traditional schools, alternative schools are actual schools that are not located within a traditional school (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

The state in which the current study took place offers several types of alternative learning programs, which provide alternative education for at risk students. The state defines these programs as services for students considered at risk of dropping out, mild to severe behavior problems, and truancy and/or academic failure. According to the state's annual consolidated data report, during the 2015-2016 academic year, students were most often (29%) placed in alternative programs because of chronic misbehavior. The avoidance of long-term suspension was the second highest cause for placement (19%). Felony charges resulted in 1.1% of placements during this period.

The current study took place in the fourth-largest school district in the state where the alternative school used for this study is located. The school district had developed various programs to provide alternative learning services and settings for juveniles based on their impediment. Three alternative schools are provided by the district, of which the alternative school used for this study is one. To ensure confidentiality, the alternative school used for the present study is referred to as *Another Chance* throughout this dissertation. According to the district policy in which the school is located, Another Chance is intended to provide alternative learning services to students in Grades 6 through 12 who commit violations of the school district's student code of conduct considered to be Level 5 violations. Level 5 violations include an assault on school personnel without a weapon, robbery without a weapon, a violent assault not resulting in serious injury, or repeated offenses of lower level offenses when other interventions have failed.

The principal at a student's regular school makes a recommendation for their enrollment in Another Chance through a formal disciplinary recommendation process. Parents are also notified of such recommendations through this procedure and invited to participate in the decision. If parents do not agree with the recommendation, they are advised of their due process rights in the matter. However, students may also enroll when entering the district from an alternative program in another school district, when entering the district from secured custody and on completion of Community Involvement Program. According to the school district's policy, it is also possible for a student to enroll for reasons unrelated to discipline. Once enrolled, students may remain at Another Chance for no less than one full academic quarter(45 days) and may remain for as long as the completion of their academic tenure in the school district. The principal of Another Chance makes decisions to return a student to a traditional school within the district based on the student's achievement of their behavior plan goals. The instructional superintendent assigned to Another Chance and the director of alternative education then reviews the principal's decision. The Another Chance principal will also write a transition plan for the student that includes behavior and academic goals. In the last 9 years, Another Chance has returned 75% of students served through its program, according to the school's website.

The literature notes a significant increase in reliance on alternative learning programs (Vanderhaar et al., 2014), including alternative schools, throughout the nation. However, some scholars regard such programs as only exacerbating the school-to-prison-pipeline epidemic through employing largely punitive practices. Yet, the literature is

sparse and inconsistent regarding the actual outcomes of such programs on at-risk juveniles. For instance, both positive and negative outcomes have been reported in the literature for juveniles who attend behavior-focused alternative schools. Such outcomes include lower disciplinary referrals (Wilkerson, Afacan, Perzigian, Justin, & Lequia, 2016), significant increases in the likelihood of subsequent juvenile detainment and high recidivism rates (Vanderhaar et al., 2014).

Findings such as these, which indicate both positive and negative outcomes of behavior-focused alternative schools, tend to cast into confusion the ability of such programs to address behavior problems of at-risk juveniles. Nonetheless, this contradiction may be explained by literature that suggests that not all juveniles respond equally to alternative learning programs. For example, Herndon and Bembenutty (2014) found that upon enrollment in a behavior-focused alternative school where all juveniles initially displayed low self-regulation skills, those who subsequently committed to self-regulation also displayed both academic success and positive classroom behavior (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2014).

Although self-regulation skills have been positively associated with behavioral success among juveniles placed in behavior-focused alternative schools, it remains unclear with regard to aspects of disciplinary alternative school programs juveniles experience as facilitating in the development of such skills. Thus, exploring juvenile experiences in and perceptions of behavior-focused alternative school programs is the logical next step in understanding the outcomes of such programs for at risk juveniles.

Therefore, in this study, I explored the experiences and perceptions of juvenile participants in a behavior-focused alternative school.

This study contributes to the literature by providing data on what juveniles perceive as facilitators and barriers of such programs for developing self-regulating skills. This study provides policymakers with data to consider in assessing the effects of such programs on discipline and delinquency outcomes among at-risk juveniles.

Purpose

My purpose in this study was to improve the understanding of how juveniles experience and perceive alternative school programs as facilitating the development of self-regulation skills as a means to promote positive behavior outcomes. To address this gap within the literature, I used a qualitative approach. I used interviews of juveniles who have attended behavior-focused alternative schools to study student experiences and perceptions of strategies and tools used by alternative schools to address negative behavior issues.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do juveniles experience alternative school programs as facilitators to managing impulses of deviant and delinquent behavior?

RQ2: How do juveniles experience alternative school programs as barriers to managing impulses of deviant and delinquent behavior?

RQ3: How do juveniles perceive alternative school programs as improving their own disciplinary and delinquency outcomes?

Theoretical Framework

Durkheim and Merton's (1961; 1957) structural functionalist theories served as the theoretical lens for this study. Functionalist theorists describe societies as the combined functioning of its various social institutions. Each institution is viewed as having a critical function that benefits the entire society, ultimately leading to its endurance.

Institutions of education, thus, serve the function of educating individuals to become contributing members of society. Institutions of education also function to transmit social behavioral norms through discipline, according to Durkheim (1961). In fact, Durkheim viewed the transmission of behavioral norms to be primarily the task of schools more so than that of families. Such behavioral norms equip individuals in their adherence to social standards of conduct and in the avoidance of dangerous and punitive social consequences that might result from failure to adhere to such standards.

Therefore, discipline is the means by which such behavioral norms are transmitted. In this manner, discipline serves to develop within the individual a capacity to regulate one's own behavior in accord with socially accepted standards of conduct. Thus, the individual must experience (not necessarily perceive) discipline as developing self-regulatory skills over one's own impulses (Durkheim, 1961).

Nevertheless, Durkheim (1961) viewed the outcomes of the transmission of such behavioral norms through discipline as varying among individuals. These differing outcomes are based on the individual's perspective of the utility of such discipline, used

to achieve a self-regulated adherence to behavioral norms, in the broader scope of their lives.

Merton (1957) contributed to the functionalist theory in identifying the ability of social institutions to have manifest and latent functions. In other words, the ability of a social institution, such as education, to produce intended and unintended outcomes.

Therefore, the functionalist theory provides an appropriate lens through which to interpret data of juvenile experiences and perceptions of aspects of an alternative school program as facilitators and barriers in the development of self-regulatory skills. I discuss this theoretical framework in more detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

In the current study, I used a qualitative phenomenological approach. This approach is consistent with exploring the experiences of juveniles in developing self-control skills. This approach is also consistent with understanding the perceptions of juveniles placed in alternative schools regarding such programs' facilitators and barriers in addressing discipline and delinquency. In line with the phenomenological approach of this study, I conducted semistructured interviews of juveniles placed in alternative schools for reasons of discipline and delinquency problems to understand the essence of this phenomenon. Juvenile experiences and perceptions of alternative school programs as facilitators and barriers to positive behavior outcomes provides information for schools and policymakers on effective aspects of alternative schools in facilitating positive behavioral outcomes.

Assumptions

I assumed that answers provided by study participants were honest and truthful. This aspect of the study, however, cannot be demonstrated to be true.

Scope

The scope of the present study is limited to exploring how behavior-focused alternative school juveniles experience and perceive such programs as facilitators and barriers for developing self-regulating skills. Exploring juvenile experiences in and perceptions of behavior-focused alternative school programs is the logical next step in understanding the outcomes of such programs for at-risk juveniles. Given the focus of the current study, the population used for this study was limited to only those juveniles enrolled in a behavior-focused alternative school.

The rich, thick description of participants enhances the transferability of this study. This type of description enables readers to determine the transferability of the study based on detailed characteristics.

Limitations

The present study is narrow in scope because I collected data from only one alternative school. Because alternative schools vary in objectives, characteristics and target populations, the results of the present study do not yield universal findings.

Significance

This research helps to fill a gap in understanding how at-risk juveniles perceive and experience alternative school programs as facilitators and barriers of self-regulatory skill development. This research is an important next step in understanding the outcomes

of alternative school programs. This study provides data on what at-risk juveniles experience and perceive as facilitators and barriers to their own improved discipline and delinquency problems. This is particularly important because such problems have been found to place at-risk juveniles at a greater risk for contact with the juvenile and criminal justice systems. This study is unique in part because it explores an undersearched area of juvenile experiences and perceptions of facilitators and barriers of alternative school programs that are associated with positive behavioral outcomes among at-risk youth. In addition, this study is unique in the methodology that I used to study to this topic. Although previous research has studied the association between alternative school programs and behavior outcomes, these studies have either used quantitative methods, which yielded data on student perceptions based on closed-ended, forced responses or qualitative methods using schools distinctly different from the one used in the present study.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an outline of the relevance of the present problem of study along with the purpose, scope, and nature of the study. In the next chapter, I will review the current literature on this topic as well discuss the theoretical lens through which I conducted this study.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

My purpose in the current study was to improve the understanding of how juveniles experience and perceive alternative school programs as facilitating the development of self-regulation skills as a means to promote positive behavior outcomes.

