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Teacher Perspectives on Implementation and Outcomes of a Character Education Program: A Comparative Case Study at Three Public Middle Schools

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TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON IMPLEMENTATION
AND OUTCOMES OF A CHARACTER EDUCATION
PROGRAM: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY
AT THREE PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOLS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

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Department of Leadership, Policy and Development:
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ABSTRACT

Tennant, Grace A. *Teacher Perspectives on Implementation and Outcomes of a Character Education Program: A Comparative Case Study of Three Public Middle Schools.* Published Doctor of Education dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2018.

In the United States, character education employs a lengthy history in the public school system. As a result of recent legislation, accountability measures for schools in the United States and Colorado have changed. Teachers are now being evaluated on the climate and culture in their classrooms and schools. Academic growth among students in United States schools is slow, and an achievement gap continues to exist. One possible solution to these problems is character education. This comparative case study examined teacher perceptions about implementation and outcomes regarding a newly implemented character education program delivered through a class structure called Crew. Data were collected from 18 teachers at three public middle schools through focus groups, collection of artifacts, and field notes. Themes from each school were described, and similarities and unique qualities between the schools were identified. Implications of this research indicated that educational leaders from all levels in the school district must demonstrate support of the new initiative, Crew structures and the use of common language must be modeled throughout the school district at all levels, and structures must be in place to ensure high levels of buy-in from all stakeholders involved in Crew implementation.

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My grandmother was an inspiration for me. She was so proud of me and always told me when I was able to visit her. She passed away just a few months before I graduated, but she was smiling and told me how proud she was the last time we were together. Her stamina, determination, wit, and zest for life have shaped me into the person I am today.

Since I do not live close to my extended family, I often call my local friends my "chosen family." My circle of supportive friends and University of Northern Colorado cohort members listened to me for hours upon hours, provided advice when I asked, and helped with my children so that I could work. Sometimes, they told me when I needed to take a break and forced me to do so. My cohort members became good friends who I could lean on often. I am grateful for each and every one of them and could never have finished this dissertation without their support.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Down through history, in countries all over the world, education has had two great goals: to help young people become smart and to help them become good" (Lickona, 1991, p. 6). The founding fathers of the United States believed that in order for democracy to succeed members of the community must be able to demonstrate respect for rights of individuals, regard for law, participate voluntarily in public life, and demonstrate concern for the common good (Lickona, 1991). Character education (CE) seeks to create "good character" in students and consists of "knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good" (Lickona, 2001, p. 240). Lickona (2001) referenced Aristotle when defining this goodness of character as a life of right conduct. Aristotle connected the two different fields of good conduct through virtues: those that are self-oriented like self-control and those that are other-oriented like compassion (Lickona, 2001). Aristotle thought that both self-oriented and other-oriented virtues were necessary to possess good character (Lickona, 2001). The educational system in the United States employs a lengthy history of educating for good character, dating back to the writings of the founders of the country (Watz, 2010).

Children today are facing unique challenges as the world is rapidly evolving and becoming a place where teaching values and morals is often overlooked (Character Education Partnership [CEP], 2008). Students are facing an "increasingly

interdependent economy, exploding technological change, an environment at risk, and a world still plagued by war, disease, and injustice" (CEP, 2008, p. 2). In addition to addressing the changing needs of students, educators endure pressures to meet school district and state accountability measures while preparing students for jobs that do not currently exist, leaving little class time for educating children in a holistic way. With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, education was focused on prioritizing academic proficiency (U. S. Department of Education [USDE], 2004). The No Child Left Behind Act influenced classroom practice by creating a strong incentive for educators to focus on the content areas that were tested (Dee & Jacob, 2010). When teachers were held increasingly accountable for the subjects tested, teachers reported that instructional time surrounding those subjects increased (Dee & Jacob, 2010). As a product of increasing instructional time in relation to the subjects that were tested, less time remained during the school day for instruction in nonacademic areas. With the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, a nonacademic indicator of school quality was added as a requirement for school evaluations (ESSA, 2015). The requirement to use the data from the federally mandated, high-stakes student assessment was eliminated (ESSA, 2015). Since President Obama signed ESSA, the USDE has been working with states and school districts to implement the new law (ESSA, 2015).

The following section describes CE and its role in education throughout history, followed by a description of current problems in the educational system in the United States. After the statement of the problem comes a brief description of one possible approach to alleviating some of these problems: CE. To ensure the use of common language, a definition of terms section follows the description of CE, and the

chapter finishes with a description of the purpose and nature of this research including research questions that were explored.

Historical Perspectives

"The fact that a political entity should attempt to shape the moral character of its young people through education employs a long history" (Glasner & Milson, 2006, p. 525). To understand the current state of CE in the United States it is important to trace the origins and historical trends surrounding CE. The foundation of CE in the United States stems from the writings of people such as Benjamin Franklin and Horace Mann (Watz, 2010). Throughout history moral education was seen as a way to preserve harmony and order in society, and it became a priority that children from all social groups and classes attended school to receive moral teachings (McClellan, 1999). Initially, readings from the Bible were used to teach moral education, and over time disagreements surrounding the different interpretations of the Bible led to the removal of religion from public schools in the United States (McClellan, 1999). The following section outlines a timeline beginning with the inception of public schooling for all members of society and concludes with the current state of CE in the United States.

In colonial America CE was based on religion and biblical moral teaching (Glasner & Milson, 2006). Schools would teach reading, writing, and history through the use of the moral stories of the Bible (Watz, 2010). Protestants and Catholics struggled to compromise on which version of the Bible to use and its interpretations for moral education in the classroom (McClellan, 1999). Ultimately, the two were unable to compromise; so Catholic parochial schools were created, while Protestants continued on with secular public schools (McClellan, 1999). Both groups sought

government funding, and while the secular public schools were able to secure this funding the Catholic schools were not. The differences in Catholic and Protestants' moral education philosophy essentially created the rift between secular and parochial schools. This chasm continued to grow and was the state of the schools from the 19th century through the mid-20th century (Glasner & Milson, 2006).

Religious conflict continued, and the 1960s brought about many lawsuits in public education (McClellan, 1999). Trends continued that supported the separation of religion and public education (McClellan, 1999). In 1962, the Supreme Court decision from Engel v. Vitale outlawed required school sponsored prayer; in 1963, School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Edward Lewis Schemp made any reading of the Bible in public schools illegal (McClellan, 1999). By the late 1960s, Bible-related character education and mandatory prayer in public schools were disappearing (Glasner & Milson, 2006). This absence of religion-based CE in public schools made space for contemporary character education programs to provide moral education to students.

Watz (2010) pointed out that, "historically, the impetus for the waves of character programs that have risen in the United States have been one of societal frustration from a perceived lack of morals in American youth" (p. 36). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, CE was a topic of debate with some supporting its inclusion and others believing it to be unnecessary indoctrinating (McClellan, 1999). Glasner and Milson (2006) noted that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the USDE offered millions of dollars in funding to states and organizations for CE research. Many non-academic reforms were undertaken during this time to combat the perception regarding the decline in the quality of public education (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). The increase

for federal support of CE was visible beginning in the late 1990s, first with the support of President Bill Clinton and then a few years later with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). The Clinton administration put the challenge to schools to "cure the moral problems of society" which included issues such as increased school violence, drug use, and teen pregnancy (Davis, 2003, p. 32). In 2000, CEP chairman Sanford N. McDonnell, along with executive director and chief executive officer of CEP, Esther Schaefffer, wrote a letter urging legislators in states without CE legislation to consider passing legislation (Glasner & Milson, 2006). This letter also commended states that were seeking ways to encourage the teaching of moral character in public schools (Glasner & Milson, 2006). Currently, most legislative policy is left up to the states and can vary widely between states (CEP, n.d.-a). Some states mandate CE, some states encourage CE, and some states do not have any policy at all (CEP, n.d.-a).

Statement of the Problem

The educational system in the United States is experiencing challenges surrounding shifting educator accountability, slow academic growth, and negative student behavior (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; The Nation's Report Card, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). The upcoming sections shed light on problems regarding schools in the United States and justifies why these issues must be addressed. Three areas will be discussed: stagnating student growth, increasing and shifting educator accountability, and concern for youth and ethics in society. More research is needed to examine whether or not CE is a possible approach to work towards reducing or eliminating any of these problems the educational system in the United States currently faces.

Stagnating Student Growth

Recent trends in student achievement and growth will be described first. Since this research took place in Colorado, both national trends and trends from Colorado will be discussed. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress reports, student academic growth in the United States has been stagnating for quite some time (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; The Nation's Report Card, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) reported that the majority of students in Colorado were not proficient in math or English/language arts (CDE, 2016a, 2016b; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; The Nation's Report Card, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). These trends certainly leave many questions for educational leaders to explore: Why is growth slowing among students in the United States and Colorado? What can educators do to increase academic growth and achievement of students in the United States and Colorado? These statistics surrounding academic outcomes demonstrated the presence of a problem in the educational system in the United States and in Colorado. Some research has shown a link between implementing CE programs and increased academic growth and/or achievement (CEP, 2008; Durlack & Weissberg, 2011). Reports from the CEP (2008) and Durlack and Weissberg (2011) suggested that CE may be one solution for this slow and/or stagnating growth of students.

With less than half of the students in the United States meeting the proficiency mark at various ages and in various subjects and data trends showing scores that are staying the same or decreasing, it becomes apparent that academic outcomes have not been improving (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; The Nation's Report Card, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). The National Assessment of Educational Progress, also called

The Nation's Report Card, is a measure of academic achievement given to students in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The National Assessment of Educational Progress website showed that reading proficiency levels of nine-year-olds showed no measurable change between 2008 and 2015, and during this same period the eighth graders' scores decreased (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.-a). Math scores for students in fourth and eighth grades decreased in 2015 when compared to the 2013 scores (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.-a). When examining twelfth grade mathematics scores, The Nation's Report Card (n.d.-b) reported that only 22% of the students tested performed at or above the proficiency level. In comparison to the initial reading assessment year, 1992, the 2015 average reading scores were lower with only 37% of students demonstrating performance at or above proficiency (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.-b). In 2015, only 40% of fourth grade students and 33% of eighth grade students performed at or above the proficient level in the National Assessment of Educational Progress mathematics. When national reading trends are examined it is revealed that in 2015 36% of fourth grade students and 34% of eighth grade students performed at or above the proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.-a).

In Colorado, the Partnership for Readiness for College and Career test is used to measure math and English/language arts proficiency levels in students from grades three through eight (math) or nine English/language arts (CDE, 2016a). In 2016, only one-third of Colorado students demonstrated proficiency on the English/language arts Partnership for Readiness for College and Career assessment (CDE, 2016b). In mathematics, students demonstrated proficiency levels that ranged between 18.9% and

31.9% (CDE, 2016b). While test scores can be useful tools to measure student academic growth and achievement, other issues certainly come into play that create a pressing need for changes in the current educational system.

Educator Accountability

As achievement scores on national and state assessments continue to stagnate, pressure has increased on educators and educational leaders to increase student growth and achievement. Trends in educator accountability are shifting. As a result of changes in Colorado and the United States, nonacademic factors, such as relationship building, are now being included in teacher evaluations (CDE, 2014a; ESSA, 2015). These nonacademic pieces are now part of teacher evaluations in Colorado and are required as part of ESSA as a measure of school quality (CDE, 2014a; ESSA, 2015). Looking back to previous legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act largely determined a school's quality based on the performance of students on a federally mandated standardized test (USDE, 2004). Schools and teachers had to set measurable goals, especially for marginalized populations; if those goals were not met, schools were penalized in various ways. These penalties included corrective action, improvement plans, and financial penalties (USDE, 2004). With the election of Barack Obama in 2008, political control in the White House shifted and new measures of accountability came into play (CDE, 2016c). Race to the Top was a competitive grant program enacted by the Obama administration encouraging educational reform that began in 2009 (CDE, 2016c). State education agencies could apply for grants and receive funding for their innovative ideas. In 2011, Colorado received a $17.9 million Race to the Top grant that had four areas of focus: building capacity to implement the state's education reforms; implementing the Colorado Academic Standards; redesigning the

state's educator evaluation system; and advancing science, technology, and math education (CDE, 2016c). This grant eventually led to the passage of the Educator Effectiveness Act which changed the evaluation process for teachers in Colorado (CDE, 2014b). This new evaluation system increased accountability for educators in Colorado to demonstrate student growth and academic achievement and also required teachers to demonstrate proficiency incorporating non-cognitive factors into their planning and teaching (CDE, 2014a). One specific piece of the evaluation rubric for Colorado educators included a stipulation that teachers establish a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment for a diverse population of students (CDE, 2014a). Quality standard two (part of the rubric for evaluating Colorado teachers) specifically mentioned building relationships with students, providing a learning environment with acceptable behavior from students, as well as engaging students (CDE, 2014a).

In 2015, President Obama signed ESSA into law (ESSA, 2015). Essentially, ESSA eliminated the requirement that the federally mandated standardized test results be included in an educator's evaluation and also eliminated the adequate yearly progress provision of the No Child Left Behind Act (ESSA, 2015). A nonacademic indicator to measure school quality was also added as part of ESSA (ESSA, 2015). The nonacademic pieces of evidence are "explicit recognition that more than achievement scores are relevant" (University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Psychology, Center for Mental Health in the Schools, 2016, p. 1). What schools are being held accountable for has shifted—the removal of the high stakes academic piece and the addition of the nonacademic indicator for measures of school quality provide evidence of that (ESSA, 2015). This federal and state legislation holds educators accountable for including nonacademic components into their teaching and planning

and bases measures of school quality on including these components (CDE, 2014a; ESSA, 2015). Shifting accountability could point to the inclusion of CE programs to increase measures of school quality, as well as fulfill a necessary piece for teacher evaluations.

Concern for Youth and Ethics

Recent data collected from The Nation's Report Card demonstrated reason for concern for youth in the United States. In school year 2008–2009, 7,066,000 United States students ages 12 through 18, or 28% of all such students, reported they were bullied at school, and about 1,521,000, or 6%, reported they were cyber-bullied (USDE, 2011). Students who are bullied can experience many negative impacts from the experience (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.) These negative impacts can include depression and anxiety, feelings of sadness and loneliness, and loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Decreased academic achievement can also be attributed to bullying (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Students who are bullied are also more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

Lickona (2014) noted the "alarming increase of cheating, stealing, and lying that is occurring in schools across America" (p. 23). Furthermore, Watz (2010) wrote, "Record numbers of students are displaying unacceptable behavior, committing crimes, going to jail, not graduating from high school, and achieving dismal academic performances" (p. 1). The National Center for Education Sciences, along with the Bureau of Justice Statistics, administered a survey to students across the United States to obtain data on school safety. According to the *Indicators of School Crime and*

Safety Survey, during the 2011–2012 school year, 3.4 million public school students in the United States received in-school suspensions and 3.2 million received out-of-school suspensions (Zhang, Musu-Gillette, & Oudekerk, 2016). The same survey reported that in the 2011–2012 school year about 38% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that student misbehavior interfered with their teaching, and 35% reported that student tardiness and class cutting interfered with their teaching (Zhang et al., 2016). Disruptive behavior results in lost instructional time and has been linked with lower academic achievement for the disruptive student and other students in the class (Vanderbilt University, 2016). Students who are disruptive also demonstrate less engagement and motivation (Vanderbilt University, 2016).