Certain practices with noted positive outcomes appear prevalent among the behavior-focused alternative schools within in the literature. Practices such as cultivating school settings that foster emotional support (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Free, 2017) and self-efficacy (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Mills & McGregor, 2016); for instance, have been linked with such schools also providing nurturing environments, family-like dynamics, and improved faculty-student (Free, 2017; Mills & McGregor, 2016) as well as peer interactions when compared to traditional schools (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2014).

Yet, despite the implementation of these practices and the positive school climate findings associated with them, alternative school student behavior outcomes appear to be somewhat conflicting according to findings in the literature. Findings of high recidivism rates, subsequent juvenile detention (Vanderhaar et al., 2014), and physically threatening behaviors (Free, 2017) among behavior-focused alternative school youth are among the negative behavioral outcomes noted in the literature. In fact, Free's (2017) study on one behavior-focused alternative school revealed negative behavioral outcomes that were actually perceived as associated with the aforementioned practices, touted in other literature as mediating poor behavior outcomes (Free, 2014; Herndon & Bembenutty

2014; Maillet 2016; Mills & McGregor, 2016;). Free's (2017) research illuminated a dangerous school culture and an unconditional tolerance for socially unacceptable behavior that manifested from the positive school climate factors previously noted.

Even so, studies have likewise found juvenile enrollment in behavior-focused alternative schools to be associated with positive behavioral outcomes. For instance, studies have found significantly lower office disciplinary referrals (Wilkerson et al., 2016) and significantly lower suspension rates (Kennedy-Lewis, Whitaker & Soutullo, 2016) among behavior-focused alternative school youth.

In this chapter, I present what is known from the current literature on this subject as well as present a discussion on the theoretical framework that I used to conduct the present study.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the following databases to conduct the literature search of current research for this study: Academic Search Complete, Thoreau Multi-Database Search, Expanded Academic ASAP, Sage Journals, ProQuest Central, and ProQuest Criminal Justice Database. I used the following search terms and combinations in searching the literature: Alternative schools and student perspectives, alternative schools and student voices, alternative schools and self-control, alternative schools and self-regulation, alternative schools and discipline OR delinquency OR behavior, alternative schools and behavior, behavior focused alternative schools and discipline outcomes, discipline alternative schools and behavior outcomes, alternative schools and self-esteem, alternative schools and self-management.

Theoretical Framework

I used the theoretical lens of structural functionalism. This framework provides that society is comprised of various structures—social institutions—and each structure has the task of certain functions: objectives. Structural functionalist theorists such as Durkheim and Merton (1961; 1957) see society as the integrated parts of these various social institutions. Much in the same way as organs work together for the functioning of the body, each institution serves a function for the benefit of the greater society. In this manner, such institutions are critical for the endurance of society.

Educational institutions are among the various key social institutions regarded by functionalists as tasked with objectives: educating children to become productive members of society that benefit the greater good of society. In addition to providing education, discipline, according to Durkheim (1961), is a primary function of educational institutions.

Discipline in schools, according to Durkheim (1961), is not for the sole purpose of penalizing juveniles. Nor is its purpose to shame or physically harm. Rather, the purpose of discipline is to transmit social behavioral norms. Discipline, therefore, is a means to an end and socially acceptable behavior. In this manner, discipline functions to outline and require specific behavior through authority figures setting expectations and rules set by teachers within the school (Durkheim, 1961, p. 32).

In turn, however, discipline may be perceived by those being disciplined as little more than a bothersome constraint on their individual will or as a limitation on their natural inclinations. Durkheim (1961) acknowledged that discipline does in fact act to

prevent individual's unrestrained desires to engage in acts that are pleasurable to the individual, but which may not be beneficial for society. Yet, such behavioral limitations are necessary in a society in which interaction among the members of that society is inevitable and through such interactions, differences may arise (Durkheim, 1961, pp. 35-36). Durkheim (1961, p. 37) suggests that when behavioral norms are cast aside and conduct is unconstrained, individuals risk encountering negative social consequences.

Therefore, discipline acts to develop the characteristic of constraint within the individual. Yet, effective discipline does not seek to develop a forced constraint of the individual's natural inclinations. Rather, effective discipline aims at limiting natural impulses through a willing characteristic to constrain such impulses. Therefore, what is required is both self-restraint and a willingness to do so. This characteristic of willing self-constraint, Durkheim (1961) suggested, enables individuals to restrain their natural impulses of solely self-gratifying behavior, thus equipping them for mutual existence and the ability to avoid negative social consequences.

The characteristic of restraint, or self-regulation, of one's natural inclinations has to develop for individuals whose faculties for reasoning are not as developed as their faculties for emotion, according to Durkheim (1961). It is the function of discipline, therefore, to develop such self-regulation. This development, however, occurs only when the individual acknowledges that self-regulation requires effort. Such effort is exerted, according to Durkheim (1961, p. 46; 99), based on the individual's perceptions of the duty and good in its exertion.

Although all acts performed in accordance with rules are to some degree out of both a sense of duty (obligation) and good (an appeal to the natural senses), Durkheim (1961) suggested that one of these two factors are always dominant. Whether an individual follows a rule out of a sense of duty or a sense of good is dependent on the natural disposition of that individual. Individuals who naturally possess well-developed self-regulatory skills are guided more strongly by reason, an ability to suppress natural impulses. Individuals who are not as well equipped with self-regulatory skills are guided more strongly by emotion. These individuals act in accordance with what appeals to their senses.

Thus, what develops in the child through the function of discipline is the capacity for reason. Reason then acts as a constraint on impulses arising out of emotion, creating a sense of duty (obligation). Self-regulation, then, is achieved only through the development of one's reasoning skills (Durkheim, 1961).

The characteristic of willing restraint is achieved through one's sense of good; that is the extent to which something appeals to the individual. A willingness to adhere to rules or standards is achieved through the individual's attachment to the social group that prescribes such rules, standards and/or norms. Thus, the stronger the attachment the individual has to the group, such as schools, the more connected they feel to the very authority of the rules and standards to which they willingly adhere. Consequently, discipline and attachment to social groups are inextricably linked. Durkheim (1961) considered them as parts of the same thing. Together, they yield a willingness for self-regulation, which exudes itself as socially acceptable behavior.

Although the objective function of discipline can be seen, through this theoretical lens, as the transmission of behavioral norms through the development of self-regulatory skills, disciplinary outcomes may vary among juveniles, according to Durkheim (1961). This variation in behavioral outcomes is influenced by the juvenile's perception of the functionality of such discipline. In other words, how juveniles perceive the usefulness of such disciplinary practices in their overall lives, affects their behavioral outcomes (Durkheim, 1961).

Merton (1957), contributed to the functionalist perspective in describing social institutions, such as schools, as having both manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are those intended outcomes of an institution. While latent functions are unintended outcomes of a social institution. In this light, education can be seen as having the manifest function of educating juveniles to become productive members of society and teaching behavioral norms. Likewise, Durkheim (1961) suggested that behavioral norms are not simply transmitted through formal means, but also through informal and unintentional means. Merton (1957) would consider the transmitting of behavioral norms through formal means of discipline, such as expectation setting by authority figures, as a manifest function of education. However, the transmitting of behavioral norms as a result of teacher modeled behavior would be considered a latent function (Merton, 1957).

One objective of the present study was to understand how juveniles experience an alternative school program as facilitating the development of self-regulation skills as a means to promote positive behavior outcomes. Thus, the functionalist approach served as an appropriate lens through which experiences of functions of the alternative school in

this study could be interpreted as facilitators and barriers for positive behavioral outcomes of the juveniles served by them. The other objective of the present study was to understand how juveniles perceive alternative school programs as facilitating the development of self-regulation skills as a means to promote positive behavior outcomes. Again, the functionalist approach provided an appropriate framework through which to interpret student perceptions of alternative school facilitators and barriers in terms of developing self-regulatory skills.

Free (2017) similarly applied the functionalist theoretical framework in her study of faculty and staff perceptions of the strengths weaknesses of a behavior-focused alternative school. Additionally, in researching the impact of student perceived school bonds on the classroom behavior of alternative school juveniles, Free (2014) analyzed data through the theoretical lens of Hirschi's (1969) theory of social control. In doing so, Free (2014) noted that Hirschi's (1969) theory was significantly informed by Durkheim's (1961) theory on the function of discipline in the context of education, particularly transmitting behavioral norms.

Literature Review

Given the significant range in characteristics of alternative schools and programs in the United States, a single definition for such schools and programs does not exist. However, alternative schools are generally educational settings housed independent of traditional schools, while alternative programs are usually housed within a traditional school (Carver& Lewis, 2010). Alternative schools have the task of servicing the academic and/or behavioral needs of at-risk youth due to academic failure, truancy, in-

school discipline, violence, drugs, weapons and delinquency. These schools, unlike traditional schools, attempt to meet these needs by providing an educational setting that is more conducive to the specific academic and/or behavioral needs of the youth it serves (Vanderhaar et al., 2014).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), 64% of school districts within the United States have at least one alternative school or program for at-risk youth. The most recent data shows that these schools and programs serve more than 600,000 youth nationwide (Carver & Lewis, 2010). In a recent study, Vanderhaar et al. (2014) found that approximately 1 in 10 juveniles were placed in a disciplinary alternative school between 3rd and 12th grade.