During the 2013–2014 school year, 65% of public schools recorded that one or more incidents of violence had taken place, amounting to an estimated 757,000 incidents (Zhang et al., 2016). School violence includes shoving, pushing, bullying, gang violence, and assault with or without weapons (Centers for Disease Control, 2016). The negative impacts of school violence include physical harm as well as psychological harm (Centers for Disease Control, 2016). These psychological impacts affect teachers and students and include depression, anxiety, and fear (Centers for Disease Control, 2016).

Lickona (2014) also reported that apathy in regard to current events and politics is increasing among young adults. Apathy is a cause for concern because in order to have a functional democracy a society must have citizens who exercise their right to vote (Lickona, 2014). Results from a longitudinal survey that was given to college freshmen each year between 1970 and 2010 demonstrated rising levels of apathy among young adults (University of California, Los Angeles, Department of

Psychology, Center for Mental Health in the Schools, 2016). Trends over the 40-year time span showed a rising level of materialism, less concern for a life philosophy, and a declining interest in public affairs (Lickona, 2014).

Student achievement scores and academic growth in the United States have been stagnating, and student reports about the current climate in education and society are becoming increasingly negative. Coupled with shifting educator accountability, it becomes obvious that a change is necessary in the United States education system. It is imperative that students in the United States are set up to be productive members of an increasingly global society.

Character Education

Problems exist in the United States educational system that include a lack of student achievement and growth, shifts in and increased educator accountability, and growing concern for behaviors demonstrated by youth in the United States. As educational leaders look to resolve these challenges facing youth and schools, one solution schools may choose to turn to is implementing a CE program. Many schools have made the decision to implement programming, as demonstrated by the CEP certification process (CEP, n.d.-d). The CEP is an organization that promotes the integration of ethics and character into schools across the United States through the use of a framework developed by the organization (CEP, n.d.-d). The CEP recognizes schools that have undergone an extensive evaluation process and meet the requirements of the CEP (CEP, n.d.-b). Currently, the CEP has evaluated and awarded Schools of Character status to 68 schools in the United States and four school districts in the United States (CEP, n.d.-d). Twenty-nine states recognize the Schools of Character award through the CEP. These states have an infrastructure in

place to evaluate school CE programs at the state level. In 2015, the CEP reported that applications to receive the Schools of Character designation increased by 22%, which demonstrated an increased interest in CE (CEP, n.d.-d).

Increasing academic achievement and decreasing unwanted behaviors are consistent goals in CE programs (Watz, 2010). An effective CE program establishes and reinforces positive influences that help youth to avoid negative behaviors (Battistich, n.d.). Berkowitz and Bier (2007) found programs had success in improving traits such as emotional competence, academic achievement, personal morality, and character knowledge. Additionally, Berkowitz and Bier (2007) stated that schools with CE programs demonstrated a decrease in drug use, violence, and general misbehavior. According to Berkowitz and Bier (2007), "Character education can work when implemented with fidelity and broadly and has a very robust impact" (p. 29). A CE program incorporates the instruction of social–emotional skills that include managing and controlling emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, appreciating the perspectives of others, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling interpersonal situations effectively (Durlack & Weissberg, 2011). School based social–emotional programs (falling under the umbrella of CE) can produce multiple positive outcomes including, but not limited to, increases in positive behavior, more positive attitudes from students about themselves and their schools, and increased academic achievement by a mean of 11 percentile points (Durlack & Weissberg, 2011). Some research demonstrates that CE can have a positive impact and address some of the previously mentioned problems. This research, along with shifting educator accountability,

indicated that a possible approach to dealing with problems in the educational system in the United States could include implementation of CE programming.

Definition of Terms

Before defining CE, it is imperative to define good character. Thomas Lickona (1991), a developmental psychologist and professor (State University of New York, Cortland, 2017), defined good character as "knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good" (p. 51). (Lickona wrote several seminal works in the field of CE). Lickona (1991) deemed these the habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action. Good character involved the ability to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and the action of doing what is believed to be right (Lickona, 1991). There are several definitions of CE, and those definitions can vary. To ensure common language and consistency, the definition of CE for the scope of this paper will be the definition utilized by the USDE. The USDE defined CE as learning processes that enable students and adults in a school community to understand, care about, and act on core ethical values such as respect, justice, civic virtue and citizenship, and responsibility for self and others (USDE, 2005). The USDE (2005) went on to state that:

> Upon such core values, we form the attitudes and actions that are the hallmark of safe, healthy, and informed communities that serve as the foundation of our society. Character education teaches the habits of thought and deed that help people live and work together as families, friends, neighbors, communities and nations. (What is Character Education? section)

The CEP broke the definition of good character into two parts: performance character and core ethical values (moral character). Both performance and moral character are used throughout the literature. These two aspects of character coexist, and one aspect directly supports the other (CEP, n.d.-c). Core ethical values encourage

treatment of others with fairness, respect, and care (CEP, n.d.-c). Performance values allow people using the core ethical values to make positive changes in the world (CEP, n.d.-b). Performance character includes strengths such as effort, initiative, diligence, self- discipline, and perseverance (CEP, 2008). Core ethical values (also known as moral character) include traits such as empathy, fairness, trustworthiness, generosity, and compassion (CEP, 2008). The CEP website identified the organization as a group of passionate people advocating for integrity, honesty, respect, and other core ethical values to be fused into education for the betterment of our nation. This prominent organization was involved with parents, educators, administrators, and community members in its work surrounding CE.

This research study involved the introduction of a new CE component through a class structure called Crew. The Crew structure was adopted from Expeditionary Learning Schools. Crew is a class structure that allows for relationship building, academic progress monitoring, and character development (Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, 2011). Crew allows students to build positive connections with their peers and with their Crew leader (Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, 2011). Prior to the implementation of Crew in the Snowy Peaks School District (this is a pseudonym), four purposes of Crew were adopted to support character development among students: teach character skills throughout the day, ensure all students are members of a Crew class, create an intentional culture of character, and provide social–emotional supports for the whole child (see Appendix A).

A CE includes and complements many different educational approaches such as whole child education, service learning, social–emotional learning, and civic education (CEP, n.d.-e). It is important to differentiate these terms for clarity in this

dissertation. A CE is a broad term that is made up of smaller components. One component of a CE program is social–emotional learning. For this research, the definition for social–emotional learning came from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Collaborative Learning. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Collaborative Learning, a nonprofit organization devoted to social–emotional learning, gave the definition as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide insight about the teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation and outcomes of Crew. One purpose of Crew was to foster relationship building between teachers and students. Positive academic and social impacts can be seen when teacher–student relationships improve. (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011). Improved student and teacher relationships, increased self-confidence, and increased teacher self-efficacy can be attributed to a positive school climate (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). By collecting data from multiple sources at all three middle schools in the school district, the hope was to illuminate what teachers perceived as strength and weaknesses of implementation. Challenges and parts of the implementation that were successful through the eyes of the teachers at the research sites were included in the research. This research examined teacher perceptions of the implementation of a new CE program and the teacher perceptions surrounding outcomes of the program.

Qualitative data were collected to examine factors that contributed to the successes and challenges during the implementation of the CE program. Data were also collected from the teachers about perceived outcomes that they attributed to Crew. This information can be shared with other middle schools, school leaders, and district leadership teams in and out of the school district. This information will be useful for school district and building leaders as a planning tool. The successful parts of the implementation process can be shared with district and school leaders who are considering adding a CE program like Crew. Sharing challenges would be helpful for school and district leaders as well, so that perhaps previously unanticipated issues could be addressed proactively.

Nature of the Study

This comparative case study research communicated shared and unique teacher perceptions surrounding the implementation process and outcomes of a CE program in a middle school setting. The district where the proposed research was conducted had three middle schools. This case study research involved teachers from three middle schools in the district. Focus groups were purposefully selected and included teachers from the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Artifacts were collected from each teacher who attended a focus group. Field notes were taken during the focus groups and immediately following the focus groups.

Middle school students were selected for this research because early adolescence is a time of rapid developmental change and transition for students (Farrington et al., 2012). For many early adolescents, the middle grades are characterized by decreases in school performance and engagement (Farrington et al., 2012). If the implementation of the CE program could cause more positive

experiences for research students in school, perhaps the program could counter some of the negative changes that can occur during the middle school years. The school district where the research was conducted was selected because the Crew structure was implemented in all three middle schools during school year 2015–2016. This allowed for teachers to share information with me about the school from before and after the implementation of the CE program.

Research Questions

To examine the teacher perceptions about the implementation and outcomes of the Crew class, the following research questions were developed:

Q1   What are middle school teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of Crew?

Q2   What are middle school teachers' perceptions regarding the outcomes of Crew?

Conclusion

The Nation's Report Card and the CDE both provide evidence that student growth and achievement in the United States are stagnating (CDE, 2016a, 2016b; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; The Nation's Report Card, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Students are exhibiting behaviors in school that are hindering learning, decreasing instructional time, and causing disruption in classes (Lickona, 2014; USDE, 2011; Zhang et al., 2016). Educator accountability has shifted, and teachers are being required to incorporate non-cognitive skills into teaching and planning (CDE, 2014a; ESSA, 2015). Educational leaders must seek ways to address these issues in order to improve the state of education in the United States. One approach that may work to curb some of these issues is the implementation of a CE program. Some research has demonstrated that CE can solve these problems (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Durlack &

Weissberg, 2011). More research is needed surrounding implementation and outcomes

of CE programs (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; USDE, 2010a).

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Our beginning premise is that throughout history, education rightly conceived has had two great goals—to help students become smart (in the multidimensional sense of intelligence) and to help them become good (in the multidimensional sense of moral maturity)—and they need character for both (Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2008). Two goals that educators strive to accomplish through character education (CE) programs are to prepare students to live a flourishing life and to reduce negative behaviors in which young people hurt themselves and/or society (Davidson et al., 2008). Character educators hope to teach children to do the right things in interpersonal relationships and also to consistently perform at their personal best when completing a task (Davidson et al., 2008).

The purpose of this literature review is to shed light on the current state of research regarding CE and also to justify the need for more research regarding implementation and perceived outcomes of CE programs. This literature review contains eight sections: the common purposes of CE programs, theories regarding CE, components of an effective CE program, leadership implications, measuring fidelity of implementation of CE programs, benefits and barriers when implementing CE programs, funding and current legislation regarding CE, and the need for more research in the field.

Purpose of Character Education

While definitions do vary among different organizations and individuals, the purposes of CE in educational settings share many overarching concepts. One of the six broad goals of the United States Department of Education (USDE) as part of the 2002–2007 Strategic Plan was to "promote strong character and citizenship among our nation's youth" (USDE, 2005, para. 2). The USDE (2005) stated that a goal of CE is to teach the habits of "thought and deed that help people live and work together as families, friends, neighbors, communities and nations"(What is Character Education? section). The USDE (2005) named another goal of CE programs is to create safe, healthy, and informed communities that are able to act as the foundation of our society. Berkowitz and Bustamante (2013) added,

> Ultimately, all societies should desire citizens who are able and willing to participate in the political process toward societal improvement and are able and willing to understand and manage their own emotions and relationships and to understand others and are motivated and equipped to follow a moral compass. (p. 8)

While states, districts, and individual schools can have unique and specific goals for CE, common purposes in CE agendas include involving the whole community in the program and making CE an integral part of educational processes (USDE, 2005). By intentional teaching of character skills to students, educators hope to increase prosocial behaviors (Beesley, Clark, Barker, Germeroth, & Apthorp, 2010). The American Psychological Association (2017) defined prosocial behaviors as behaviors that are carried out with the goal of helping other people. Students who demonstrate high levels of prosocial orientation are more likely to be engaged and motivated in school (Beesley et al., 2010). Motivation is linked to student engagement and both are integral parts of academic achievement (Reyes, Brackett,

Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Relationship development is another shared purpose of CE. Developing strong student-to-student and teacher-to-student relationships is significant for students, both academically and socially (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011). In summary, common purposes of CE include intentional character instruction with the ultimate goal being to increase students' likelihood of success and contribution in school, relationships, and society.

Character Education Theories

Before administrators can make recommendations regarding the role of teachers and counselors in a CE program, it is integral to understand different theoretical perspectives (Williams, 2000). These theoretical perspectives provide important background knowledge that can be helpful when creating new programs or examining existing programs. When discussing CE, it becomes apparent that most experts agree that three major approaches or theories to instruction can be described (Howard, Berkowitz, & Schaeffer, 2004). Williams (2000) stated that while the three approaches share some common ground, major differences and even conflicts among advocates of each approach may exist. The three different approaches are the traditional approach, the cognitive-developmental approach, and the caring or feminist approach (Howard et al., 2004).

The oldest of the three approaches is the traditional approach and can be dated back to the days of Aristotle (Howard et al., 2004). This approach worked to instill traditional values and virtue and viewed character as a struggle against the "corrosive effects of modernity" (Howard et al., 2004, p. 191). Traditional CE placed an emphasis on "doing the good," which was based upon Aristotle's work that sees action and habit as fundamental, ever knowing, and desiring (Howard et al., 2004, p. 191).

This philosophy advocates for inculcating the young with the virtues of society. Strong focus is given on training of habits of virtuous behavior (Williams, 2000). The traditional character education approach utilizes a direct instruction approach (Williams, 2000).

The second approach discussed by Howard et al. (2004) is the cognitive-developmental approach. The cognitive-developmental approach essentially says that Piaget's cognitive stages and Kohlberg's stages of moral development had to occur concurrently, and progression through the stages of moral reasoning requires progression through cognitive stages of development (Lickona, 1977). This approach is contextual in nature and has its roots in the rationale that ethical decisions and actions are contingent on context, and decisions are relative based on the unique situation (Howard et al., 2004). This approach is not about doing right or wrong, yet the core of this approach is to develop a process of how to critically think when making any ethical decision (Howard et al., 2004). The cognitive-developmental approach is rooted in Socratic thinking and based on knowing what is good. Williams (2000) stated that this approach provides indirect instruction (in contrast with the traditional approach) and promotes understanding and socio-moral development. This indirect instruction leads to interpersonal interactions of peers under the guidance of caring adults (Williams, 2000). The cognitive-developmental approach emphasizes social justice (Howard et al., 2004). Since Kohlberg's work regarding stages of moral reasoning only involved Caucasian males, limiting the transferability of this research, another approach emerged. This approach was called the caring approach, also known as the feminist approach (Howard et al., 2004).

Howard et al. (2004) stated that the caring approach differs from the previously

mentioned approaches in three major ways:

1.   Care is based upon relationships rather than individual morals.
2.   Primacy is given to moral emotion and sentiment, and these two things
      are the stimulus for reasoning and action.
3.   Care does not require that moral decisions need to be universal to be
      justified. (p. 195)

This approach seeks a greater appreciation for the affective needs (Howard et al.,

2004). Williams (2000) stated that the caring approach focuses on the environment

and community building. This approach seeks to build relationships among

communities and groups to promote ethical and moral decision-making with

community building as the basis for instruction (Williams, 2000).

All three approaches share some common ground. The caring approach and the

cognitive-developmental approach both share a constructivist view which emphasizes

building relationships and resolving authentic ethical dilemmas that arise within a

community (Howard et al., 2004). This differs from the traditional approach because

the traditional approach seeks to fill youth with virtues and have them practice those

virtues, while the other two approaches focus on the processes of youth making

decisions based upon a protocol within a unique situation. Both the traditional and

cognitive-developmental approaches have some shared virtues. Democracy and the

obligation to vote are integral to both approaches (Howard et al., 2004). Both concepts

also recognize that deliberation of significant public issues is important (Howard et al.,

2004).

To increase a CE program's likelihood of success, educators must look at

student behaviors along with child development theories when selecting a CE

approach (Williams, 2000). In summary, CE programs are most effective when

tailored to the specific developmental level (both cognitive and moral) of the students and specific goals and objectives of the CE programs. All of these factors must be taken into consideration when planning to implement a CE program.

Implementation of a Character Education Program

**Components of an Effective
Character Education
Program**

Many attempts have been made to define what an effective CE program looks like and how to replicate a program that has been deemed effective at a specific school. The literature lacked any universal idea of what the word effective means in regard to CE programs. This is perhaps because different schools and/or classrooms had unique desired outcomes for programs based on the site's specific needs. For the scope of this literature review, the word effective will mean that the CE program produced the desired outcomes set forth at the beginning of the program. The following is a synopsis from several experts in the field as to what effective CE programs have in common.

Making CE a priority within a school building is a key component in effective CE programs (Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009). Williams (2000) stated that leadership is found to be the most essential element for initial and ongoing success of CE programs in schools. Berkowitz and Hoppe (2009) stated that schools that create an authentic mission statement and use common language often experience success with character education. Setting organizational priorities is necessary and plays a significant role in organizational development and theory (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013). From a leadership perspective, creating an official policy that delineates this priority and holds

all stakeholders accountable is also an important part when prioritizing programs within a building (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013).

Professional development for all staff members is another common denominator of effective CE programs. Much of the understanding of how character develops and methods that are utilized to teach character are necessary topics for professional development (Williams, 2000). Berkowitz and Bier (2005) also mentioned professional development as one of the most important components in successful programs. Professional development should be ongoing for all involved in implementing the CE initiative and its elements (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Community involvement and participation from many adults in different roles also play a part in a successful CE program. These adults may include parents, community members, and teachers. Berkowitz and Hoppe (2009) also pointed out that students are more likely to flourish in schools if parents are constructively involved in their children's learning. Schools need to seek out ways to involve communities in the CE initiatives and programs that they are promoting.

Berkowitz and Bustamante (2013), through research at the University of St. Louis, Missouri, also added relationship building to the list of components that make up an effective program. Historically, education has been based on individualistic and competitive tendencies (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013). Individualistic and competitive attitudes in the classroom have led to less interaction between students and are not supportive of character development or learning (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013). Relationship building is necessary for the general day-to-day functioning of schools, but also can be helpful when dealing with problem situations as they arise (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013).

Modeling of good character by the adults who are involved in the lives of children is also an integral part of a CE program that works (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013). Bandura coined the social–learning theory, which stressed the importance of observation and imitation of behaviors observed in others (American Psychological Association, 2017). Adults must reflect on their own behaviors and then model the desired outcomes of the CE program (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013).

Berkowitz and Bustamante (2013) also mentioned empowering children and shifting the reward system within an organization from extrinsic to intrinsic as other priorities for a successful program. Many current programs that are recommended and utilized as CE programs can be authoritarian in practice and provide extrinsic rewards for students demonstrating the desired outcomes (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013). Allowing students to be empowered and to seek out these intrinsic rewards can be a shift for some programs that provide extrinsic rewards, but it is an integral component of effective CE programming.

**Phases of Program Implementation
and the Leadership Role**

Burke (2014) listed four phases as part of a model for planning and leading organization change: prelaunch phase, launch phase, postlaunch phase, and sustaining the change. During the prelaunch phase, the leader needs to embody the vision of where the organization is going (Burke, 2014). The launch phase involves communicating the need for change, and initial activities that can capture attention and provide focus are conducted (Burke, 2014). During the launch phase, the leader will also have to deal with resistance from individuals, groups, and from the larger systems in the organization (Burke, 2014). This resistance can be met by allowing members of

the organization to make choices throughout the process, providing symbolic closure

to old practices, restructuring groups, providing rewards after the process is complete,

and involving members of the organization in the change process (Burke, 2014).

During the postlaunch phase, it can be expected that new ways of doing work, new

structures, and different values may emerge from the organization (Burke, 2014).

Also, during this phase, consistency in implementation and perseverance are necessary

to sustain the change (Burke, 2014). Leaders must continue to encourage people,

exude energy and enthusiasm for continuing the change, and find ways to continue

communicating the message (Burke, 2014).

Measuring Fidelity of
Implementation

> Regardless of careful and detailed preparation it can be expected that
> implementation will take longer than expected, change will be resisted more
> than anticipated, and what seemed like a really good idea will not be
> appreciated universally. (Bickman et al., 2009, p. 96)

Implementation of a CE program can bring about some unanticipated challenges as

illustrated by this quote. Bickman et al. (2009) spoke of the wide agreement that

measuring fidelity is critical and that a constant struggle exists as to how to best

measure fidelity of implementation of school-based programs. Fidelity can be defined

as the extent to which the protocol or program model matches up with the delivery of

the intervention or service (Mowbray, Holter, Teague, & Bybee, 2003). As mentioned

in the previous section, there are several necessary components that must be present

for a CE program to succeed. In addition to those previously mentioned components,

examining fidelity of implementation is important to produce accurate and measurable

outcomes. This was illustrated in the USDE evaluation of seven CE programs

published in 2010 (USDE, 2010a). One of the limitations of this research was the low

levels of implementation that took place at some of the research sites, potentially causing less of an impact on the outcomes that were measured (USDE, 2010a). Bickman et al. mentioned that implementation measurement had been neglected until recently, with more attention having been focused on outcomes and mediating variables. This presents an issue because measurements of outcomes could be inaccurate if the quantity and quality of implementation are unknown (Bickman et al., 2009). Thus measuring the outcomes of a CE program could not be accurate unless researchers know the level of fidelity of implementation (Bickman et al., 2009). Chen (1990) (as cited in Mowbray et al., 2003) stated that the importance of documenting fidelity allows determination of whether any unsuccessful outcomes reflect a failure of the model or a failure of implementation. When measuring fidelity it is important that both structure and process are measured, encompassing both the framework for service delivery and the way in which the services are delivered (Mowbray et al., 2003). In regard to measurement of implementation, Mowbray et al. (2003) listed the most common methods: ratings by experts based on interviews, classroom observations, videotaping, program documents, and surveys completed by those delivering or receiving the services.

Benefits of Character Education

Climate

The National School Climate Center (n.d.) reported that having a positive school climate can have direct impacts on many aspects of a school including lower dropout rates, reduced school violence, and increased academic achievement. School climate refers to the quality and character of school life and is based on patterns of students', parents', and school staffs' experiences of school life (National School

Climate Center, n.d.). School climate includes norms, goals, values, relationships, how teaching and learning occur, and how the school is organized (National School Climate Center, n.d.). Positive classroom and school climate are increasingly being linked to increased academic achievement, effective risk prevention, and positive youth development (National School Climate Center, n.d.). According to Battistich, Solomon, Watson, and Schaps (1997), when a student's needs for safety and belonging are met, it can result in the student becoming affectively bonded with and committed to their school. Students will also be more inclined to identify with and behave in accordance with the school's expressed goals and values (Battistich et al., 1997). England (2009) found that CE played a role in creating a safe learning environment (school climate). Smith (2013) linked the promotion of moral character through a CE program with a reduction in bullying behaviors. Hamre and Pianta (2006) found that a positive school climate can contribute to students' self-confidence, teachers' self-efficacy, and improved student and teacher relationships.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Many studies tout the benefits of relationship building between students and teachers and also among students. In their research, Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos (2011) reported that improving students' relationships with teachers had positive, long lasting impacts on academic and social development. When teachers develop positive relationships with a student, which often happens through intentional modeling and instruction of specific relational character skills, students feel supported in their academic endeavors, tend to enjoy school more, and get along better with peers (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). These feelings of support help maintain students' interest in school, which ultimately leads to more positive relationships with peers, as well as

increased academic achievement (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). Explicit instruction for students regarding regulation of feelings fosters relationship development and can provide students an opportunity to explore difficult situations and emotions in a safe and supportive environment (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). Hamre and Pianta (2006) also found that building positive relationships with teachers provided students with increased feelings of competence, safety, and connectedness and that these relationships should be explicitly targeted as part of school-based intervention and prevention efforts. Klem and Connell (2004) found that students who perceive their teachers as creating a caring and structured learning environment are more likely to report engagement in school, and high levels of engagement were associated with higher attendance and test scores.

Student Engagement

In a 2014 Gallup poll, 47% of students in grades five through twelve surveyed reported either not being engaged or actively disengaged in school. Research from Beesley et al. (2010) found that CE programs can increase student engagement through direct instruction of performance character. Student engagement includes the processes in which a student thinks about school, the enthusiasm the student shows for learning, the attention, and also the interest a student shows for school and learning (Klem & Connell, 2004). Klem and Connell (2004) also found that middle school students with higher levels of engagement were 75% more likely to have higher grades and attend school regularly than those who were disengaged.

Benefits for All Levels

The CE programs are beneficial for all student levels (Parmeter, 2011). Elementary students benefit from consistent CE (Parmeter, 2011). By having a teacher

check-in with how they are when they are in school, they develop character (Parmeter, 2011). By feeling that they belong in a school, they develop a sense of community (Parmeter, 2011). The CE also helps prepare elementary students' brains for the learning they will encounter in school, which in turn can contribute to students' production of high quality work (Parmeter, 2011). As students progress into middle school, their developing brains and changes that adolescence brings demonstrate a need for CE (Pinto, 2012). Middle school students often have low tolerance for frustration, lack of impulse control, memory issues, organizing challenges, and can be challenged by worrying too much about what their peers think about them (Pinto, 2012). Pinto (2012) went on to state that Crew builds relational character and helps model conflict–resolution skills, problem solving, and personal communication skills. As students progress into high school, having a CE component is equally as important (Lieber, 2009). Students in high school have needs for belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity (Lieber, 2009). When these basic needs can be met (often through CE), students develop healthy ways to deal with conflict, self-expression, and are able to be empathetic and supportive (Lieber, 2009). In summary, CE can be beneficial to students of all age groups.

Barriers to Implementing a Character
Education Program

Implementing any program within a school will inevitably be met with barriers. Implementing a CE program is certainly not immune from having barriers and challenges. This section will highlight several barriers that were present in current research surrounding implementation and evaluation of CE programs. A USDE report created in 2008 examined the experiences of several pilot projects that resulted from

government grants for CE between 1995 through 2001. This report listed several

challenges that were common among the 46 CE grants that were awarded during this

time frame (USDE, 2008). School staff can create a barrier to implementing a CE

program. Movement of teachers and other school staff into and out of a school can

present a challenge with levels of training for program implementation with fidelity

(USDE, 2008). Time constraints on staff can present challenges since teachers already

have numerous responsibilities and developing a new program is time consuming

(USDE, 2008). Some critics of CE said that programming can actually take away from

academic learning time (USDE, 2008). Some staff firmly believed that school should

be a place where academics are a priority, thus placing less importance on CE

programming and not supporting the adoption of a CE program (USDE, 2008). There

can also be a financial burden when implementing CE programs. Receiving money

through grants was a challenge, since CE programming grants had to compete with

other educational priorities (USDE, 2008). Assessing the measured outcomes of CE

programs was necessary for the grants to be continued. This presented a barrier

because very few uniform evaluation tools were available, and many schools lacked

any baseline data, which were both necessary to measure improvement (USDE, 2008).

In addition to the USDE report of 2008, other research presented additional

barriers and challenges to implementing a CE program. Romanowski (2005)

completed a qualitative study of one high school that implemented a CE program.

Romanowski used student data from previous research to ask teachers questions about

their perspectives to implementation of the CE program. Teachers pointed out that

assessing any changes attributed to the CE program was difficult due to the fact that

numerous factors came into play, which made it challenging to isolate solely the

impact of the CE program (Romanowski, 2005). Regarding assessment, the teachers also shared that they believed another challenge in measuring the impacts on students is that character may not materialize in students until adulthood (Romanowski, 2005). Romanowski also collected multiple reports from teachers of parents and administrators not consistently modeling the desired behaviors that were prioritized as part of the CE program. Teachers in the study resoundingly mentioned a lack of parental support as a major barrier regarding the effectiveness of the CE program (Romanowski, 2005).

Methods of measuring character can prove to be a challenge when evaluating CE programs. Character is difficult to measure using a written test since most of the characteristics are observable actions (Davis, 2003). Further, it is difficult to differentiate between students who come to school with a value and moral education from their families and those who acquire that education within a school setting. Some students who exhibit high levels of prosocial behaviors within their family unit may have more support at home, thus leading to higher achievement in school. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to isolate the CE program as the sole component of changes within a school or a student.

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Current Legislation and Funding for
Character Education

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Legislation

Effective school programming must be supported by federal, state, and local educational policy as well as administrators (Durlack & Weissberg, 2011). Thus for CE programs to be a priority in schools, legislation must exist in support of CE. While some legislation does support CE in schools, an issue arises around prioritization of a

program when that program is not mandated by legislation. As stated earlier, competition among school programs can be a barrier for implementing CE programs (USDE, 2008). From 1993 to 2009, 36 states passed laws mandating or encouraging CE (Hanson, Dietsch, & Zheng, 2012). Currently, the Character Education Partnership (CEP) website shows that 18 states mandate some form of CE, and 18 states encourage CE. The CEP website reports that currently seven states support CE, but have not passed legislation. This leaves seven states and the District of Columbia with no legislation in support of CE. In 2001, Colorado passed House Bill 01-1292, the Caring Communities Builds Character partnership that strongly encourages schools to develop a CE component but does not mandate CE programs in Colorado schools (CEP, n.d.-a). While Colorado does not mandate CE, the state does mandate that schools have in place both a policy to prevent bullying and to develop and implement plans and strategies for safe and civil school climates (CEP, n.d.-a).

Funding

In order for a program to succeed in a school, funding must be present to support the implementation of the program. It is important to know how CE programs are funded, because without funding, the programs could not exist. Schools fund the implementation of CE programs utilizing government resources or applying for private grants (CEP, n.d.-b). Since, in many instances, CE is not mandated by legislation, this grant funding encourages states to commit staff time and resources to CE (USDE, 2008). Currently, the Federal government oversees, coordinates, and recommends national policy for CE under the guidance of the Office of Safe and Healthy Students, which is part of the USDE (USDE, 2015b). The Safe and Supportive Schools Group is one of three divisions in the Office of Safe and Healthy

Students (USDE, 2015b). The Safe and Supportive Schools Group provides CE grants

to state education associations and local education associations in the form of school

climate transformation grants (USDE, 2015b). A school climate transformation grant

provides competitive grants to state education associations or local education

associations to develop, enhance, or expand systems of support for evidence-based,

multi-tiered behavioral framework for improving behavior and learning conditions for

all students (USDE, 2015a). Allowing local education associations to apply for grants

allows individual districts to gain support to develop programs at the grassroots level

(USDE, 2008).

In addition to government funding, sources of funding are available from

several different foundations that are not affiliated with the government (CEP, n.d.-b).