Reasons for enrollment into alternative schools vary considerably, from academic to behavioral, adding to the difficulty in defining these schools. However, behavioral reasons such as chronic office disciplinary referrals, possession or use of a firearm, possession or use of drugs, violence, truancy and court orders, while not an all-inclusive list, may subject a juvenile to placement in a behavior/discipline-focused alternative school.

In general, juveniles who engage in violent behavior and/or chronic substance abuse have an increased frequency of in-school disciplinary problems and coming into contact with either the juvenile or criminal justice systems more often than their peers do. This behavior often results in the removal of such youth from traditional schools to behavior-focused alternative schools, juvenile justice facilities or dropping out of school.

School exclusionary practices have been found to increase a juvenile's likelihood of coming into contact with the juvenile or criminal justice system. Juvenile arrests have been found to be 2.10 times more likely during months when they have been suspended or expelled from school as compared with juveniles who have not (Monahan et al., 2014, p. 1116).

Given the available data on the association between school practices such as zero tolerance and youth contact with the juvenile and criminal justice systems, it is imperative that studies take a deeper dive into the relationship between juvenile schooling experiences and entry into the juvenile justice system (Vanderhaar et al., 2014; Monahan et al., 2014, p. 1116).

Juveniles enrolled in alternative schools have been found to have stronger tendencies for substance abuse and violence as compared with juveniles in traditional public-school settings. Therefore, it is especially critical to study this population due to the implications of their increased vulnerability to the school-to-prison pipeline (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2014; Herndon, Bembenutty & Gill 2015).

Disciplinary alternative schools aim to promote self-control and motivation while also facilitating positive self-direction and responsible social behavior among juveniles in pursuit of academic success (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2014). Yet, a review of the literature reveals a paucity of knowledge as to the effectiveness of alternative schools in meeting the needs of the target population of youth served by them. More precisely, questions remain as to the impact behavior/discipline-focused alternative schools have on effectuating behavioral changes among at-risk youth that may benefit them in avoiding

negative in-school behavioral outcomes and subsequent contact with the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

In fact, prior research on behavior/discipline-focused alternative schools, have indicated both positive and negative outcomes for juveniles served by such schools. For instance, juveniles enrolled in a behavior-focused alternative school were found to have significantly lower attendance rates and earned fewer course credits during a single semester as compared to juveniles enrolled in a traditional school. Yet, youth enrolled in a behavior-focused alternative school were also found to have significantly lower office discipline referrals as compared to youth enrolled in a traditional school (Wilkerson et al., 2016).

Kennedy-Lewis, Whitaker and Soutullo (2016) surmised that the placement of juveniles in a behavior-focused alternative school ultimately worked for the benefit of traditional schools by removing problem behaviors, more than it benefitted the juveniles removed. Kennedy-Lewis, Whitaker, Soutullo (2016) further concluded such placements as tantamount to warehousing students, where juvenile behavior resulted in no statistically significant differences per year. Kennedy-Lewis, Whitaker, Soutullo (2016) also found further support for this conclusion in standardized math outcomes of the alternative school juveniles in their study, which experienced a slight decline. To the contrary, however, this study also found some positive outcomes among the behavior-focused alternative school youth studied. Juvenile suspensions, for instance, saw a statistically significant decline and unweighted Grade Point Averages (GPA) increased during enrollment at a behavior-focused alternative school.

Still, additional negative outcomes of behavior-focused alternative school placement are cited within the literature. Recidivism among those placed in behavior-focused alternative schools, for example, further presents questions as to the effectiveness of the behavioral outcomes of these programs. In a cohort of 186 students, Vanderhaar et al. (2014) reported that students were placed in alternative schools 266 times.

In their study, Vanderhaar et al. (2014) also found that most removals from traditional to alternative schools occur during middle school years, particularly 7th and 8th grade. In fact, they determined that 4 out of 10 students placed in alternative schools during 7th and 8th grades were subsequently detained in juvenile detention within two years of placement.

Overall, in their study on the relationship between alternative school placement and subsequent detainment, Vanderhaar et al. (2014) concluded that placement in a disciplinary alternative school highly increases the likelihood of subsequent placement in juvenile detention. They interpreted this data as indicating that alternative schools may increase rather than decrease juvenile detention rates.

In spite of the inconsistencies within the literature of behavior outcomes among alternative school juveniles, some studies have illuminated aspects of alternative school programs that are associated with such outcomes. For instance, Herndon & Bembenutty (2014) found that alternative schools might actually be effective when facilitating student success through positive peer interaction and promoting delayed-gratification, a component of self-regulation.

Behavior and academic performance have been found to be a reflection of a juvenile's self-regulatory skills. Thus, juvenile's success in school and social settings require self-regulating skills. For juveniles who are less equipped in self-regulation and thus considered at-risk due to the behavioral expressions of such vulnerabilities, some studies (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2014: Herndon, Bembenutty & and Gill, 2015) note that it is especially critical that such skills be developed. Likewise, staff interviewed at an alternative provision free school in the United Kingdom (likened to U.S. charter schools) for juveniles who no longer attend traditional schools for reasons which include behavior and exclusion, also emphasized the need for schools similar in characteristic to their own novelty school, to employ strategies targeted toward juveniles with low self-regulation. The lack of self-regulatory strategies employed within traditional schools, was cited as having initially led to the failure of such youth (Putwain, Nicholson, & Edwards, 2015).

Moreover, behavior-focused alternative school juveniles must acquire a willingness to develop such self-mastery (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2014; Herndon & Bembenutty and Gill, 2015). This finding echoes Durkheim's (1961) earlier contention of the necessity of the individual's willingness for self-control. In addition, this type of regulation must be exerted even in the face of observing negative behavior models (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2014).

Herndon and Bembenutty (2014) found that most juveniles entered the behavior-focused alternative school used in their study with a low willingness for self-regulation. Given the association between willing self-control and group attachment offered by Durkheim (1961) regarding transmitting behavioral norms, it becomes important here to

point out suggestions of the likelihood that upon entering alternative schools, juveniles bring with them negative assumptions and experiences, including relationships with adults from their previous schools (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Mills & McGregor, 2016).

Herndon and Bembenutty (2014) noted that some juveniles who displayed an initial low willingness for self-regulation were, nonetheless, successful in acquiring greater self-regulatory skills during enrollment at the behavior-focused alternative school used in their study. However, this was not the case for all juveniles. For those that were, however, able to commit to greater self-regulatory skills, they exuded changes in their patterns of behavior. Herndon and Bembenutty's (2014) determined that juveniles who were able to control their anger and attend class prepared to learn were judged by their teacher's as having positive peer associates, willing to defer immediate impulses, engaged in less violent behavior, and were among those who used less illegal substances. Herndon, Bembenutty and Gill's (2015) study similarly support these findings. In their study, Herndon, Bembenutty and Gill's (2015) concluded that alternative school juveniles who exude self-restraint, an ability to delay-gratifications and stay on task have more successful behavioral and academic outcomes than juveniles who do not display these characteristics.

Thus, self-regulation skills are necessary for academic and behavioral success. Not only has self-regulation been found to mediate behavior, but also poor academic skills (Herndon and Bembenutty 2014; Herndon, Bembenutty & Gill, 2015). Therefore, aspects of alternative school programs, which lend to the development of such skills

among alternative school juveniles, are important to explore as a means of promoting positive behavior outcomes. Still, the current literature does not offer qualitative findings on such functions of alternative schools. Qualitative studies can enrich the literature by validating quantitative findings, such as those discussed here, as well contributing to the detail and thickness of the data.

Additionally, school bonds have been linked to behavior outcomes within the literature. Free (2014), for example, found that attachment to teachers and a sense of affiliation with the school among at-risk middle school youth enrolled at an alternative school significantly affected their classroom behavior. Maillet (2016) also cited the importance of student-faculty relationships in addressing juvenile academic and behavioral success based on his personal experiences as an administrator of alternative education middle school reengagement center. Furthermore, Maillet (2016) found that the development of such relationships was imperative to other practices used to address behavior and academic success of alternative school youth within his reengagement center.

Putwain, Nicholson, and Edwards' (2015) study lends support for these conclusions. In their study, data based on staff and student perceptions of positive instructional strategies for juvenile reengagement included an emphasis placed on positive student-teacher relationships and a nurturing school environment. Herndon and Bembenutty's (2014) study suggests that juvenile peer interactions also influence their classroom behavior. They found that behavior-focused alternative school juveniles

display positive classroom behavior and an ability to delay-gratification when they build relationships with peers who exhibit positive behavior.

These finding support Durkheim's (1961) theory of the relationship between attachment to social groups and willing adherence to prescribed norms.

Consequently, there is a noted likeliness in the literature for alternative school juveniles to carry negative assumptions and experiences from their traditional school to their alternative school (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Mills & McGregor, 2016). However, studies have concluded that these juveniles, nonetheless, have the capacity to develop positive school bonds of affiliation and attachment in an alternative school setting (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Mills & McGregor, 2016; Free, 2014).

Support for Durkheim's theory regarding the connectedness of social attachment and self-mastery can be gleaned even more from Edgar-Smith and Palmer's (2015) study on the social and emotional problems of alternative school youth and their perceptions of school bonds. In looking at the socioemotional functioning of alternative school juveniles, Edgar-Smith and Palmer, (2015) concluded that socioemotional function deficiencies were associated with poor perceptions of school climate, including relationships with teachers and a wanting sense of inclusion. Where juveniles had a sense of connection to the school and perceived their relationships with school faculty as supportive, they were found to have less social and emotional problems (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015). However, the findings of this study are limited since fifteen percent of the student participants were transferred from the school because of being unsuccessful in

the alternative school program. As a result, their perceptions are not captured within the data.

Free (2017) similarly concluded that the provision of an emotionally supportive school climate is important to alternative school juvenile's outcomes, according to the faculty perceptions captured during her case study of a behavior-focused alternative school.

Nevertheless, Free's (2017) case study on faculty and staff perceived strengths and weaknesses for juveniles of one alternative school seems to present conflicting results on the issue of school bonds. On one hand, the data indicates that faculty perceived family-like relationships cultivated through alternative school environments similar in characteristic to their own as one of the strengths of such schooling for juveniles. The faculty perceived such relationships of this case study as fostering a positive rapport between teachers and students (Free, 2017). In this light, Free (2017) surmised that alternative schooling, resembling the one in her case study creates a "culture of care."

Even so, Free's (2017) study additionally revealed several faculty perceived weaknesses for juveniles. In fact, some participants perceived such weaknesses as a direct result of the identified strengths of the characteristics of the alternative school studied, namely the family-like dynamic between faculty and students. One of the primary weaknesses identified were adult responses to juvenile discipline, or rather, lack thereof. Faculty perceived these responses as inconsistent or lacking. Moreover, however, such responses were perceived to be a result of the emotionally nurturing and family-like

dynamic cultivated through the school's environment. Specifically, faculty described a high tolerance disciplinary school culture in which retaining juveniles within the school and even in the classroom was a top priority, even at the cost of the physical safety of faculty, staff and students.

As a result of ignored rules and a nearly unconditional tolerance of problem behavior, ranging from socially unacceptable to physically threatening, juveniles were perceived to be unclear as to behavioral expectations and in some cases confident that violations would not be met with consequences.

The alternative schooling environment described in this case study was that of chaos, disorder and physically dangerous. This, Free (2017) described as a "culture of danger" which was agitated by students in response to an adult fostered "culture of care."

Consequently, faculty perceived students as ill prepared to exude appropriate conduct in other social settings such as employment, due to inconsistencies in in-school responses to discipline. Free's (2017) study highlights disadvatges associated with aspects alternative schooling in which inconistent responses to problem behavior is characteristic of the school.

Finally, alternative schools have also been found to provide settings that allow juveniles to nurture their self-efficacy. Like self-regulation, self-efficacy has been associated with behavior as well as academic outcomes of alternative school youth (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Mills & McGregor, 2016; Putwain, Nicholson, and Edwards, 2015). Herndon and Bembenutty (2017) found that self-efficacy beliefs mediate behavior. Juveniles who possess greater self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulation skills

have more confidence in their academic abilities (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Mills & McGregor, 2016). These sentiments translate to higher standardized test scores as compared to juveniles with low self-efficacy and self-regulation (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017). Putwain, Nicholson, and Edwards (2015) likewise found in their research on a novelty alternative provision free school used in their study that emphasis placed on fostering self-confidence was perceived by faculty and students as an instructional strategy associated with juvenile reengagement.

Perhaps, the conflicting data on the effectiveness of behavior-focused alternative schools might be explained by the fact that not all juveniles respond in the same manner to alternative school placement (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017). As a result, numerous studies have emphasized the need for qualitative research on the experiences and perceptions of juveniles placed in alternative schools, particularly behavior-focused alternative schools (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Free, 2017; Vanderhaar et al., 2014; Wilkerson et al., 2016).

Summary

What can be gleaned from the literature are two different pictures of behavior-focused alternative schools in terms of outcomes. One picture suggests that behavior-focused alternative schools are associated with effectuating positive outcomes (Free, 2017; Herndon and Bembenutty 2014; Herndon, Bembenutty & Gill's 2015; Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Kennedy-Lewis, Whitaker & Soutullo, 2016; Mills & McGregor, 2016; Wilkerson et al., 2016). Contrasting literature, sometimes within the same studies, presents a picture in which behavior-focused alternative schools are associated with

negative behavior outcomes (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Free, 2017; Kennedy-Lewis, Whitaker & Soutullo, 2016; Vanderhaar et al., 2014). Yet, this data is limited due to employing largely quantitative methods in order to reach such conclusions.

Thus, a search of the current literature indicates conflicting positive and negative behavioral outcomes for juveniles attending behavior-focused alternative schools. More importantly, the literature fails to provide the type of rich insight that a qualitative study can yield as to the reason behind such inconsistencies within the data. Consequently, these findings urge a persistence in addressing questions as to the effectiveness of these schools.

Furthermore, the literature suggests that student experiences and perceptions are a critical component of their behavioral outcomes (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Free, 2014; Mills & McGregor; Putwain, Nicholson, and Edwards, 2015). Nevertheless, the existing literature relies primarily on quantitative methods to capture juvenile experiences and perceptions of aspects of alternative school programs and their associations with behavior outcomes (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Free, 2014; Herndon & Bembenutty, 2014; 2017). This is also true of the findings specifically related to alternative school juvenile's self-regulatory skills (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2014; 2017; Herndon, Bembenutty & Gill, 2015).

Few studies within the current literature have sought to capture juvenile experiences and perspectives of alternative school programs using a qualitative study. Putwain et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews of juvenile participants in order to determine their perceptions of instructional enablers and

obstructions of school reengagement. However, this study was on an alternative provision free school located in England for juveniles in the tenth and eleventh grades. While these schools are a novelty in England, the researchers described such schools as comparable to American charter schools. Another characteristic, among others, that distinguishes the school used for this research from the alternative school used for the present study is that the juveniles studied participated in both on and off campus aspects of the school program.

Mills and McGregor (2016) also implemented a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews in order to analyze juvenile perceptions of two alternative schools in Australia. Even so, these schools differ significantly in characteristic and target populations from the school used for the present study. One of the schools used in Mills and McGregor's (2016) case study was non-compulsory and patterned after adult education models. The second school used within their case study serviced homeless and disadvantage juveniles. More importantly, the principal and faculty of a traditional high school assumed the operating responsibility for the alternative school.

Other research shortcomings have also limited the findings within the current literature. As for the association between acclaimed alternative school practices and positive behavior outcomes reported by Edgar-Smith and Palmer (2015), fifteen percent of the initial participants failed to successfully comply with the alternative school program in the study. These juveniles' perspectives were not only not captured in the data, but also given the non-compliance within the alternative school program of such participants, this raises questions as to how their perspectives may have influenced the

outcomes of the study. Free's (2017) case study also appears to cast doubt as to the linkage between positive school climate practices and behavior outcomes of alternative school juveniles. This study also only captures the perspectives of faculty and staff as to the aspects of the alternative school program regarding strengths and weaknesses for students.

Due to the shortcomings in the current studies that appear within the literature, which largely utilized forced-answer, closed-ended surveys and questionnaires to determine student perceptions, the richness of data is lacking. The primary research methods employed and other limitations of these studies have not yielded thick, rich data regarding how at-risk juveniles experience and perceive behavior-focused alternative schools as facilitating positive behavioral outcomes.

Moreover, the current literature reveals scarce data on the topic of the present study. Current literature has linked the behavioral success of alternative school juveniles to their ability to develop sufficient self-regulatory skills (Herndon & Bembenutty; 2014; Herndon, Bembenutty & Gill, 2015). Yet, the current literature does not provide rich insight into the experiences and perceptions of alternative school students in developing self-regulatory skills. As a result, it remains unclear as to the aspects (functions) of disciplinary alternative school programs juveniles experience as facilitating in the development of such skills as well as their perceptions of such functions.

Thus, as the logical next step, the present study helps to fill a gap within the literature in exploring juvenile experiences and perceptions of behavior-focused alternative schools as facilitators and barriers for developing self-regulation skills. This

provides data for stakeholders and policymakers in assessing the impact of behavior-focused alternative schools.

The following chapter will present the research design and methodology that I used in the current study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

My purpose in this study was to improve the understanding of how juveniles experience and perceive alternative school programs as facilitating the development of self-regulation skills as a means to promote positive behavior outcomes.

In this chapter, I will present the research design and methodology of the present study.

Research Design and Rationale

To address this gap within the literature, I used a qualitative approach to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do juveniles experience alternative school programs as facilitators to managing impulses of deviant and delinquent behavior?

RQ2: How do juveniles experience alternative school programs as barriers to managing impulses of deviant and delinquent behavior?

RQ3: How do juveniles perceive alternative school programs as improving their own disciplinary and delinquency outcomes?