Various foundations offer different awards based on competitive, discretionary grants

(CEP, n.d.-c). A search on the website through the Snowy Peak School District's

publically released budget for the 2016–2017 school year did not show any specific

line items devoted to the CE program, although as part of the district's visioning

process, the assumption is made that all programming and instruction expenses listed

in the budget will go towards supporting the district vision.

Need for More Research

A variety of universal school-based programs designed to help schools

increase positive student behaviors, reduce negative behaviors, and improve academic

performance are available (USDE, 2010b). More evidence from rigorous evaluations

is needed to better understand the effects of the CE programs (USDE, 2010b). What

research does exist is limited relative to the large number of CE programs that are

available for use and are currently being implemented (Howard et al., 2004). Many of

the attempts to implement programming have not been evaluated for effectiveness (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007).

Experts often disagree about what type of research is most beneficial when completing objective evaluations of CE programs, and concerns are often raised regarding the results. In 2010, The Institute of Educational Sciences evaluated seven different school-based CE programs. This study examined the seven CE programs together and separately and ultimately did not link CE programs with improvement of any outcomes (USDE, 2010a). This USDE report randomly assigned 84 schools in six states to receive one of the seven CE programs. Implementation and outcomes were studied for the schools, creating a sample that had more than 6,000 students in grades three through five. At the end of each year, researchers looked at the effects of the programs, both overall and as individual programs. Researchers examined 20 indicators relating to social and emotional competence, academics, behavior, and perceptions of the school climate (USDE, 2010a). Results were analyzed for both all students and for four subgroups: gender, students with different initial risk levels, students who had been in the program from the beginning versus newcomers, and students in participating schools with good or poor fidelity to the chosen program (USDE, 2010a). At the end of the study, researchers compared the three-year growth of students on those character indicators to the growth of students in the control schools, some of which had their own character-related activities (USDE, 2010a). The results varied from year to year, but the overall consensus was that none of the CE programs actually had an overall impact on students (USDE, 2010a). This research study had a standard practice group and a treatment group, making the research experimental in nature. The study attempted to measure outcomes quantitatively, but

there were some limitations that made the results questionable. One limitation of the study included the length of time the research was conducted—consistent changes as a result of any of these seven programs may take longer than three years to see (USDE, 2010a). Questions also arose surrounding the treatment groups and the amount of CE activities already done in these schools (USDE, 2010a). This led to the renaming of the treatment groups to standard practice groups (USDE, 2010a). In addition, response rates from the number of students with data usually ranged from 60% to 68%, due to lack of parental consent or student assent (USDE, 2010a). Levels of implementation varied as well with many of the teachers reporting low levels of implementation in regard to the programming (USDE, 2010a). It was difficult to attribute programming to any outcome because the level of implementation is not known.

Disagreements exist about which type of research is needed in the field. Howard et al. (2004) stated teachers and others implementing CE programs are far more focused on implementation than on evaluation and that the field suffers from having relatively few rigorous research findings, indicating a need for more research that is evaluative in nature. In contrast, Berkowitz and Bier (2007) identified a specific need for more research regarding implementation. After analysis of 64 research reports identified by an expert panel as being sound in research design, details were lacking in regard to both content and process of the implementation of the CE programs (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). This lack of research surrounding implementation of CE programs leaves a gap in the research; much of the research in the field is focused on outcomes and lacks rich descriptions in regard to the implementation of CE programs (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). Measuring outcomes is informative and can provide evidence for a program's effectiveness. However, if the

levels of implementation of such programs are not addressed, the outcome measures are not accurate (Bickman et al., 2009). Also mentioned is an inherent need for research examining stages of implementation and other processes that may have an impact on implementation (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). These processes include professional development, school leadership, and other mediating variables like school climate (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). Berkowitz and Bier (2007) went on to mention that fidelity of implementation does matter in regard to a CE program demonstrating effectiveness, implying that research regarding evaluation of implementation is necessary in the field of CE. Controlling for multiple or different implementation strategies is also an area where more research is needed (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007).

On the other end of the spectrum, Durlack and Weissberg (2011) stated that an analysis of social–emotional skills programming showed an 11-percentile point gain in achievement (average among elementary, middle, and high school groups) when schools implemented a CE program. This meta-analysis examined 213 research studies (mostly peer reviewed) and involved data from more than 270,000 students (Durlack & Weissberg, 2011). This analysis did mention results were more positive from studies where implementation was higher, making it difficult to predict the success of a CE program without some evaluation of implementation (Durlack & Weissberg, 2011). Inconsistency within the research exists, and levels of implementation within a school can lead to very different results. This is evident in the comparison of the results from the USDE (2010a) report and the Durlack and Weissberg meta-analysis research.

Not all of the research suggests that CE has positive impacts on schools, and even among scholars different studies produce very different results. Research from

some studies has come back with mixed data. Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) conducted a longitudinal panel study in which data for three different areas were collected from five school districts that had introduced a CE program. The three areas data were collected were behavior indicators (suspension, expulsion, attendance, and dropout rates), behavioral perceptions of students (collected from teachers, students, and community members), and academic achievement (data from state assessments) (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). At the conclusion of the research, Skaggs and Bodenhorn stated, "There is little evidence to suggest a relationship between CE and school-level achievement" (p. 110). Skaggs and Bodenhorn surmised that student achievement was not directly influenced by character education. Behavioral perceptions among teachers, community members, and students did however improve as a result of implementing a CE program in the five districts (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). While this study had a large and diverse population, data were only collected for three years, again opening up the question as to how long CE programs need to make any impact. The five districts that participated as the treatment groups used varied CE programs, and it is possible that one program worked well while the other four did not (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). This research is an example of how some CE programs can have positive impacts in one area of desired outcomes and no impact in other areas of desired outcomes.

Many of the programs available for purchase lack credible research because of the use of internal auditors, lack a peer review process, findings belong to a grant provider, or programs are not evaluated at all (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). As for school created programs, it can be inferred from the research that many of these programs lack the continuity or consistency to gather longitudinal data (Berkowitz &

Bier, 2007). Some scientific research that defends CE covers short periods of two to three years, while character is something that lasts a lifetime (Davis, 2003). Davis (2003) also stated that when teachers claim to see an increase in positive behaviors during the school day it does not necessarily predict students' behavior outside of the school day or, better yet, for the rest of their life.

Measuring character presents a challenge (USDE, 2008). Do students with higher levels of character developed inherently do better in school? Or do students who are explicitly taught character education programs do better as a result of those programs (Beesley et al., 2010)? These questions pose a great challenge to researchers. There is a need for uniform evaluation tools (USDE, 2008). Without consistent methods to measure character, it is difficult to measure outcomes and prove that any of these programs work. Research is needed in the field that involves the implementation of CE programs, along with the outcomes of those programs. Evaluating one without the other clearly leads to limitations in the research and research results that may not be representative of what is actually happening in regard to CE programs.

Conclusion

When reviewing the literature in regard to character and CE it becomes apparent that the waters are murky. Both moral and performance character have a lengthy history in United States public and parochial schools. It seems that there is always some level of debate in regard to what schools should teach, be it academics, character, or a combination of both. When clear, measureable objectives and goals are created at the outset of any educational endeavor, those objectives must be measured. The issue then, perhaps, lies with all stakeholders involved in educating youth to prioritize the outcomes that are desired.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This comparative case study provided insight from the teachers' perspectives regarding the implementation and outcomes of the Crew class. Specifically, I collected data about the teachers' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of Crew. I also collected data about the teachers' perceptions of outcomes that they believed could be attributed to Crew.

Research Questions

To examine the teacher perceptions about the implementation and outcomes of the Crew class, the following research questions were developed:

Q1   What are middle school teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of Crew?

Q2   What are middle school teachers' perceptions regarding the outcomes of Crew?

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective describes an approach to understanding and explaining society and the human world (Crotty, 2003). The theoretical perspective that framed this study was interpretivism. Interpretivism seeks to understand and explain human and social reality (Crotty, 2003). This case study research explained and provided context from teachers' perspectives regarding the outcomes and implementation of a new character education (CE) program. The focus groups, field

notes, and artifact collection provided insights on the teachers' interpretations of the implementation and outcomes of Crew.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know (Crotty, 2003). To construct meaning from the qualitative data I collected, a constructionist epistemology was utilized. This comparative case study research sought to create a thorough understanding of the CE program at each of the three middle schools. The data that I collected and the conclusions that I reported were constructed through my focus group experiences with teachers at each school, collected artifacts from the teachers, and field notes that I took.

Methodology

Qualitative research seeks to understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Questions about understanding experiences warrant the use of a qualitative research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The most appropriate design for this research was a comparative case study. Case study research explores a real-life, bounded system (case) over time using in-depth data collection from multiple sources (Creswell, 2013). Case study is a methodology that explores a phenomenon within its context using data obtained from multiple sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Collecting data from multiple sources at each site enable the researcher to explore the issue through many lenses and achieve a thorough understanding of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I gathered data through focus groups, field notes, and artifact collection at three middle schools. The comparative case study examines in rich detail the context and features of more than one example of a specific

phenomenon (Mills, Durepos, & Weibe, 2010). Comparative case study still provides the "thick description" indicative of case study research, but the goal of this comparative research is to discover contrasts, similarities, or patterns across the cases (Mills et al., 2010, p. 174). My study provided a rich and thick description of the teachers' perceptions regarding Crew implementation and outcomes at the three different middle schools in the Snowy Peaks School District. After analyzing the data, I reported the similarities and differences that existed at each of the different research sites.

Case study begins with the identification of a specific case (Creswell, 2013). Case study explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) over time (Creswell, 2013). The case for this research included teachers from three middle schools and the implementation of the CE program. This case was bound by location (the schools), the program (CE/Crew), and time (one semester of data collection). The hope is that this comparative case study can provide information for administrators who are implementing a CE program or plan to implement a CE program in the future.

Setting

The school district where the research was conducted began a community visioning process during the school year 2013–2014 under the guidance of new leadership. At the conclusion of this process, five pillars were adopted as the foundation for the school district's new strategic plan: academic excellence, character development, talent development, community partnership, and strategic use of resources. The school district listed four strategies to support the pillar of character development: teach character skills throughout the day, ensure all students are members of a Crew class, create an intentional culture of character, and provide

social–emotional supports for the whole child. Beginning in the school year 2015–2016, staff in all three middle schools committed to implementing a CE program, utilizing a class structure referred to as Crew. Crew is a structure derived from the Expeditionary Learning school model. Expeditionary Learning is a school model designed with collaboration between the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Outward Bound (Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, 2011). Crew is a dedicated time during the school day to focus on character skills, social–emotional learning, and academic goal setting (Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, 2011). Crew provides each student a relationship with an adult Crew leader at the school, as well as a consistent and ongoing small-scale peer community, and sets the stage for the development of deeper teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships in the hopes of increasing feelings of belonging and supporting all students' success (see Appendix A).

Common expectations were created prior to district-wide implementation of Crew. It should be noted that I worked as a participant on several committees regarding the development of the Crew program as a teacher, professional development leader, and during my internship for my doctoral program. To create common expectations for Crew and the non-negotiable requirements expected at each school in the district, a committee was formed. The committee was comprised of district administrators, teachers, representatives from Expeditionary Learning, and district office staff. At the conclusion of several stakeholder meetings, a document was devised that provided common expectations for the structures of Crew throughout the district. Those common expectations for Crew were that every student belongs to a Crew group with 15 to 20 students; schools dedicate time within their daily schedule

for Crew; Crew meetings follow a long-term unit plan and a common format; physical space is arranged to support student interaction, usually in a circle; whole school grade-level meetings and celebrations occur to support school-wide culture building; adults model being part of a school and district Crew in how they interact and build relationships; and all instructional staff have a role in Crew (see Appendix A).

This document also lined out four common purposes of Crew. The purposes of Crew are:

- Positive culture: Build and maintain a positive school culture, climate, and community that connect to the broader community.

- Academic advisement: Facilitate goal setting to develop college and career readiness.

- Character development: Develop and maturate Habits of a Scholar (character skills) and support social-emotional learning (see Appendix B).

- Adventure: Foster adventure, health, fitness, and a love of learning (see Appendix A).

Participants

The participants for this study included teachers in three middle schools in a rural school district situated in western Colorado. Three schools were picked to be the research sites because the school district had three middle schools, and each of the middle schools introduced the Crew class structure on the same timeline. During the process of this research, the Snowy Peaks School District did open an additional school, but that school was not included in this research. This district was selected for research because the CE initiative was newly introduced through the Crew structure

during the 2015–2016 school year. The fact that the Crew program is new in the district allowed me to collect data regarding teacher perceptions from before and after the implementation of Crew in the school district.

During the school year 2016–2017, the entire population of middle school students in the school district was approximately 1,200 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2016d). The student population of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students at each of the middle schools ranged from between 251 to 543 (CDE, 2016d). During the school year 2016–2017, the mean percentage of students in the three middle schools qualifying for free and/or reduced prices for lunch was 45%, with the percentage ranging from between 40% to 56% at each of the schools (CDE, 2016d). The three middle schools have a mean percentage of approximately 57% of students identifying as Latino/a or Hispanic, with the percentage ranging between 51% to 67% for each of the three schools (CDE, 2016d). The percentage of English language learner students in each of the three middle schools ranged from 30.9% to 44.4% in the school year 2015–2016 (CDE, 2016e). Typically, in the state of Colorado, students qualifying for free and/or reduced lunch and who are Latino/a or Hispanic do not perform as high on measures of academic success such as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career test (CDE, 2016b). Using strategies to increase academic achievement of these students would be especially important in regard to closing the achievement gap that currently exists within the middle school students in the Snowy Peaks School District. Evidence from Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career assessment data from the school year 2015–2016 supported the existence of an achievement gap at all three of the middle schools in the school district (CDE, 2016e).

To protect individual school identities, I took the average of the differences of the mean scale scores from all three middle schools and included those numbers. Students who were classified as English language learners had a mean scale score on average of 27.3 points lower than their non-English language learner counterparts on the English Language Arts Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career assessment (CDE, 2016e). English language learner students had a mean scale score that averaged 25.6 points lower than non-English language learner students on the math Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career assessment (CDE, 2016e). When comparing students who are eligible for free and/or reduced lunch prices to students who are not eligible, the students who are eligible had a mean scale score that was 27.6 points lower in English language arts, and 24.3 points lower in math, when compared to their counterparts who do not qualify for free and/or reduced lunch prices (CDE, 2016e).

Middle school students were selected for this research because early adolescence is a time of rapid developmental change and transition for students (Farrington et al., 2012). For many early adolescents, the middle grades are characterized by decreases in school performance and engagement (Farrington et al., 2012). Gaining teachers' perspectives on how the CE program impacted the students was important. If the changes in teacher perceptions are positive after implementation of the CE program, this information could be shared with administrators as one potential way to help counteract the negative changes in behavior that are sometimes associated with middle school students.