Both objectives of understanding how juveniles experience and perceive alternative school programs as facilitating the development of self-regulating skills as a means to promote positive behavior outcomes along with the aforementioned research questions informed the method of inquiry used for the current study. The method of inquiry I used for the current study informed the data collection, analysis process and the sampling procedure.

Although a number of qualitative approaches can be used in qualitative research, not all such approaches were suitable for the present study given the objective and research questions of the current study. Although the present research problem might be addressed through a case study, such studies are generally used for illustrating an issue, rather than the lived experiences of a phenomenon. Likewise, an ethnographic study was not be appropriate here, because such studies aim at understanding the culture of a group. The narrative approach also did not align well with the current study as such studies focus on the life experiences of individuals, with a particular focus on the context of events and meanings within the chronology of such events. These were not my goals for the current study.

I used a phenomenological approach. This approach is consistent with exploring the experiences of juveniles in developing self-control skills through behavior-focused alternative schools. This approach is also consistent with understanding the perceptions of juveniles placed in alternative schools regarding such programs' facilitators and barriers in addressing discipline and delinquency. This approach has also been used in similar studies. For example, Putwain et al. (2015) used this approach in their study of alternative provision free school youth's perceptions of classroom instructional strategies used to re-engage such youth.

In line with the phenomenological approach of this study, I conducted semistructured interviews of juveniles placed in alternative schools due to discipline and delinquency problems to understand the essence of this phenomenon. The methodology used for this study aligned with the phenomenological inquiry approach of this study.

Another Chance is an alternative school located in the fourth largest school district in the state where the school is located. The objective of Another Chance is to provide alternative learning services to students in Grades 6 through 12 who commit violations of the student code of conduct considered Level 5 violations, according to the policy of the school district in which the school is located. According to the school district's policy, Level 5 violations include an assault on school personnel without a weapon, robbery without a weapon, a violent assault not resulting in serious injury or repeated offenses of lower level offenses when other interventions have failed.

A principal at a student's regular school can recommend them for enrollment in Another Chance. However, students may also enroll when entering the district from an alternative program in another school district, when entering the district from secured custody and on completion of a community involvement program. It is also possible for a student to enroll for reasons unrelated to discipline, according district policy in which the Another Chance is located. Once enrolled, students may remain at Another Chance for no less than one full academic quarter and may remain for as long as the completion of their academic tenure in in the school district. The principal of Another Chance makes decisions to return a student to a traditional school within the district based on the student's achievement of their behavior plan goals. The instructional superintendent assigned to Another Chance and the director of alternative education reviews all such decisions. The principal of Another Chance will also write a transition plan for the student, which includes behavior and academic goals. In the last 9 years, Another Chance

has returned 75% of students served through its program, according to the school's website.

Role of the Researcher

As a former public-school educator in the public-school district in which the school used for the present study is located, I bring with me my experiences as an educator and my knowledge of the overall school district. However, I do not bring with me any previous role at the school under study nor any role within the life of any student participants. Additionally, as member of the community in which school district of the school used in the present study is located, I bring with me my knowledge of the overall community.

My role as a researcher was observational in the data collection process as opposed to a participant role. As the researcher, I did not have any personal and/or professional relationships with student participants for this study.

Methodology

Data Collection

I collected data from students in Grades 10 through 12 enrolled at a single secondary behavior/discipline-focused alternative school (Another Chance) located in the southeastern region of the United States. Data collected from students in Grades 10 through 12 offered insight from students who have had a greater wealth of schooling experiences to draw from. It is also likely that students in Grades 10 through 12 are more cognitively developed than students in Grades 6 through 8. Both of these factors were considered to enhance the quality of data for the present study.

Data collection occurred through a single one-on-one semistructured in-depth interview with each participant. The Another Chance faculty and staff forwarded invitations and consent forms to participate in the study to all parents and students in Grades 9 through 12, inviting such parents and students to contact the researcher directly to volunteer. I conducted all interviews for this study. Interviews lasted between 20 to 45 minutes, based on participant responses. A member of the Another Chance administration was present in the facility where each interview took place and were available to respond to any safety concerns according to school policy, although none occurred. Although a member of the Another Chance administration was present in the facility where each interview took place, they were not present in the interviewing room. Interviews were semistructured to yield the best quality of data possible to best describe the phenomenon for those studied.

Interview questions were open-ended subquestions of the primary research questions. Such questions were designed in a way that was easy for interviewees to understand and answer. I used a self-produced interview guide for conducting interviews and furnished a copy to the principal of Another Chance prior to conducting the study. I asked additional questions during the interviews for clarity or elaboration.

Interviews took place at the research site location in a setting that was private, quiet and free from distractions. To ensure accuracy, interviews were audio-recorded. Participation of youth participants concluded once I transcribed interviews and participants reviewed transcripts of their interview. As a token of appreciation, participants received a $10 McDonald’s gift card for their participation in this study.

Sampling

Purposeful sampling allowed selection of participants based on their ability to contribute to the understanding of the present phenomenon of study. I used criterion sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, in the present study. Criterion sampling ensured that all participants selected had experienced the phenomenon examined. Experience of the phenomenon is a critical component of phenomenological studies, the type of inquiry that employed here. Since all members of the sample met the criteria, in this case having attended an alternative school for discipline and/or delinquency reasons, this enhanced the quality of the study.

Sample Size

The current phenomenological study consisted of 5 participants. Phenomenological studies generally range from a minimum of three participants to no more than ten participants (Dukes, 1984).

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data through a process of coding, categorizing and interpreting for meaning. I transcribed audiotaped interviews. Transcribed interviews were then coded with single words or short phrases by the researcher through a process of open coding. For the purpose of this phenomenological study, I identified participant statements of experiences with the phenomenon of study in the present case for coding. I used coded data to identify broader categories within the data and such codes were combined into the identified categories. In the case of the current phenomenological study, I coded statements of participant's experiences with the phenomenon of interest and then grouped

such codes into broader categories. I interpreted the aggregated data for meaning. This interpretation involved a textural description and a structural description of what was experienced by the participants regarding the phenomenon of interest and how the experience occurred. I combined these descriptions into a description of the essence of the phenomenon as experienced by the study participants. In this manner, data collected through the in-depth interviews addressed both of the aforementioned research questions.

Trustworthiness

I employed several procedures in order to support the trustworthiness of the current study. These procedures included clarification of biases, transcript review by participants, the use of detailed field notes and rich description of data.

I provided a detailed account of any connections to the current research that may have informed the inquiry in the study through biases and/or assumptions. I recorded interviews by audiotape and then transcribed them. I then listened to the audio recording while reading the transcript to check for accuracy. I described the setting of the study and study participants in detail to include setting characteristics, quotes, gestures and phrases of significance. In addition, I conducted a 10-15 minute transcript review to allow participants to check the interpretations of the content of their statements. I coordinated transcript reviews with the parents of participants.

Ethical Considerations

I obtained permission to conduct the study from the Walden University Institutional Review Board before data collection began. Walden University's approval number for this study is 03-07-18-0523647.The purpose of the study was explained to

each participant as well as how the study findings would be used. I also informed each participant as to why they were selected to participate in the study. I kept participants' identities confidential for the purpose of the study using an established code used throughout this dissertation.

Consent forms were provided to both parents and participating students for their review and signatures. Each consent form informed participants of their right to elect to withdraw from the study at any time, procedures for collecting data, confidentiality of participation, disclosure of known risks and any benefits for participation. I informed study participants of the amount of time needed to conduct the interview. School counselors; school social workers with clinical backgrounds; and school psychologists, were present and available, if needed, to intervene if a crisis occurred for students during or after interviews.

Additionally, I conducted transcript reviews to allow participants to check the interpretations of the content of their statements. I maintained exclusive control of audiotaped interviews. Transcribed and coded data was stored in password protected electronic database, to which I maintained exclusive control. In addition, I submitted a 1page hardcopy summary of the non-identifying results, written in everyday language, to the participants and stakeholders.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

My purpose in this study was to improve the understanding of how juveniles experience and perceive alternative school programs as facilitating the development of self-regulating skills in promotion of positive behavior outcomes. I used a qualitative approach in order to answer the following research questions.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do juveniles experience alternative school programs as facilitators to managing impulses of deviant and delinquent behavior?

RQ2: How do juveniles experience alternative school programs as barriers to managing impulses of deviant and delinquent behavior?

RQ3: How do juveniles perceive alternative school programs as improving their own disciplinary and delinquency outcomes?

In this chapter, I will present the setting of the data collection, participant demographics and characteristics related to the study, data collection, data analysis, and results of the present study.

Setting

Another Chance is one of three alternative schools within the fourth largest school district in the state in which it is located. The alternative school is located in a medium sized city with a population of approximately 244,000, according to the most recent publication of the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), in the southeastern region of the United States. Another Chance is intended to provide alternative learning services to students in

Grades 6 through 12 who commit violations of the school district's student code of conduct considered Level 5 violations, according to the policy of the school district in which the school is located. Level 5 violations include an assault on school personnel without a weapon, robbery without a weapon, a violent assault not resulting in serious injury or repeated offenses of lower level offenses when other interventions have failed.