Sample

The sample for the focus groups was purposefully selected. I tried to only recruit teachers who had been present in the building for three years or more. This was to make sure that teachers participating in the research were able to speak of changes before and after the implementation of the Crew class. The majority of teachers who participated in this research had been present in the district for more than three years. The steps I took to recruit teachers follow. First, I presented my research proposal to teachers at a staff meeting. I handed out and read through the Institutional Review Board approved description of the research with the group of teachers. Then, I had teachers check a box at the top of a form that indicated their willingness to participate in the research project. Teachers placed the forms in a manila envelope, and a teacher delivered the envelope to me. I examined the list of teachers who wished to participate, and then I purposefully selected teachers who allowed for a diverse range of teaching experience. I looked for teachers with various levels of experience so that I could collect data from several different perspectives. As with any occupation, spending more time on the job can cause perceptions to shift. For example, a teacher with more teaching experience may have more success in the classroom as a result of that experience, which could lead to a differing perspective in regard to how a program is implemented and the outcomes of a program. More experience in the education field may also allow a teacher to have more frames of reference and context when sharing perceptions on program implementation and outcomes. To obtain an accurate representation of the implementation, it was integral that a diverse sample of teachers be utilized.

Data Collection

Creswell (2013) stated that a qualitative case study presents an in-depth understanding of the case. Creswell went on to state that to accomplish this deep understanding, many forms of qualitative data must be collected. To accomplish this in-depth understanding of each case, I collected data through focus groups with teachers, taking field notes, and collecting numerous artifacts that helped to reveal the perspectives of the teachers. I conducted three focus groups: one with teachers from each of the three schools. I took detailed field notes during the focus groups and directly following the focus groups. Artifacts were collected from the teachers who participated in the focus groups. The steps I used in my data collection phase follow.

Prior to collecting any data, I obtained Institutional Review Board approval, and collected signed consent forms from all participants (see Appendix C). The signed consent forms will be kept in a locked drawer in my research advisor's office for three years (see Appendix D). All school district policies were followed regarding research at the schools.

This research gained an in-depth vision of the teacher perceptions surrounding implementation and outcomes of Crew. The focus groups allowed me to describe the teachers' perceptions of the CE program implementation and outcomes in great detail. The field notes and document/artifact collection provided the opportunity to triangulate what the teachers shared in the focus groups regarding perceptions of implementation and outcomes. By providing a rich and detailed description of the teachers' perceptions of the CE program, I was able to gain a thorough understanding of the CE program and the teachers' perceptions of its role in each of the three schools.

Focus Groups

Focus groups allowed the data to be socially constructed within the interaction of the group (Merriam, 2009). This fit into the constructionist epistemology of the study, because the data collected allowed the participants and me to construct meaning and answers to the research questions within a contextual frame. The contextual frame was present because I was able to guide the participants with opening questions and then allow other participants' responses to be incorporated into the discussion. Building on others' perceptions allowed the groups to build on the context during the focus groups.

In order to limit my own personal biases around Crew, I used focus groups rather than interviews so that the participants were leading the conversation with me providing guidance through open-ended questions. In a focus group, the interviewer is not in a position of power or influence, which allows for comments of all types (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). I believe that if I had utilized an interview format the likelihood of bias would have increased. The interview would have put me in a more directive role and since I did have a role in introducing this program in the school district, the likelihood of my personal bias being present would have been higher.

The goal of focus groups is to "gain understanding and see the issue through the eyes and hearts of the target audience and the staff who will have to implement the program" (Kreuger & Casey, 2015, p. 8). Focus groups allowed me to see how the teachers understood and valued the Crew class (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). Macnaghton and Meyers (2004) stated that focus groups are appropriate for a group to discuss something that the members of the group all know about but do not always talk about. Speaking from personal experience, I knew that teachers were often overloaded with

work and often did not have the time to formally sit down and discuss new initiatives in a group setting. Since the program was currently in the third year of implementation, it was relatively new to the schools, but it was also likely that teachers have had some time to process the perceived impact(s).

The focus groups provided me with valuable feedback regarding program implementation and outcomes. Feedback is important when implementing a new initiative. Without feedback, it is impossible to know if the program is meeting expectations (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). Lack of feedback can lead to failure of implementation of a program, which can affect morale (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). Further, sometimes the perceptions of the staff who are implementing the program differ from the leaders who are initiating the change (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). Taking the time to speak with groups of teachers about perceptions of Crew provided invaluable information and feedback for administrators.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that most writers recommend focus groups having at least six participants and no more than 10. Following this recommendation, I tried to structure my focus groups with between six and 10 participants. The focus groups were audio-recorded, and I took field notes during the focus groups. Since one goal was to create a comfortable, permissive environment during the focus groups, I began each group with introductions (so that every member started out speaking) and asked teachers to share a story about a positive Crew experience (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). At the conclusion of the focus groups, I provided an oral summary of the notes that I took to make sure that the participants were in agreement that what I wrote down was congruent with what they wished to communicate. Sample focus group questions are attached in Appendix E.

Artifact Collection

Collection of artifacts and documents took place and provided additional details that may not have surfaced in the focus groups. The collection of these teacher created and/or utilized artifacts added richness to the description that the teachers gave regarding their perceptions of Crew implementation and outcomes. The artifacts revealed additional details that the teachers may not have had the chance to share with me during the focus groups. Stake (1995) stated that documents can serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher did not directly observe. I collected artifacts from the teachers that he or she had previously used or planned to use during Crew. Some of the documents were created by teachers who participated in the focus groups and some were created at the school or district level. Collecting and examining documents and artifacts that teachers had created and/or used in the classroom provided me with a view through the lens of the teacher regarding how Crew was being implemented in the classroom from a teacher's perspective.

Field Notes

Field notes should be highly descriptive and include details about the participants, setting, activities or behaviors of the participants, and what the observer does (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This highly descriptive note taking process should provide enough detail so that a reader could feel as if he or she is there (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To further triangulate my data collection and provide a rich and thick description of the focus groups, I took detailed field notes based on the events that occurred during the focus groups with teachers from each of the three middle schools. I made sure to create the field notes as quickly as possible after the focus group was completed.

Saturation

The qualitative data were collected until the data reached a saturation point. The saturation point is reached when the themes and concepts that are present in the data begin to repeat. Data collection continued until I believed that the saturation point had occurred.

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Data Analysis

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The process of data analysis involves organizing the data, reading through the data, coding and organizing the themes, presenting the data, and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2013). During qualitative research, data analysis is done in conjunction with data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The steps I took to analyze my data follow. First, I transcribed the audio-recorded focus groups and studied the artifacts and field notes that I collected. This was an ongoing process since data were collected over the course of several weeks. Data from all three sources were organized on an ongoing basis, and the coding of the data began as soon as possible after data collection. The process of coding involves aggregating the data into small categories and then providing evidence for the code from the different sources of data collected (Creswell, 2013). Merriam (2009) suggested a process that begins with open coding, and then creating fewer, more comprehensive categories through axial coding. During open coding, I took notes and made comments on the data that struck me as relevant in relation to my research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Then, I grouped the open codes together into related categories called axial codes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The categories, or axial codes, were then aggregated into common ideas called themes (Creswell, 2013). I looked for conclusions and meaning from the data once the themes became apparent. I also created tables to display the large amounts of data collected

during this qualitative case study. The interpretation in qualitative research leads the researcher to the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2013). The comparative case study approach uses an iterative analysis of each case individually first and then a comparison of emergent patterns and themes from all cases (Mills et al., 2010). At the conclusion of data interpretation, I provided a detailed description of each case. After the detailed description of each case, I described similarities and unique qualities between the cases.

Data that I collected from the artifacts and field notes went through a similar data analysis process. I kept the data from each school organized and first carefully read through all of the collected data. Then I coded the data. I noted the categories and themes, and then I interpreted the data. I created a visual representation of the data in table form that placed specific pieces of evidence into the categories that I had previously created. After analyzing each case separately, I then compiled data from all three schools. I looked for similarities, differences, and patterns that existed within the data.

Trustworthiness

An essential component of all research is trustworthiness. To ensure trustworthiness in this research, I incorporated strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following section describes the steps I utilized to ensure trustworthiness.

Credibility

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) utilized the term credibility to describe the extent to which the findings and interpretations of the data collected match up with the reality of the participants. In order to ensure credibility in my case study, I made every

attempt to interpret and report the data that I collected in a way that was congruent

with the reality of the research participants. One way I accomplished this was through

triangulation. I triangulated the data by collecting data from several different sources,

utilizing a peer review process, and using member checking. Prior to the start of the

focus groups, I had a colleague read through the questions and make sure that the

questions related back to the research questions. I used the same question prompts

with each of the three focus groups. I began the focus groups by asking teachers to tell

me about a successful Crew experience that they had experienced recently. Then I

went on to ask the participants about strengths and weaknesses of Crew

implementation at their school. Following that, I asked the participants to share

outcomes that they attributed to Crew. I did minimal speaking during the focus group,

specifically because I wanted the groups to socially construct the data. This structuring

aligned with the constructionist epistemology I used to frame this research. After the

focus groups were completed, I used member checking to check the accuracy of my

findings. Member checking was completed to confirm that my interpretation was what

was meant to be conveyed by each member of the focus group (Merriam, 2009). I used

member checking in two different ways. At the conclusion of each focus group, I

summarized the content from the focus group with the members. I asked the teachers

if my summary sounded accurate. In all instances, teachers agreed and said my

summary sounded accurate. At the conclusion of data collection and data coding, I

made tables with the themes from each school. These tables listed specific evidence

from the data I collected to support those themes. I sent a copy of the table to each

focus group member and asked that he or she let me know if anything on the table

(including my interpretations) was not an accurate representation of what they wished

to convey. No teacher listed any instances where he or she believed that the data were not accurately reported or interpreted. This process allowed the teachers to examine the themes I deciphered from the multiple sources of data. Also, when I asked teachers for artifacts, I was purposefully vague so that I would not influence the teachers' decisions as to which artifacts to choose. I simply asked the teachers to give me artifacts that illustrated their perceptions about Crew implementation and outcomes. Many teachers asked for clarification and I answered with, "Whatever you would like to share with me." Triangulation took place by using multiple points of data to confirm the findings (Merriam, 2009). For this comparative case study, triangulation of the data was accomplished by collecting data from three sources. As previously mentioned, the three sources were field notes, artifact collection, and focus groups. Another way I sought to minimize my biases was through peer review. I sent my data analysis to my research advisors and through questioning and feedback was able to revisit the data a number of times to approach the data from many different angles and look for any disconfirming data. Shenton (2004) also mentioned addressing research beliefs and assumptions, which I do in the following section, entitled Researcher Perspective, which appears later in Chapter IV.

Transferability

Transferability is a process performed by readers of research, where the reader notes the specifics of the research situation and compares those specifics to an environment in which the reader is familiar (Barnes et al., 1994-2012). In order for this to occur, the reader needs to know as much as possible about the original research situation (Barnes et al., 1994-2012). To ensure transferability, I provided a rich, thick description of the teacher perceptions of implementations and outcomes of the Crew

class at each of the three middle schools. I also triangulated my data collection

methods to create higher levels of transferability by conducting focus groups, taking

detailed field notes, and collecting documents and artifacts that illustrate the teacher's

perceptions regarding Crew.

Dependability and Confirmability

Shenton (2004) defined confirmability as the taking of steps to ensure that the

research findings are the result of experiences and ideas of the participants and not the

researcher. Dependability refers to the ability of another researcher to be able to

replicate a similar qualitative study (Shenton, 2004). To ensure confirmability and

reduce bias, I triangulated my data collection sources. I also used member checking as

described earlier. To warrant both confirmability and dependability, I also made sure

that I provided a detailed description of my methodology so that readers of my

research could have a very detailed description of the steps I used in the research

process. Shenton also mentioned addressing research beliefs and assumptions, which I

do in the following section, entitled Researcher Perspective.

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Researcher Perspective

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How I interpreted and reported my research findings related directly to my

own life experiences. Specifically, my writing was a reflection of my cultural, social,

gender, class, and personal political beliefs (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) stated

that reflexivity is necessary for researchers to "position" themselves in their writing (p.

213). Reflexivity is composed of two necessary parts. The first part for me was

identifying my own prior experiences with the phenomenon being explored. The

second part was to see how those experiences shaped my interpretation of the

phenomenon in the context of this research. To examine my own reflexivity required

me to acknowledge my own previous experiences surrounding middle school, my experiences as a teacher, and then reflecting on how these experiences impacted my own interpretations and research processes.

I recalled my own school experiences, specifically challenges and successes, as a student. I always enjoyed listening and observing when I was a student. I always felt like I was very attentive and compared myself to a sponge seeking to soak up as much knowledge as I could. In my family we were raised to abide by the class rules. This was seen as a sign of respect to my teachers and my parents. I brought with me the expectation that my parents instilled in me of listening to the teacher and following the rules consistently. I experienced success in school, and I can attribute my behavior and eagerness to learn to a large part of that success. My traditional acceptance of the class rules may have had an impact on me, as the Crew class structure is very open, non-traditional, and students are expected to share openly (Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, 2011).

Another prior experience that impacted my research was my previous employment as a teacher. I spent 14 years as a public school teacher in Colorado, with 13 of those years teaching middle school. Throughout my career, community building and CE had always been a personal passion of mine. I always sought to teach character through my own content classes. This experience allowed me to have both insider and outsider perspectives in my research. I understand the way middle schools in the school district are structured and challenges that teachers and school staff often face, which gives me an insider perspective. This teaching experience brought with it preconceived notions about middle schools, teachers, and students. For example, I may have made assumptions that all teachers faced the same challenges that I faced as

a middle school teacher. To address these challenges, I made sure that I was aware of the fact that these biases were present. By being aware of the biases, I was able to continuously re-evaluate my data during analysis to make sure that I was remaining as unbiased as possible.

During my years as a teacher, I was employed in the school district where the research occurred. I worked on the leadership committee that designed the initiative to bring CE to all schools in the district. I also worked in a professional development capacity with district teachers helping them develop curriculum for the CE program and training teachers on the purposes of the Crew class structure. This work experience allowed me an in-depth knowledge of the expectations of the CE program implementation. Since I worked on the committee to implement Crew, I have a personal interest in seeing it succeed. It was challenging for me to hear about any negative aspects of implementation from teachers and just listen without offering suggestions for improvement. To address this bias, I made sure to continuously re-evaluate as I analyzed the data. I also made sure that the data I collected were directly related to the research questions. I used member checking at the conclusion of the focus groups and also once my interpretations of the data were complete.

Conclusion

The inclusion of CE in schools is not a new concept. As society changes, the focus and objective of CE shifts to reflect the needs of our communities (Glasner & Milson, 2006; McClellan, 1999; Watz, 2010). Levels of academic achievement proficiency are low and academic growth is stagnating at schools in the United States and Colorado (CDE, 2016a, 2016b; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; The Nation's Report Card, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Students and teachers reported concerns

surrounding negative behavior of the youth in the United States and the impact this negative behavior had on teaching and learning (Davis, 2003; Lickona, 2014; USDE, 2011; Watz, 2010; Zhang et al., 2016). Shifting educator accountability in the United States and Colorado required teachers and schools to incorporate nonacademic indicators into teaching, planning, and measuring school quality (CDE, 2014a, 2014b, 2016c; Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). Components of a successful CE program have been identified (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013; Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009; Williams, 2000). More research is needed surrounding implementation and outcomes of CE programs (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; USDE, 2010a). The goal of this case study research was to provide insight regarding teacher perceptions around implementation and outcomes of a newly implemented CE program called Crew. The results of this study will provide valuable information to administrators seeking to implement or improve a CE program. The information will inform best practice by sharing patterns, similarities, and differences that the teachers at the three middle schools experienced when implementing a new program.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This comparative case study sought to collect qualitative data regarding

teacher perceptions of implementation and outcomes of a newly introduced character

education (CE) program delivered through a class structure called Crew in Snowy

Peaks School District. Crew is a dedicated time during the school day to focus on

character skills, social–emotional learning, and academic goal setting (Expeditionary

Learning Outward Bound, 2011). Crew structure fosters relationship building with an

adult at the school, as well as a consistent and ongoing small-scale peer community,

and sets the stage for the development of deeper teacher-to-student and student-to-

student relationships in the hopes of increasing feelings of belonging and supporting

all students' success (see Appendix A).