Interviews took place at the research site location in a private classroom setting, which was quiet and free from distractions. The classroom was well lit by both florescent and natural lighting. I used one of several long classroom tables for each interview with participants sitting across from me.

Demographics

Study participants included five students in Grades 10 through 12, enrolled in Another Chance at the time of data collection. The study participants included three 10th-grade students, an 11th-grade student, and a 12th-grade student. Two of the study participants were male and three were female. To ensure confidentiality, study participants are referred to as S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5 throughout this dissertation.

According to the district policy in which the alternative school is located, once enrolled, students may remain at the alternative school for no less than one full academic quarter, but they can also be assigned for longer periods and may remain for as long as the completion of their academic tenure in the school district.

Participants for this study ranged in the amount of time they had been enrolled at the alternative school. The 12th-grade participant reported being enrolled for a period of almost 3 months. The 11th-grade participant reported being enrolled for approximately 1

month. One 10th-grade participant reported being enrolled for a period of approximately two months while another 10th-grade participant reported being enrolled for approximately one quarter. Another 10th-grade participant reported being enrolled for a few weeks.

Out of the five participants, four reported being placed at the alternative school for disciplinary incidents, which occurred at their home schools. Four participants reported that such incidences involved physical/violent behavior including, an assault on a peer, a fight in which a weapon was brought to the home school, and pushing a police officer. Of the study participants, two indicated that their placement was the result of repeated incidents of disciplinary problems. One such participant reported that such multiple disciplinary incidents involved both violent and non-violent behavior including, slapping another student, walking out of class, and skipping.

All participants reported an initial low-willingness for their alternative school placement. For example, S2, a 12th-grade male student who reported being placed at Another Chance as a result of an assault on a peer, said, “I just was kind of like down a little bit . . .” when responding to questions of his initial feelings about being placed at an alternative school. S3, a 10th-grade female student who said that her placement at the alternative school was due to being involved in a fight and bringing a weapon onto school property, stated, “I didn't want to come to Another Chance because uh, I heard nothing but bad reviews about this school. So of course, I was nervous and, you know, I was having anxiety.” S4, an 11th-grade female student who reported being placed in

alternative school due to repeated disciplinary referrals, stated, “I was mad,” when describing her initial feelings about being placed at Another Chance.

Four of the five participants reported perceived deficiencies in their abilities for self-regulating their behavior, prior to enrollment at the alternative school. For instance, S1, a 10th-grade female student enrolled at Another Chance for approximately 2 months, was asked to compare her response to behavior triggers since attending Another Chance versus before attending. The participant stated,

> I would have reacted bad before . . . If I don't get my way I would be mad the whole entire day . . . I would like battle them [peers] and curse them out . . . I used to like . . . throw things off my desk. I used to like hold the door shut and like lock teachers in rooms.

Another participant, S4, also acknowledged having challenges with behavioral self-regulation. S4 stated, “I know I have problems with self-control issues.” She went on to describe specific areas of her prior behavior in which her ability for self-control was lacking. She stated,

> I have a problem with my attitude and anger issues and my mouth . . . Before I came here, I didn't care. I was like let one of these girls try me. Let one of these boys try me. Let these teachers . . . I don't care. I had a bad mindset.

S3, also described her ability to exercise self-control over her behavior by stating, “It was really hard for me to try to control it because like once I'm mad, I'm mad.”

Although most participants described experiencing challenges with their behavior and self-restraint prior to enrollment at Another Chance, four participants described

improvements with their behavior and self-restraint since attending the alternative school. S3 stated, “I think . . . I’m able to control it [my behavior] a lot better now.” This statement captures the general sentiment shared among the four participants who reported changes in their behavior since enrolling at Another Chance.

Data Collection

Prior to collecting data, I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board. I collected data from five students in Grades 10 through 12 during a single one-on-one semistructured in-depth interview with each participant. Invitations and consent forms inviting parents and students of Another Chance to contact me directly to volunteer for participation in the study were distributed to students in Grades 9 through 12 of Another Chance by the faculty and staff of the school. Parent consent and student assent forms were provided for all interviews. All interviews were voluntary and confidential.

I collected data in person at the research site location in a private classroom setting, which was quiet and free from distractions. Members of the Another Chance administration were present in the facility where each interview took place, but were not present in the interviewing room. I conducted all interviews. Unless otherwise noted, all interviews took place between March 22, 2018 and May 14, 2018. Each interview lasted between 20 to 45 minutes, based on participant responses. Interviews were semi-structured in order to yield the best quality of data possible for describing the phenomenon as experienced by those studied. I used a self-produced interview guide to

conduct each interview and asked additional questions for clarity or elaboration about responses.

To ensure accuracy, interviews were audio-recorded. Participation of youth participants concluded after I transcribed interviews and participants reviewed them for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data analysis took place through a process of open coding based on patterns identified within the data, sorting codes into broader categories and interpreting for meanings, which emerged from the data. To protect the confidentiality of participants, data were de-identified prior to coding, whereby I assigned each participant a letter and case number.

I transcribed audiotaped interviews. I then read the transcribed interviews line-by-line to identify meaningful text related to the research questions. Then I manually coded such text with short phrases through a process of open coding. For the purpose of this phenomenological study, I identified participant statements of experiences with the phenomenon of study for coding. The coding process occurred through an inductive analysis approach to identifying participant responses, which addressed the research questions.

The open coding process resulted in 15 codes. Each code created, summarized the properties of the meaningful statements identified. The following were the codes used to label such statements:

1. School Environment Characteristics

2. Faculty/Staff Proactive and De-escalating Tactic
3. Student/Faculty Relationships
4. Engaged/Helpful Faculty/Staff
5. Peer Relating
6. Behavior Observations and Modeling
7. Setting Behavior Goals
8. Lack of Assistance with Academics
9. Perceived Academic Inferiority
10. Presence of Triggers
11. Faculty/Staff Overreactions to Behavior
12. Leaving
13. Alternative School Stigma Motivations
14. Negative Associations
15. Changes in Ability for Behavioral Self-Control

I then analyzed the coded statements of participant's experiences with the phenomenon of interest to identify any relationships. In this manner, I looked for any underlying meanings among groups of codes. Through this process, I grouped codes into categories. Three themes emerged from the data 1) Facilitating Program Experiences, 2) Hindering Program Experiences and 3) Perceptions of Program as Influencing Behavior. I also analyzed discrepant cases and addressed them in the findings.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I used several procedures in order to support the trustworthiness of the present study. These procedures included, clarification of biases, participant review, the use of detailed field notes and rich description of data.

I have provided a detailed account of all connections to the current research that may inform the inquiry in the study through biases and/or assumptions in this dissertation. I recorded interviews by audiotape and then transcribed them. Audio recordings were then listened to while reading the transcript to check for accuracy. I described the setting of the study and study participants in detail to include setting characteristics and quotes of significance. In addition, participants reviewed the transcript of their own interview to check the interpretations of the content of their statements.

Results

I identified three themes during the data analysis process described, which addressed each research question. Each theme is presented here in the context of the research question addressed along with portions of salient data to support such findings.

Theme 1: Facilitating Program Experiences.

Participants described various experiences while attending Another Chance as mediating inappropriate behavior. These findings serve to address the first research question of this study - How do juveniles experience alternative school programs as facilitators to managing impulses of deviant and delinquent behavior?

Two participants described the student population and class sizes at Another Chance, for example, as smaller than those of their home school were. These participants

described such school environment characteristics as contributing to their personal ability to avoid inappropriate behavior. For instance, S3 stated,

> . . . since it's like less students here and smaller classrooms it's not a lot of drama... So it's really easy for me to stay out of drama here and not get dragged into the mess . . . When I used to be in like bigger classrooms with all the students, you know everybody get to acting out, I was right along with the crowd.

Another participant, S4, who reported being placed at Another Chance after multiple office referrals at their home school, stated, "Here I go to class. I get my work done. There's no big ole distractions. There's not a rowdy crowd that's going to make me late for class because everyone's fighting."

In addition, four participants described the disciplinary tactics used by members of the faculty and staff of Another Chance, as experienced and/or perceived as proactive and/or de-escalating. S3 explained, "Here I feel like [if] there's a problem, you know, they handle it then and there . . . Because they handle the problems so quickly like it's hard, you know, to really be in drama . . ." Another participant, S1 said, "They will let me have time to myself . . . If I have time to myself, then I can go ahead and think of what's making me angry and think of a positive thing."

Such participants also described other disciplinary tactics used by faculty and staff including, talking with students and avoiding removing students from the classroom and/or school environment. S2 described the disciplinary tactics of the faculty and staff of Another Chance as "a little bit more lenient," in comparison to their home school. S2 stated,

> I've witnessed people kind of cussing at the teachers. They're just like watch your mouth, we don't need all of that cussing and then it keeps going and it keeps going and you might get sent to the office and talk to the principal, but they'll come right back.

These participants described such de-escalating and pro-active disciplinary tactics as mediating to their behavior choices.

Four participants described relationships with faculty and staff as supportive and encouraging in dealing with personal challenges faced by participants. S5 explained, "The teachers here, they cooler. The teachers here . . . they talk to you and stuff. They just try to help. The staff, they'll help you out a lot. They give advice."

In addition, two participants described opportunities experienced at Another Chance for observing and modeling appropriate and inappropriate behavior of other faculty and peers. These participants described such experiences as encouraging their own behavior management. S2 described experiences of observing inappropriate behavior of peers, the reactions of such behavior by others and modeling of inappropriate behavior as facilitators for their own behavioral self-regulation.

> . . . it kind of shows me what others [peers] have done and shows me what other ways people react to situations and how people encounter each other. It's like uh when I look at it, I'm like dang I kind of don't want to act like that. So it's showing me what not to do. And in a way it's showing me what I should do better to become a better me . . . I've seen how the teachers react. They don't really like approve of it. They just, they don't really like it. And I can see how if I was in

> their position, I wouldn't want them to act like that. So I just take their feelings into account and react the way I feel like I would want somebody of my age to act.

Similarly, S4, described experiences of becoming aware that other students enrolled at Another Chance viewed them as a role model. In this manner however, S4 described experiences in which realizing that their peers were observing them influenced their own behavior choices. When asked what most significantly influenced the behavior changes they described since enrolling at Another Chance, S4 stated, “Once I see how much the younger kids look up to me, that inspires me . . . ”

All participants also described experiences with and perceptions of the faculty and staff of Another Chance as engaging with and assisting students with personal, academic and disciplinary needs. These experiences were at times described as contributing to participant’s inappropriate behavior. I will address such experiences as they relate to another research question, later in the dissertation.

Still, four other participants described experiences and perceptions of the faculty and staff of Another Chance as engaging and helpful. Such participants described these experiences and perceptions as influencing appropriate behavior. S3 explained,

> I do better here because the staff and you know administrators take action . . . And I think it's mainly because like my previous school they don't take the time out to like actually help you. And here they, they help the students that really want to be helped.

Theme 2: Hindering Program Experiences.

Analysis of the data also revealed various experiences not described by participants as mediating inappropriate behavior. These findings within the data address the second research question of the present study - How do juveniles experience alternative school programs as barriers to managing impulses of deviant and delinquent behavior?

One participant, S2, described feeling as though their academic experience at Another Chance was inferior to their experiences at their home school. This participant explained the impact of this perception on their behavior. S2 explained, “It kind of slows down my educational, like my educational goals. And it’s kind of like, I'm down out about it. So it kind of makes me . . . made me . . . yeah, I don't know . . . tick a little quicker.”

As previously discussed, four participants described the faculty and staff of Another Chance as engaging and helpful with student needs. These aspects of Another Chance were also previously discussed as influencing the appropriate behavior of such participants. However, not all participants described this experience. One participant, S1, described experiences of not receiving what they perceived to be proper academic assistance in the classroom. This participant described such experiences as affecting their behavior. S1 said, “I’ll flip out,” when describing their reaction to these experiences.

Although, as discussed earlier, four participants described disciplinary experiences and perceptions of the faculty and staff of Another Chance as proactive and de-escalating, two participants described experiences of faculty and staff disciplinary

approaches as excessive. For instance, S5 explained that, “Anything you get sent to the [principal’s] office for, 9 times out of 10 you're going to get suspended.” These participants described faculty and staff responses to discipline as extreme and unnecessary. For instance, S5 described the impact of suspension for what the participant described as “dumb reasons.” S5 explained, “That's taking me out of school. When it could have been handled a different way.” When discussing faculty and staff reactions to discipline another participant, S4, said,

> . . . you [faculty/staff] should be more cautious on what you're writing a student up for . . . you're an adult so I feel like if there's a situation . . . and you're dealing with high school students and there's ways you can handle it and you know, move around. Not trying to escalate to get them in trouble.

However, such participants did not describe how, if at all, such faculty and staff reactions to discipline served to influence their own behavioral self-management.

Theme 3: Perceptions of Program as Influencing Behavior.

Participants described several perceptions about Another Chance as influencing their behavior. The analysis of this data provided answers to the third research question of the current study - How do juveniles perceive alternative school programs as improving their own disciplinary and delinquency outcomes?

Three participants, for instance, discussed their enrollment at Another Chance as unfavorable. S3 stated, “My goal is to get out of here. I don’t want to be in alternative school.” This sentiment was expounded upon by two participants who described

unfavorable associations with attending Another Chance as a result of having siblings who previously attended the alternative school. S2 stated,

> My older brother, like he came here and I remember thinking, dang it sucks to come here . . . I was kind of disappointed in myself . . . I had to come to another school where it kind of fit my behavior. . .

These participants described a stigma associated with attending Another Chance as motivating their behavior choices since enrolling at the alternative school. For example, S3 explained,

> Because I had to come here it's like a mind thing. That I felt like it [behavior changes] needed to be done. I feel like they [Another Chance] have played a role because probably if it wasn't for me going to the school, I probably wouldn't be trying to like change . . . my behavior.

The desire to "get out" of Another Chance, as stated by S2, summarizes the sentiment expressed by three participants when discussing changes in their behavior since enrolling at the alternative school. Another participant, S3, explained, ". . . I'm like okay, I got to get out of here and you know that's my main goal. So whatever I have to change then that's what I'm going to change."

Summary

The current study sought to improve the understanding of how juveniles experience and perceive behavior-focused alternative school programs as facilitating the development of self-regulation skills as a means to promote positive behavior outcomes.

The findings of the current study reveal that for those participants who reported a desire to leave Another Chance in order to return to a non-alternative school environment, the negative perception of attending an alternative school facilitated positive behavioral changes for such participants.

In addition, the findings reveal that for participants who described positively experiencing and perceiving faculty/staff approaches to addressing discipline, faculty/student relationships, faculty engagement and assistance with student needs, such experiences and perceptions were also described as mediating deviant and delinquent behavior among such participants.

Contrarily, for those participants who did not positively perceive receiving the proper assistance from faculty/staff, such participants perceived these experiences as hindering their management of deviant and delinquent behavior.

The data also revealed opportunities described by some participants for behavior observation and modeling while attending Another Chance. Such participants described these opportunities for observing and modeling behavior as facilitating their choices for appropriate behavior.

Finally, for participants who attributed improvements in their behavior to having smaller class sizes and school populations, these characteristics were described by such participants as facilitating in the regulation of their own deviant and delinquent behavior.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

My purpose in this study was to improve the understanding of how juveniles experience and perceive alternative school programs as facilitating the development of self-regulation skills as a means to promote positive behavior outcomes.

To address this gap within the literature, I used a qualitative phenomenological approach. This approach is consistent with exploring the experiences of juveniles in developing self-control skills. This approach is also consistent with understanding the perceptions of juveniles placed in alternative schools regarding such programs' facilitators and barriers in addressing discipline and delinquency. In line with the phenomenological approach of this study, I conducted semistructured interviews of juveniles placed in alternative schools for reasons of discipline and delinquency problems to understand the essence of this phenomenon.

The findings of this study reveal that although all participants entered into the alternative school with a low willingness to attend, all except for one reported experiencing changes in their behavior for deviance and delinquency. Such participants experienced and perceived various aspects of the alternative school program of Another Chance as enabling their ability to regulate deviant and delinquent behavior. Participants experienced and/or perceived these aspects/functions of the alternative school program as facilitating their ability to regulate their behavior for deviance and delinquency. The functions identified by participants as facilitating behavioral self-regulation skills included: proactive and de-escalating faculty/staff disciplinary tactics, small class sizes,

small school population, positive student/faculty relationships, faculty/staff assistance with student needs, and opportunities for self-reflection through behavior modeling and observations of other juveniles who display similar behavior challenges.

I was able to glean additional revelations from findings of participants who negatively perceived and/or experienced the academic aspects of the alternative school program at Another Chance as inferior to their home school or one in which they did not receive the academic assistance they needed. Participants deemed such perceptions and/or experiences as hindering to their ability to regulate their behavior for deviance and delinquency.

The findings further indicate that for participants who perceived and/or experienced attending the alternative school program at Another Chance as having a stigma, these perceptions and/or experiences served to facilitate their ability to regulate inappropriate behavior. The desire to return to a non-alternative school environment was associated by some participants with the stigma they perceived attending an alternative school to have. Participants who experienced a desire to exit the alternative school environment experienced and/or perceived such objectives as facilitating their ability to regulate their behavior for deviance and delinquency.

Interpretation of the Findings.

Previous studies have linked the behavioral success of alternative school juveniles to their ability to develop sufficient self-regulatory skills (Herndon & Bembenutty; 2014; Herndon, Bembenutty & Gill, 2015). In the present study, I identified aspects/functions of disciplinary alternative school programs that affect juvenile commitment to self-

regulating skills. This study provides richness to the insight of how juveniles experience and perceive such aspects as facilitating in their development of self-regulatory skills and its impact on their behavioral outcomes.