To guide this comparative case study, two research questions were explored:

Q1   What are middle school teachers' perceptions regarding the
       implementation of Crew?

Q2   What are middle school teachers' perceptions regarding the outcomes
       of Crew?

After data were collected, the research questions were answered, and the findings are

presented in Chapter IV. A description of the teachers who participated follows with a

summary of themes after that.

Participant Profiles

I recruited teacher volunteers from each school to participate in this research. Eight teachers participated from Rocky Springs Middle School; Elk Mountain and Two Rivers Middle Schools had five participants each. As I stated in Chapter III, I sought to have teachers who had been in the district for more than three years and taught sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. I wanted teachers who had been in the school district before and after Crew was implemented. I was not able to fulfill this requirement at all three schools. I had enough teachers volunteer for the research, but I had a hard time finding a common time that teachers could meet for the focus group. I had to modify my requirements and had one first-year teacher and two fifth-grade teachers participate in the research. I decided to include these teachers since perceptions from a wide range of teachers would allow me to gather more data from varied perspectives. I also wanted to make sure that I had enough data to analyze, and it seemed more feasible to include one first-year teacher and two fifth-grade teachers than to allow the number of focus group members to decrease by three members.

Some details were omitted purposefully in the reporting of the findings to protect the identity of the participants. All names are pseudonyms and may not reflect the actual gender of the participant. Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide relevant details about the participants from each of the three schools.

Table 1

Participants: Rocky Springs Middle School

Name	Years in education	Years in district	Current grade level
Angie	Less than 10	More than 3	7
Ben	More than 10	More than 3	6, 7, 8
Kate	More than 10	More than 3	6
Chad	More than 10	More than 3	6, 7, 8
Jenn	More than 10	More than 3	6
Lisa	More than 10	More than 3	7
Tammy	More than 10	More than 3	6
Cathy	Less than 10	More than 3	7

Table 2

Participants: Elk Mountain Middle School

Name	Years in education	Years in district	Current grade level
Emma	More than 10	More than 3	7
Kristin	More than 10	More than 3	7
Beth	More than 10	More than 3	5, 6, 7, 8
Jamie	Less than 10	More than 3	8
Mary	Less than 10	Less than 3	6

Table 3

Participants: Two Rivers Middle School

Name	Years in education	Years in district	Current grade level
Charlie	More than 10	More than 3	5, 6, 7, 8
Phyllis	More than 10	More than 3	5
Ken	Less than 10	Less than 3	8
Amanda	Less than 10	More than 3	5
Pat	More than 10	More than 3	8

Summary of Themes

I collected data through focus groups, field notes, and collection of artifacts from teachers. (The data that I collected from field notes are woven throughout the findings section and not specifically mentioned in each instance). I analyzed the data from each of the three schools independently before identifying similarities and unique qualities among the three middle schools. At Rocky Springs Middle School, the data revealed four themes surrounding implementation of Crew: consistency, teacher leaders, time, and buy-in. Data from Elk Mountain Middle School revealed three themes surrounding implementation of Crew: teacher leaders, time, and buy-in. At Two Rivers Middle School, the data revealed four themes surrounding implementation of Crew: consistency, teacher leaders, buy-in, and autonomy. The data I collected from each school about the outcomes of Crew revealed three themes that were shared

between all of the middle schools. Those themes were relationships, opportunities for leadership, and Crew all day. Table 4 summarizes the findings.

Table 4

Summary of Themes

Themes	Middle school		
	Rocky Springs	Elk Mountain	Two Rivers
Implementation			
Consistency	X		X
Teacher leaders	X	X	X
Buy-in	X	X	X
Time	X	X	
Autonomy			X
Outcomes			
Relationships	X	X	X
Opportunities for leadership	X	X	X
Crew all day	X	X	X

Emergent Themes from Rocky Springs Middle School

Rocky Springs Middle School was the largest of the three middle schools in the school district. The local community had approximately 10,000 residents. The school was recently remodeled as the result of a bond issue passed by the community. Along with an updated building, the school website appeared fresh and contained current information. Rocky Springs Middle School had a diverse population with approximately half of the students speaking Spanish as their native language. The Crew classes at Rocky Springs Middle School have sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students in them. The same teacher stays with the same group of students for three years. Graduating eighth graders from the Crew group are replaced with incoming sixth graders each school year.

During the focus group, teachers from Rocky Springs Middle School seemed eager to participate and share their perceptions about Crew with me. The interactions between teachers were energetic, and teachers were passionate when sharing their thoughts about Crew with me. The teachers were quick to respond to my questions and shared information with me freely. At the conclusion of the focus group, teachers expressed that they often did not have time to discuss Crew implementation and outcomes and that the focus group was a valuable way for them to do so.

To begin the focus group, I asked each teacher to share a personal story about Crew that they perceived to have been a successful experience. The teachers were quick to share with me about these experiences. One particular story stood out for me because of the way Ben described his Crew. Ben told me that one year he had a group of students in his Crew with low buy-in. Ben said, "I had a rough Crew for months and months, and it was hard to have them work together. There was lots of disruption

and then we took on a project and chose to work at the animal shelter." I listened as Ben told me about how this service learning project impacted the students in his Crew class. Ben said that the kids were excited to deliver the supplies that they had collected for the animal shelter. Ben shared, "So, I noticed a big change after we did that, or just through the whole process and then having more teamwork and communicating better." Ben was excited to share about the success his Crew experienced when they worked together for a common cause.

Implementation

During the focus group, I asked teachers from Rocky Springs Middle School to talk about perceptions they had about the implementation of Crew. Specifically, I asked teachers to tell me about strengths and weaknesses of Crew implementation in their building from their own experiences. In regard to implementation, four themes became apparent from the data I collected at Rocky Springs Middle School: consistency, teacher leaders, time, and buy-in.

Consistency. Teachers from Rocky Springs Middle School brought up consistency when I asked about implementation of Crew. Teachers agreed that over the course of the three years that Crew had been implemented they perceived that consistency among teachers had increased. Ben supported this increased consistency and said that, "we are going in a similar direction now, and it is definitely paying dividends." Teachers suggested that one reason consistency had increased was increased teacher buy-in for Crew. Tammy became really excited and proudly told me about how she thought that the staff at Rocky Springs Middle School had great buy-in for Crew. She talked about the staff and said, "I feel like most of our staff really believes in it, and really sees the value in it." Teachers shared with me that they

thought that most teachers saw value in Crew, and consistency had increased as a result.

Kate spoke about having a more positive experience with Crew as the consistency increased. "There is safety in saying this is what we are all doing," said Kate. Common plans and structures for Crew were also evident when I examined the artifacts from the teachers. The lesson plans that the teachers used shared a common template for planning each Crew lesson: an opening and/or greeting, a reading, an initiative, and a debriefing. Each lesson concluded with next steps. Many of the artifacts that I examined were printed on the same template and had all of the previously mentioned parts of a complete Crew lesson. While teachers perceived that most teachers implemented Crew consistently, some contradicting data surfaced as the conversation shifted to challenges that the teachers perceived with Crew implementation.

During the focus group I asked teachers about weaknesses of Crew implementation, and they brought up how any lack of consistency during implementation had created challenges for implementation of Crew. Teachers shared that in the past they thought colleagues had implemented Crew to different levels of fidelity. Teachers noted that they perceived this to be improving, but lack of consistency among select teachers still presented a challenge. Chad stated, "If you have some doing one thing and others doing different things, that's tough to have a complete buy-in from staff and students." Angie also described challenges that lack of teacher consistency had presented for her in the past. She shared her experience about another teacher's Crew where students were used to playing video games on the computer during their Crew class instead of participating in Crew activities. When

students from her Crew noticed this, they asked her why the other Crew class got to play video games on the computer and why her Crew class did not get to do that. Angie said, "That can be really hard." The focus group discussion about lack of teacher consistency shifted to consistency surrounding accountability of students during Crew.

Teachers participated in a lively discussion regarding consistency for student accountability during Crew. This discussion was definitely an area that teachers were interested in discussing as was evidenced by their numerous comments and level of engagement during the discussion of student accountability. Grading of students during Crew was brought up. Some teachers said that they wrote comments about Crew on report cards, some teachers actually gave students a grade on the report card, and some teachers did not provide comments or report card grades for students in regard to Crew. This is an area where teachers stated that more consistency would be helpful. Jenn said, "It has never been clear, because there is that question of do you want to grade kids if you're trying to bond with them. It is kind of a separate subject." Teachers noted that Crew is a work in progress and that consistency surrounding student accountability was an area that currently needed attention. Kate stressed the need for consistency surrounding what teachers were doing to hold students accountable for Crew. She said, "So this brings us back to one of the things we have been talking about, inconsistency. So, what we need to figure out is do we need to give them any kind of feedback or is it just about bonding?" This discussion went on for some time, and teachers were genuinely interested in what others had to say. Teachers valued this discussion and noted that they wanted to continue the dialogue about student accountability at a later time.

Teacher leaders. As discussion ensued during the focus group, teachers brought up multiple examples of how teachers in the building had taken on leadership roles that supported Crew implementation. When I asked the focus group about successes surrounding implementation, Ben replied swiftly. He stated, "I would say the teacher leaders that have stepped up to form groups and make lesson plans and to really share those and get feedback. That's been really helpful." During the focus group, teachers spoke in a complimentary and positive manner about other teachers who "stepped up" and took on additional leadership roles within their building. Teachers complimented Angie and all of her hard work creating and sharing plans with other teachers in the building. Angie talked about how the teacher leaders evolved naturally. She told me that initially teachers were working in a more independent manner and then decided to work together. She conveyed a frustration about working alone and creating all of the lessons individually, which prompted teachers to work together. Angie went on to tell me about how the groups of teacher leaders formed at Rocky Springs Middle School. Angie stated that:

> It kind of formed organically. Like people wanted to join and then it got really big. And then the principal finally realized that we needed this and that it is really important, so she is letting us have a group that meets on Wednesdays, and she let us form another group that will just do Crew planning.

Teacher leaders were an important component of Crew implementation at Rocky Springs Middle School and were spoken about in a positive manner by members of the focus group.

I examined artifacts created by groups of teacher leaders that demonstrated the development of shared teacher leadership to support implementation of Crew at Rocky Springs Middle School. Angie showed me a PowerPoint presentation that was created

by a teacher leader group and shared with Crew leaders throughout the school. This PowerPoint was ready to use with students during Crew time. Teacher leaders also created scripts and writing prompts for use during student-led conferences. The student-led conferences are a parent–teacher conference structure that allows the student to lead the conference. The work done by the teacher leaders was appreciated by teachers in the focus group.

Time. Teachers from Rocky Springs Middle School also talked about time dedicated to implementing Crew. Teacher leaders and groups at the school were beginning to get time during weekly professional development time to plan Crew lessons together. This time teachers believed, demonstrated to staff that Crew implementation was a priority in the building. Teachers were excited about getting this time and looked forward to using the time to plan valuable lessons. When speaking about having allocated Crew planning time on a regular basis, a huge smile came to Angie's face. She excitedly told me, "Well, we haven't gotten any time yet. We have been using lunch periods. But, so now we will actually get time, actually starting tomorrow!" In contrast to the previously mentioned statement, one teacher replied with a more negative manner, "Hopefully it will be enough time, but I am sure it won't be. I am sure we will need more time." The discussion surrounding time shifted and teachers brought up a lack of time to talk with colleagues about Crew.

Teachers spoke about not having time to discuss Crew experiences with building and district level colleagues. Teachers perceived this lack of time for opportunity for discussion as one of the reasons for the lack of consistency with student accountability and grading of Crew. When this topic was brought up, the teachers were very quick to share and even talked over each other at times. Volume

levels of the teachers' voices went up. The quick responses from teachers demonstrated that the teachers were genuinely curious as to what other teachers were doing to hold students accountable. Ben told me, "We have been asking for more time for years to be able to meet as teachers to be able to work on things just to have more consistency." Ben went on to explain, "Some of us teachers grade kids on Habits of a Scholar, some do comments, some of us don't do anything." This continued for some time, with Jenn interjecting, "I think it needs to be consistent." Again, teachers noted that they perceived time for discussion about Crew to be valuable and necessary for successful implementation of Crew.

Buy-in. Teachers brought up buy-in from adults (Crew leaders, parents, and community members) and students as an important facet of implementation. At Rocky Springs Middle School, the school counselor was credited as having played an important part in this buy-in. The teachers told me about how the school counselor shared developmental information with staff about the importance of Crew. "It really helped our staff get on board," said Tammy. One teacher spoke highly of teacher buy-in at the school explaining, "I feel like one big strength of our staff is the buy-in. I would say that 95% of us, we all believe in Crew." Teachers also spoke of the increased buy-in from parents as being a positive aspect of implementation. To create this buy-in, information regarding the value of Crew was shared with parents through multiple modes. Ben told me about the counselor sharing information with the students, staff, and parents about the importance of Crew. He stated, "We took it to the parents in a couple of different ways, maybe two years ago, to show them why it is important." The school principal routinely mentioned Crew activities in the weekly phone calls home that are directed towards parents and/or guardians. This shared

communication about the importance of Crew was also evident when I looked at the school website. When I looked at the Rocky Springs Middle School website I found information about Crew meetings and events that parents were invited to attend. In addition to the school website, the Snowy Peaks School District website also had information for parents and community members that communicated the importance of Crew and CE.

Teachers then shifted the discussion to student buy-in. I reviewed several artifacts of high quality student work, which led me to believe that students were seeing Crew as a valuable class and participating. I examined a script that a student had written for a student-led conference. The script was complete and well thought out, demonstrating that the student had taken it seriously. These artifacts could have been picked by teachers because they were exemplary work; however, it became apparent that not all students had buy-in for Crew. Kate noted that a handful of negative students can change the entire Crew experience when she observed, "I can see where it can be challenging if you have some negative leaders." Tammy talked about some teachers who struggle with Crew as a result of students who do not demonstrate buy-in for Crew. She said, "It can be a really hard start to your day." These data led me to believe that buy-in must be present with all stakeholders in order to create a successful Crew experience. Adults and students who do not have buy-in for Crew present a challenge for successful implementation.

Outcomes

Not only did I collect data about teacher perceptions about implementation of Crew, I also collected data from the teachers regarding outcomes that they perceived could be attributed to Crew. I wanted to know if the teachers saw any changes in the

students that they thought came about as a result of Crew. In regard to teacher perceptions surrounding outcomes of Crew, three themes emerged: relationships, opportunities for leadership, and Crew all day.