In this study, I confirmed prior literature that student experiences and perceptions are a critical component of their behavioral outcomes (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Free, 2014; Mills & McGregor; Putwain, Nicholson, and Edwards, 2015). The findings of the present study support prior findings that suggest that behavior-focused alternative school juveniles must acquire a willingness to develop self-mastery skills to affect their behavioral outcomes (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2014; Herndon, Bembenutty, & Gill, 2015). My findings also support prior findings by Herndon and Bembenutty (2014) that juveniles who display an initial low willingness for self-regulation nonetheless, may successfully acquire greater self-regulatory skills during enrollment at a behavior-focused alternative school.

My study is also consistent with findings of prior research that indicate that juveniles attending a behavior-focused alternative school who are able to commit to greater self-regulation skills, exude changes in their patterns of behavior for deviance and delinquency (Herndon and Bembenutty, 2014).

The findings of the current study also parallel conclusions in the prior literature that a supportive school climate, particularly through student-faculty relationships, is important to the behavior outcomes of alternative school juveniles (Free, 2014; 2017; Maillet, 2016; Putwain, Nicholson, & Edwards, 2015).

However, the present study disconfirms contrary findings by Free (2017) which appeared to cast doubt to some extent as to the linkage between positive school climate practices and positive behavior outcomes of alternative school juveniles. While Free's (2017) study only captures the perspectives of faculty and staff at a behavior-focused alternative school, the present study adds to the richness of knowledge in the discipline by capturing the perspectives of the juveniles served by one behavior-focused alternative school program. Few studies within the current literature have sought to capture juvenile experiences and perspectives of alternative school programs using a qualitative study.

While the current literature provides scarce data on the topic of the present study, it has nonetheless linked the behavioral success of alternative school juveniles to their ability to develop sufficient self-regulatory skills (Herndon & Bembenutty; 2014; Herndon, Bembenutty & Gill, 2015). This study extends the knowledge in the discipline by exploring the aspects (functions) of a disciplinary alternative school program juveniles experience as facilitating in the development of such skills as well as their perceptions of such functions.

Like previous studies, the current research identified supportive student-faculty relationships and small class sizes as aspects affecting behavioral outcomes. However, the current study also found pro-active and de-escalating faculty/staff tactics for addressing student discipline, opportunities for self-reflection through behavior modeling and observation of other juveniles who display similar behavior challenges to also impact the behavioral outcomes of alternative school juveniles, as reported by such juveniles. These aspects were found to not only mediate behavioral outcomes of juveniles attending

a behavior-focused alternative school, they were found to affect such juvenile's commitment to self-regulatory skills.

The present study also extends on the knowledge within the discipline by identifying the stigma participants associated with attending Another Chance and a desire to return to a non-alternative school environment as facilitating their willingness and ability for behavioral self-regulation.

Additionally, the findings of the current study add to the knowledge in the discipline by identifying behavioral barriers identified by participants attending Another Chance. Negative perceptions and/or experiences identified by participants of the academic aspects of the alternative school program at Another Chance were identified as barriers in regulating behavior for deviance and delinquency among such participants.

The present study contributed to filling a gap within the literature through exploring juvenile experiences and perceptions of behavior-focused alternative schools as facilitators and barriers for developing self-regulation skills. This study also deepens the understanding of the functionality of behavior-focused alternative schools in affecting behavior outcomes of juveniles served by them. In this manner, this study expands on the understanding of the functionality of such alternative schools in the context of the school-to-prison-pipeline.

The functionalist approach provided an appropriate lens through which participant experiences and perceptions of functions of the alternative school in this study could be interpreted as facilitators and barriers for developing self-regulating skills as a means to promote positive behavior outcomes for the juveniles served by them. Durkheim's (1961)

functionalist perspective was helpful in interpreting the identified functions, such as supportive student-faculty relationships, small class sizes that reduce triggers for deviance and pro-active and de-escalating faculty/staff tactics for addressing student discipline, of the alternative school used in this study.

Merton's (1957) perspective on the types of functions – manifest and latent - characteristic of all social institutions was also helpful in interpreting the data in the present study. Based on the data, the manifest function of faculty/staff engagement in and assistance with student needs resulted in latent functions of creating positive student/faculty relationships. In addition, while the manifest function of Another Chance is to provide an alternative education environment for at risk students based on their behavioral impediment, this has led to a latent function and unintentional consequence of creating a stigma associated by participants to their enrollment in the alternative school program. However, the manifest function of providing an alternative education environment for at risk students based on their impediment has also led to the unintended consequence of creating opportunities for self-reflection through behavior modeling and observation of other juveniles who display similar behavior challenges, for some participants.

According to Durkheim (1961), the characteristic of self-regulating one's natural inclinations has to be developed for individuals whose faculties for reasoning are less developed than their faculties for emotion. While it is the function of discipline, in Durkheim's perspective, to develop self-regulation skills, this only occurs when the individual acknowledges that self-regulation requires effort. Such effort is exerted,

according to Durkheim (1961, p. 46; 99), based on the individual's perceptions of the duty and good in its exertion.

Individuals who are not as well equipped with self-regulatory skills are more strongly guided by emotion than reason, according to Durkheim (1961). These individuals act in accordance with what appeals to their senses. Reason acts as a constraint on impulses arising out of emotion, creating a sense of duty or obligation. Self-regulation, according to Durkheim (1961), is only achieved through the development of one's reasoning skills (Durkheim, 1961).

Based on the data in the present study, the desire expressed by most participants to return to a non-alternative school environment created an obligation for participants to align their behavior with conduct requirements imposed by Another Chance and the district in which the school was located. According to the data, this obligation acted as a constraint on the expression of behavior that did not align with such conduct requirements.

The characteristic of willing restraint, according to Durkheim (1961), is achieved through one's sense of good; that is the extent to which something appeals to the individual. A willingness to adhere to rules or standards is achieved through the individual's attachment to the social group that prescribes such standards and/or norms. Thus, the stronger the attachment the individual has to the group, such as schools, the more connected they feel to the authoritative forces of the rules and standards to which they willingly adhere. Consequently, discipline and attachment to social groups are inextricably linked. Durkheim (1961) considered them as parts of the same thing.

Together, they yield a willingness for self-regulation, which exudes itself as socially acceptable behavior.

Based on the data in the present study, participants reported experiencing positive relationships with the faculty and staff of Another Chance. Also, participants reported perceiving and experiencing the faculty and staff of Another Chance as approachable and helpful in terms of being engaged in and helpful with student needs. These functions created an attachment and a sense of connectedness for participants to the school.

Although the objective function of discipline can be seen, through this theoretical lens, as the transmission of behavioral norms through the development of self-regulatory skills, disciplinary outcomes may vary among juveniles, according to Durkheim (1961). This variation in behavioral outcomes is influenced by the juvenile's perception of the functionality of such discipline. In other words, how juveniles perceive the usefulness of such disciplinary practices in their overall lives, affects their behavioral outcomes (Durkheim, 1961). Based on the present study, this may explain some participant's perceptions and/or experiences of the disciplinary practices of Another Chance or even their placement at Another Chance as unnecessary or excessive.

Limitations to the Study

Limitations to trustworthiness did not arise from the execution of the study. I employed several procedures in order to support the trustworthiness of the current study. These procedures included clarification of biases, participant review and rich description of the data. I also provided a detailed account of all connections to the current research that may have informed the inquiry in the study through biases and/or assumptions.

Recommendations

The present study was narrow in scope and collected data from only one alternative school. Since alternative schools vary in objectives, characteristics and target populations, future studies should qualitatively research the experiences and perceptions of juveniles attending other alternative school programs that may be both similar to and distinct from the alternative school used in this study. Such qualitative studies may be beneficial in adding to the richness of data pertaining to what juveniles enrolled in alternative school programs experience and perceive as facilitating to their own improved discipline and delinquency.

Implications

The data provided by this study provides information for schools and policymakers on functions of behavior-focused alternative schools that juveniles served by them experience and perceive as facilitators and barriers to their own improved discipline and delinquency. The present study echoes previous findings on the importance of juvenile perspectives on their behavioral outcomes. The present qualitative study on the functions of behavior-focused alternative schools is necessary then for a deeper understanding of what aspects students experience and perceive as beneficial to their own positive behavioral outcomes.

The data provided by this study may be beneficial for stakeholders and policymakers in assessing the impact of behavior-focused alternative schools. In this manner, the data produced through this study may be helpful to understanding of the functionality of such alternative schools in the context of the school-to-prison-pipeline.

Conclusion

The data from this study confirms findings in prior literature that student experiences and perceptions are a critical component of their behavioral outcomes. When aspects of alternative schools function to develop reasoning skills and a willingness to adhere to school standards, such functions may be beneficial in developing behavioral self-regulation of students.

The findings of this study help to identify aspects of behavior-focused alternative schools that juveniles experience as facilitating positive behavioral outcomes. In doing so, these findings also reveal functions of an alternative school program that facilitate juvenile commitment to behavioral self-regulating skills. Moreover, this study deepens the understanding of the functionality of behavior-focused alternative schools in affecting behavior outcomes of juveniles who are most vulnerable for contact with the juvenile and criminal justice systems due to their at-risk status. In this manner, the current study expands on the understanding of the functionality of such alternative schools in the context of the school-to-prison-pipeline.

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