      Relationships. Evidence of relationship building was present during artifact examination, which demonstrated multiple activities teachers created in hopes to build relationships with students. One artifact had students' birthday month listed and then had sign-ups for celebration of birthdays during Crew. Another artifact had personal information and a picture of each student posted on the teacher's classroom wall. Snowy Peak School District also listed relationship building in the District Crew Overview Document (see Appendix A). Teachers perceived an increase in the level of teacher–student relationships. Angie spoke about relationships with her students during Crew and said, "Just relationship wise, I definitely feel closer to those kids. Like when I see them in the hall and it is a connection for me. Especially with the other grades . . . it is just a good teacher–student relationship, that piece of it." Kate had previously noted that she had some difficult students in her Crew class. When speaking about those students, she noted, "some of those that were so difficult in the beginning of the year are actually approaching me and talking to me now." Kate also stated, "I think it can be one small thing that you find clicks like talking to them about a class that they are struggling in and then e-mailing that teacher and then giving them the feedback and offering to help." In addition to teacher–student relationships, teachers perceived more positive student-to-student relationships. In order to foster these student-to-student relationships, the school had changed from lunch times that were separated by grade level to a mixed grade level lunch time. Tammy thought that this gave the students more opportunities to interact, and that Crew helped increase the

interactions between students. Tammy spoke about students interacting more in common areas and shared:

> Even in the cafeteria I have seen more mixed kids, like we used to have different grade levels in different halls, and now they're all over the school and I see them interacting more and hanging out a little bit more on their own and during lunch time. I think that's cool.

The data that I collected from teachers supported increased opportunities for positive relationships as an outcome that teachers attributed to Crew. The next theme that emerged from teachers from Rocky Springs Middle School was opportunities for leadership.

Opportunities for leadership. While teacher leaders were an integral part of the implementation process, giving students opportunities to be leaders through Crew was an emergent theme at Rocky Springs Middle School. During artifact examination, I noticed multiple documents that were created to give students the opportunity to be leaders in varying capacities. One example was a template that the school used during the student-led conferences. The student-led conferences allowed students to be the leader of the conference and to discuss academic strengths and goals with a teacher and their guardian(s). As I examined the artifacts, I saw evidence of students taking the student-led conferences seriously. I examined one document where a student had set a specific goal to work on compassion. The student set the goal and listed tangible actions to accomplish the goal. This script was written by the student with the intent of sharing with the adults present at his or her student-led conference.

Not only did students have opportunities to show leadership qualities with adults during conferences, they also had these opportunities to be leaders during Crew

meetings. Chad gave me a packet with several Crew lessons in it. He explained that students in his Crew actually paired up and planned Crew lessons for an entire week.

Students at Rocky Springs Middle School were in mixed grade level Crew classes. Teachers talked about how grouping across grade levels had provided opportunities for the older students to take on a leadership role with the younger students within their school. To illustrate this concept, Chad explained, "Kids from my Crew are good models and I see them around school helping each other and it was already mentioned, but communicating with different grade level kids you know, buddying up." The mixed grade level Crew grouping provided opportunities for the older students to take on a leadership role with the younger students in the same Crew and throughout the school.

Crew all day. One perceived outcome teachers discussed was being able to refer back to the content and common language that is presented in Crew throughout the school day. Cathy talked about using the word compassion with a student recently during an academic class.

> I have seen an increase in awareness of the Habits of a Scholar. You can talk to a kid about compassion and they know exactly what you're referencing, and you can say, 'Can you work on your compassion right now?' and they know exactly what you are redirecting them on. So, it is nice to have that common language.

See Appendix B for the Snowy Peaks School District Habits of a Scholar document describing this common language. Ben went on to talk about circling up, a common structure of Crew, outside of Crew class. Ben said, "Even on the playground, I have used that in my classes a lot. Like being outside, just circling up about what's happening and going back to the norms, and they seem more comfortable with that than ever." Teachers said that they felt like the district and building administration had

been supportive in using the Habits of a Scholar throughout the day, especially during academic time. The teachers felt that if the students had behavioral issues that occurred during times outside of Crew, one outcome had been being able to use Crew language and structures in an attempt to remedy the situation.

Emergent Themes from Elk Mountain Middle School

The second middle school that I collected data from was Elk Mountain Middle School. Elk Mountain Middle School had also recently undergone a remodel as a result of a bond issue that passed in the community. The school was clean and updated, and teachers told me how they were enjoying working in the recently remodeled building. This middle school had an updated website full of information boasting about student achievements. Resources were available in both Spanish and English for community members on the school website. This was necessary since approximately two-thirds of the students at Elk Mountain Middle School came from homes that spoke Spanish as their native language. Elk Mountain Middle School was the smallest middle school in the Snowy Peaks School District, and the community had around 6,000 residents. In Crew at this school, the groupings of students remained mostly the same each year but the teachers changed.

During the focus group, teachers from Elk Mountain Middle School were more hesitant than teachers from Rocky Springs Middle School at first but warmed up to my questioning quickly. There were very positive and respectful interactions between the teachers throughout the focus group. Beth and Mary worked together on the same grade level team and seemed to be friends as well as colleagues, which made the mood more relaxed. Much like the group at Rocky Springs Middle School, teachers wanted

to have discussions about what was going on in their classrooms and were curious about the structure of Crew at the other schools.

I began the focus group asking the teachers to share with me a recent positive experience that had happened during Crew. This was an icebreaker and allowed me to give each focus group member a chance to talk. All of the teachers were able to share about a positive experience. Jamie shared about a recent Crew experience she had and described a challenge that students were asked to complete. She talked about a game students were playing that used blindfolds and told me that some students were not comfortable wearing the blindfold initially. Jamie talked about having to help her students feel safe in Crew before they could complete the challenge. Then, she went on to describe the rest of the Crew class and how once the students felt safe and saw how much fun the other students were having, they wore the blindfolds, too. She told me that some students even begged to do the activity over and over again. Jamie said, "I mean, it was a fun teambuilding challenge."

Implementation

I asked the teachers to share their perceptions about implementation of Crew in their building. I used the same questions that I used with the other focus groups which specifically asked about strengths and weaknesses of Crew implementation at Elk Mountain Middle School. I examined the artifacts from the teachers who provided evidence of implementation. After analyzing the data from Elk Mountain Middle School, three themes surrounding implementation of Crew emerged: teacher leaders, time, and buy-in.

Teacher leaders. Teachers from Elk Mountain Middle School told me that teacher leaders were a strength. At this school, the teachers told me that there is one

building Crew leader. This Crew leader delivered professional development to staff on an ongoing basis. The focus group spoke about her ability to model Crew structures and provide quality professional development for the staff. Mary emphatically stated that the professional development is relevant and that, "she does a really nice job." In addition to the building Crew leader, I noticed that teacher leaders emerged within teaching teams. Emma spoke about one of her teammates and how this teammate, Kristin, had created an entire Crew calendar for the team to use. Emma spoke about the Crew calendar: "She created a Crew map for our whole year . . . so that was incredibly helpful." Emma described the planning process after having the Crew calendar and said, "So that makes my planning so much, so much easier." Mary spoke about her team and how they split up the work of creating lessons. She shared with me that this has worked really well for her team and that, "each lesson we get from our team mates is so valuable." During examination of artifacts from Elk Mountain Middle School, I noticed materials that were created by teacher leaders and shared within teams. I was able to look at the Crew calendar that Kristin had created, which was available for the entire team to use. This resource clearly took several hours to plan as links for all resources and detailed descriptions of the lessons were present. I was also able to look at some of the artifacts that Mary and Beth's team had created. These lessons were very detailed and followed the structure of Crew as put forth by the school district. The teacher leaders at Elk Mountain Middle School shared their work and had developed a system for creating Crew lessons that worked for them. Methods to be efficient and share the work of planning for Crew were evident with the teachers from Elk Mountain Middle School.

Time. Teachers from Elk Mountain Middle School shared with me that they believed that they had enough dedicated time built into their schedules to create quality lessons for Crew. Jamie noted that, "In addition to professional development, I feel like our school gives us a lot of Crew planning time." Jamie talked about how this dedicated time demonstrated that Crew was a priority in the building and the other teachers agreed. She shared, "Our school does a pretty good job of giving us the time. And because of that and across the grades, I feel like we all hold it to the same level and take it seriously." Teachers from one grade level team at Elk Mountain Middle School described how they split up the lesson planning to save time. They had come up with this system on their own, and it seemed to work for them. Each teacher created an equal amount of lessons and then shared them with the other teachers from the team. This structure had allowed them to have more time to create Crew lessons that they perceived to be engaging and valuable. The amount of time that it takes to plan quality Crew lessons did come up during the focus group, but teachers agreed that as Crew became more routine and as they gained more experience leading Crew, the amount of time necessary to plan for Crew had decreased. While looking at the artifacts, I was able to see lessons that had all of the necessary Crew components. These were resources that took time to create, and the teachers shared with me that they appreciated the time that was allocated in their building for Crew planning.

Teachers also shared with me that they wanted more time during Crew to use resources that they had designed specifically for their own Crew classes. Elk Mountain Middle School had adopted a social–emotional curriculum that teachers were required to use at times during Crew. The teachers were required to complete certain lessons from this pre-packaged curriculum during Crew time. Some of the teachers believed

that the required lessons took up too much time during Crew. I looked at some of the lessons that teachers had shared with me from this curriculum. The lessons did not follow the consistent Crew class structure but did address pertinent issues like bullying and goal setting. Mary talked about feeling like those lessons did not provide her Crew with instruction that was tailored to meet the specific needs of her Crew. Teachers agreed and mentioned that it would be their preference to create their own lessons based on the needs of their own Crew students. The teachers felt like they knew their student best, and because of this they wanted to create the lessons that would be best suited for their own students. The pre-packaged lessons that were required in Crew took up time and teachers thought that this time would be better spent using lessons that had been designed specifically for their own Crew classes.

Like teachers at Rocky Springs Middle School, teachers at Elk Mountain Middle School also spoke about a lack of time to reflect on Crew and what was going on with other Crew leaders in their building. This was evident when Kristin stated, "I really like hearing you guys' ideas. I wonder if there are other teachers out there that maybe feel that way." Mary piggybacked on this and talked about feeling bad when her Crew lessons were not a success. She went on to talk about how she wondered what other teachers did when their Crew classes did not succeed. She said, "I think it would be really good if people were willing to share about a difficult Crew. It would be nice to have someone who has had a difficult Crew and turned it around and maintained that." The teachers thought having time to discuss these things would be useful.

During the focus group, I noticed that the teachers listened very intently when colleagues were talking about Crew. The teachers seemed genuinely interested in

hearing about what other teachers were doing during Crew class. Beth talked about how she had a need to always have Crew be very structured, but during the focus group she was able to listen to other teachers' ideas. She said, "So, I really like hearing you guys' ideas. Like, hey, it is alright to just go for a walk. It's okay to go play a game." These comments led me to believe that the teachers at Elk Mountain Middle School would value more time and a structure to share about what was going on in the different classrooms with Crew.

Buy-in. When I asked the focus group about implementation of Crew, teachers at Elk Mountain Middle School spoke about teacher buy-in. One strength of implementation that teachers mentioned was staff buy-in. Jamie stated, "I would say nine out of 10 teachers really take Crew seriously." When looking at the artifacts, I noticed that the common Crew planning template from the school district was used which demonstrated staff buy-in. When discussing Crew planning, one teacher said, "we are making one lesson that we are passionate about and put a lot of thought and effort into it . . . and then you can tell when you get your teammate's lessons that they likewise made a lot of effort and thought." This thought and effort that teachers put into their work demonstrated buy-in from these teachers in the focus group.

Similar to Rocky Springs Middle School, challenges were brought up surrounding student buy-in. Teachers gave several examples of students causing disruption and impacting success of Crew. Many teachers expressed a need for ideas as to what to do if Crew is really not going as planned. Emma talked about some of the lessons she has wanted to use with her Crew. She stated:

> This year I have had a Crew that can be really, really negative and some of the lessons that are great on paper or have even been great with other groups in the past, they just have no buy-in, so I have had to not use a lot of these great

lessons because I look at it and I think, my Crew is going to tear this apart. Like, they are not going to do it.

This illuminated a challenge with implementation at Elk Mountain Middle School—some students may not have buy-in for the whole Crew structure. Emma talked about wanting to incorporate a Crew SOS kit into professional development time. She stated:

That's what I would love to have modeled is like a teacher who addresses that well or who can turn kids around. Or even just say, even have some professional development around when you start a Crew lesson and it is like not happening.

The other teachers got really excited as they heard this statement and were agreeing with Emma and even laughing about it. Teachers shared stories about groupings of students that they perceived to be very challenging. The excitement and laughter lightened the mood, but I knew from the discussion that student buy-in presented a serious challenge for some of these teachers.

Outcomes

After we talked about the teachers' perceptions about Crew implementation, I asked about outcomes. I wanted to know if teachers perceived any changes in the students' behaviors and actions that the teachers thought could be attributed to Crew. What the teachers shared with me about outcomes at Elk Mountain Middle School revealed three themes: relationships, opportunities for leadership, and Crew all day.

Relationships. During the examination of artifacts, evidence of materials that teachers used in their classrooms to create positive teacher–student and student-to-student relationships were apparent. One example of an activity of this type was the creation of a personalized Crew journal for students. The students covered the journals with information about themselves and then shared the journals with classmates. Teacher-created materials also included lessons designed to build community and

norms through Crew. Jamie stated, "I feel like I have become a lot closer. I mean my relationships with my students have become closer. I am a lot closer with my Crew students than any student I have for academics." Kristin spoke about relationships by saying, "You know we really get to dig deep or deeper to who they are as a human being, their family dynamics, that kind of stuff." Mary stated, "There is more accountability [for students] there. I would say a partnership. Kids get it and it feels good." Teachers spoke about an increase in positive teacher–student relationships after the student-led conferences occurred. Kristin stated that, "I definitely noticed that with my Crew after the SLC [student-led conferences], and I wish they were a little earlier because then once I met all of their parents our relationship in Crew and also in content classes is different."

In addition to more positive teacher–student relationships, teachers spoke about improved student-to-student relationships. Mary spoke about more positive student relationships. "The outcome I see is positive student relationships, that connection." Teachers also mentioned the value in having less structured time in order to support the relationship building aspect of Crew. Jamie told me about a time where she held a barbeque during her Crew time and how she perceived it as a successful experience. While she told the story, the other teachers agreed and nodded. They also laughed, further contributing to the relaxed environment. Jamie said:

> One time I just had a bunch of hot dogs left over from the World Series. So, I brought in a George Foreman grill, and they brought in all of the condiments. And we had a cookout together. And people loved it. Just to have that bonding time, like the unstructured time is some of the best times I have had with my Crew; as long as it isn't chaos unstructured, so some structure, but bonding and getting to know each other by hearing from everybody. Everybody is bringing something in or bringing something and contributing to the conversation. Those are my favorite.

The teachers agreed with this statement about how they really appreciated the bonding moments with students. This led me to believe that Crew gave teachers an opportunity to create structures designed to build relationships with their students.

Opportunities for leadership. The artifacts from Elk Mountain Middle School had examples of lessons that teachers used in their Crews to lead community meetings and about Crew classes leading other Crew classes. Beth spoke in detail about a community meeting that her Crew led for their entire grade. Beth stated, "It was really cool seeing the students be successful." Emma talked about her Crew and some of the students with low buy-in were in the group. She shared an experience where her Crew taught a game to another teacher's Crew. She said that her Crew, "exceeded my expectations of their behaviors and attitudes. I kind of backed off and let them take over. Let them be responsible and figure it out." Teachers shared about their experiences letting the students lead and take on the role that traditionally the teachers would have in the classroom. Emma talked about letting her students lead Crew. She said:

> I have to let go of the fact that most of the lessons they plan are [another teacher shouts—games!] game-oriented but then I can feel like I am part of the Crew instead of the leader of the Crew. And I really like that when I am just a participant. When one of the students is leading, I feel like the other students are more willing to participate because they know they are going to be in that seat.

As Emma was speaking about her experiences allowing students to have opportunities to take on leadership roles through Crew, the other teachers listened and nodded, showing their agreement.

Crew all day. Teachers expressed during the focus group that they use common language when referring to the Habits of a Scholar in academic classes and in

common areas of the school (see Appendix B). Beth discussed using the Habits of a Scholar outside of Crew class. She stated that, "Those words have made it outside of our compartmentalized Crew." This statement demonstrated to me that the teachers from the focus group utilized common language throughout the school day. Beth told me about this use of common language throughout the school day. She said, "I think, I mean, we have tried to use that Habits of a Scholar language in every class." Jenn told me about how she uses this common language in her content class. She described how she read a picture book with her students every day and how her students were able to generate conversations in class from content presented in the picture book. She said, "I guess our conversation sparked with what is going on in the picture book— compassion, kindness, diversity, immigration is what we did last week." While Jenn is describing this activity, another teacher interjected and said, "That's Crew-y!" This excited yet comfortable atmosphere was present throughout the focus group.

Mary talked about how Crew lends itself to being "proactive." She went on to describe how Crew time can be used to address specific behavioral challenges that students may be demonstrating throughout the school day. Mary also mentioned that Crew shows students "how to treat each other," and said Crew was "a naturally proactive program." Kristin thought that one of the outcomes of Crew was that Crew helped with student behavior throughout the day in school common areas. This was evident in some of the artifacts I examined, where students were leading community meetings in common areas or norms for classroom behavior and common areas were established by the students during Crew time.

Emergent Themes from Two Rivers Middle School

Two Rivers Middle School was the third school that I collected data from in the Snowy Peaks School District. Like the other schools in Snowy Peaks School District, Two Rivers Middle School recently went through a remodel, and the school was updated and clean. The population of the local community was around 4,000 residents. The school had approximately half of the population who reported speaking Spanish as their first language. This school was not as big as Rocky Springs Middle School but had more students than Elk Mountain Middle School. Much like the other two schools, the website for Two Rivers Middle School was updated and had many acknowledgments of students and staff accomplishments. The Crew classes at this school changed teachers each year, while the groupings of students remained largely the same.

During the focus group, teachers from Two Rivers Middle School were open to sharing their perceptions and seemed to enjoy one another's company. The atmosphere felt relaxed, and all of the focus group members were very friendly and comfortable with one another. Lots of smiling and laughing went on throughout the focus group. There were very positive and respectful interactions between the teachers for the duration of the focus group. The group was light-hearted, and they laughed often. Much like the groups at the other sites, teachers wanted to have discussions about what was going on in their classrooms and were curious about the structure of Crew at the other schools.

I asked the same question to open the focus group with teachers from Two Rivers Middle School. I wanted teachers to describe a positive Crew experience they had recently had with their students. Phyllis told me about a positive experience that

she had when grouping seventh-grade students with her fifth-grade students. The students were working on a teambuilding activity called the marble run. She told me that the seventh graders demonstrated compassion for the fifth graders when the younger students struggled with the challenge. Phyllis told me that she truly enjoys the teambuilding aspect of Crew, and the other teachers were quick to agree with that statement.

Implementation

Just like at the other schools, I wanted to know about teacher perceptions of Crew implementation. I used the same questioning route with this focus group. After reviewing the data, four themes regarding teacher perceptions of implementation of Crew at Two Rivers Middle School were identified: consistency, teacher leaders, buy-in, and autonomy.

Consistency. There was evidence of consistency being a strength for the staff at Two Rivers Middle School. Teachers told me about using a school-wide calendar for Crew lessons that had resources available for all Crew leaders. During artifact collection, I was able to examine this calendar and the resources that were provided for the teachers to use. Pat spoke about the calendar, explaining, "We have a plan every day to follow. I think that is a huge strength. So, if you need that structure, it is there." Charlie went on to discuss the school website and certain items that were required for the entire school to complete during Crew. He stated, "I feel like we are all on board with those, at least I am." I was able to look at a lesson created by the school counselor with a student interest inventory. This lesson was an example of something that each Crew leader in the building was required to complete. Upon examining teacher created artifacts, it was apparent that teachers at Two Rivers

Middle School also utilized the same common planning template from the school district for Crew, much like what was used in the other schools.

As our conversation progressed, the teachers also told me that a lack of consistency from some teachers had presented challenges during implementation. Charlie shared, "Some people do not implement at all, and there is really no accountability to those people that just blow off Crew." He went on to tell me that this presented a challenge for the staff, since variation was present in the levels of implementation. Pat added to this comment and shared about challenges that a lack of consistency brought when implementing Crew. Pat thought she did a fairly consistent job implementing Crew but then shared about difficulties when she got a new Crew class that had moved up from a teacher who did not consistently implement Crew. She talked about that experience being hard and how it took some time to get the students to participate and show buy-in for Crew since these students were not used to the common Crew structures. One teacher talked about how he thought that some teachers in the building did not think it was their job to teach social–emotional growth. While he was talking about this, the focus group participants emphatically disagreed with social–emotional growth not being viewed as part of a teacher's job, showing that they supported teaching social–emotional learning in school. At the conclusion of the focus group it became apparent that the perception was that the majority of teachers at Two Rivers Middle School were consistent with Crew implementation. However, the select few who were not consistent with implementation presented a challenge for implementation of Crew at Two Rivers Middle School.

Teacher leaders. Teachers from Two Rivers Middle School mentioned teacher leaders as an important part of implementation of Crew. Teachers initially

described an unsuccessful system of planning Crew, where all Crew leaders were required to contribute to a shared school-wide Crew plan. Many teachers made comments about their lessons not being very high quality and how this method of lesson plan creation did not work for their school. It sounded as if one teacher at Two Rivers Middle School then took it upon herself to update and revamp the entire school-wide Crew document. Phyllis discussed the teacher who worked on the document by saying, "We basically have one person that has put together that entire thing. She's amazing." The teachers spoke in a very complimentary manner about this teacher and all of the work she had done for Crew in their building. It sounded like the teacher took on this extra work on her own.

Another example that came up was the presence of an optional online sign-up sheet that another teacher created for Crew classes. Crew classes could choose a service learning project to complete. Phyllis told me about this sign-up sheet and how a teacher had come up with the idea and implemented the sign-up on her own. Charlie interjected and told me how his Crew had worked on a fundraising candy cane sale that he signed up for using this teacher-created resource. Each of the three middle schools had their own way to utilize the teacher leaders, but presence of teacher leaders was an important part of implementation at each of the schools.

Buy-in. Teachers shared with me that they perceived staff buy-in at Two Rivers Middle School to be increasing. Charlie stated, "I think we have more buy-in now than we ever had. Are we 100%? No way." Teachers from this group saw the value in Crew, and members of this focus group demonstrated buy-in as evidenced by their discussion. Pat stated, "I really love having that time with the kids." Phyllis went on to say that there may be a "few" people at the school who do not see the relevance

of Crew. These teachers perceived that the majority of the teachers from Two Rivers Middle School had buy-in for Crew, but as I listened to the group, it was apparent that a select few teachers did not see the value in Crew.

Much like the discussions with teachers from the other schools, the discussion shifted from teacher buy-in to student buy-in. When teachers talked about the buy-in from students, it became obvious that grouping of students and buy-in was a factor in contributing to success of implementation of Crew. Charlie talked about how the entire Crew experience could depend upon the grouping of the kids. This sounded remarkably like what teachers at the other schools shared with me. Amanda talked about how Crew can change from year to year based on the grouping of the students. She talked about buy-in from students surrounding Crew. Amanda went on to state that, "Last year I would have said no. This year I am saying yes 100%. It is that group of kids." Teachers said that they thought some kids really had buy-in and enjoyed Crew, while some kids just "tolerated" it. Charlie talked about how some students "accepted" Crew but "they don't love it." The teachers from Two Rivers Middle School described both student and teacher buy-in in a similar fashion. It sounded like the teachers perceived that most students and teachers had the buy-in for Crew, but the teachers and students who did not have buy-in created a challenge for Crew implementation.

Autonomy. Teachers from Two Rivers Middle School mentioned that they had a great degree of autonomy surrounding Crew. Autonomy was evident in the curricular materials that I examined. Some of the artifacts were documents used school-wide and some were documents only used by individual teachers. Amanda talked about the availability of the Crew calendar to all staff but that the teachers had

the freedom to do what they wanted with it. If the teachers wanted to use the calendar, they could, but they were not required to do so. Amanda told me, "We definitely have freedom to do what we want with Crew." The teachers really liked having this autonomy and choice with what they did. Pat said, "I love having that time with the kids. I love having that time where it is not so structured all of the time." Teachers also talked about really liking the fact that they were free to use part of a lesson plan, all of a lesson plan, or none of the lesson plan and that they could pick which lessons they wanted to use. One thing that teachers valued that involved choice was the document where their Crews could select a whole school community service project. These projects varied and involved raising money for various causes, developing things like bulletin boards that would benefit the entire school, and creating safe spaces for students to eat lunch. The freedom to choose Crew structure and lessons was highly valued by the group.

Outcomes

During the focus group, I asked about implementation of Crew first. Then, I went on to listen to the focus group teachers describe their perceptions about outcomes at their school that they attributed to Crew. After reviewing the data collected from Two Rivers Middle School, three themes emerged: relationships, opportunities for leadership, and Crew all day.

Relationships. When asked about perceived outcomes related to Crew, teachers immediately brought up relationships. The teachers discussed a recent tragic event in the school community and how they thought that students felt "safe and secure" to address the event during Crew time. Charlie described how he addressed this situation during Crew with his students. He said, "I thought that was a good time

and good place, and you know we did have a good outcome of addressing it then." In regard to teacher–student relationships, Charlie stated, "I think there is more of a familiarity with an adult; I know that's the point, and I know that I definitely feel connected with my Crew." The teachers talked about bonds they had with Crew groups that they had in the past. Phyllis enthusiastically told the group about one of her previous Crews that had moved on to the high school. She shared that she still had a strong relationship with those students, and that those students still shared special relationships with each other which she perceived to be an outcome tied to Crew. Providing opportunities for relationship building was also evidenced in many of the artifacts I examined. One artifact specifically asked students to share something personal with the Crew class and then went on to have the students share positive words with each other during the class. Charlie talked about giving each student a chance to be heard every day. He said he really tries to connect with and give the students a voice to be heard every day. Allowing the students to be heard every day was a priority for Charlie. He told the group, "I really try to connect and give them a voice."

When discussing student-to-student relationships, teachers shared experiences with mixed grade-level Crew activities. The Crews at Two Rivers Middle School routinely paired up with Crews from other grades, and teachers spoke about how mixed grade level Crew experiences created opportunities for student-to-student relationships to flourish. Amanda shared about how older students came into her Crew class. She said, "It was just cool how the seventh graders showed compassion for the fifth grade." This theme was evident as the different varied groupings of students came up often during the discussion. Teachers were enthusiastic about activities they

had completed with older and younger students. One teacher even said, "My Crew this year has been amazing. I walk in and I am just excited to spend the next 30 minutes with them."

I was able to examine artifacts that teachers had used with mixed grade-level Crew meetings. These artifacts had problem-solving and team-building activities that the younger students solved with the help of the older students. Specifically, I examined a lesson plan designed for an older Crew to work with a younger group of students. During the debrief section of the lesson, students were able to reflect and talk about strengths and weaknesses of the activities. Teachers purposefully planned lessons that provided opportunities for relationship building during Crew. The teachers from Two Rivers Middle School were able to share about multiple opportunities to increase student-to-student and teacher-to-student relationships through the structure of Crew.

Opportunities for leadership. Many opportunities for students to be leaders were discussed during the focus group. Teachers spoke about different grade levels teaming up and leading Crew classes. Amanda described an experience where her Crew took on a leadership role. She stated that, "they took ownership for it. They led it and were very proud of themselves at the end." Amanda also went on to describe different experiences that some students may have in Crew when they are not leaders in other classes. She went on to say, "it was just really cool to see where those kids might not be as successful in many other areas. It is a place where they can be successful and their voice matters and their ideas matter." I also noticed through examination of the artifacts that students planned an assembly in the school for Character Day during Crew. The teachers told me about groups of leaders that existed

within the Crew structure and how that allowed for students to make decisions within the school. Students were also assigned leadership roles within their own Crew classes.

Like the other two schools, I examined documents used for the student-led conferences during Crew. The student-led conferences allowed students to lead their own conference. Students completed their own scripts and used these scripts to describe goals, successes, and challenges with the adults at their conference. The students also listed tangible action steps to achieve these goals. All of these examples illustrated various opportunities for students to be leaders through Crew experiences at Two Rivers Middle School.

Crew all day. When teacher perceptions of outcomes were discussed, teachers mentioned using the common language for Habits of a Scholar "probably more in academic classes than in Crew itself." Phyllis told me about posters in each classroom that had the Habits of a Scholar on them. She said that teachers use these posters throughout the school day to reinforce use of the common language used in Crew. Teachers went on to describe a new piece of playground equipment and how using the Habits of a Scholar and through Crew, the school was able to create norms for use of the new equipment using this common language (see Appendix B).

Students had the opportunity to take content from Crew into other aspects of their day. When reviewing the artifacts, I discovered that teachers at Two Rivers Middle School had access to different activities for Crew classes to complete that could benefit the entire school. Amanda described a special seating area in the lunchroom where students could sit when they needed a friend. Students worked together to create this seating area. It sounded like the lunch table was one way that

the teachers promoted the use of common language throughout the school day. Charlie really liked the idea of the lunch room table idea and interjected, "Oh my gosh, it is so cute!" Teachers shared that the Crew structure allowed for time to complete projects that could benefit the school and the students.

Similarities Between Cases

Implementation

After analyzing each case alone, I wanted to know which themes all three schools had in common. While all three schools revealed many similar topics regarding implementation of Crew, two themes were shared among all three middle schools. These shared themes were teacher leaders and buy-in.

Teacher leaders were an important component to implementation at all three schools. While teachers at all three schools shared evidence of a trial and error period, by the third year of implementation, each school had teachers that took on a school leadership role in regard to Crew implementation. These teacher leaders were advocates for Crew and helped model lesson structures for staff and also helped create lessons that teachers could use in their classrooms. Often, these teacher leaders used their own time to create resources for their schools. Teachers from all three schools expressed positive feedback about the teacher leaders in their buildings. Words like "good job" and "amazing" were used during the focus groups to describe the teacher leaders. I was also able to examine documents from each of the three middle schools that teacher leaders had created for Crew leaders to use. I also noted that while these teacher leaders were an integral part of implementation at each of the schools, each school also had the freedom from the school district to utilize teacher leaders as they saw fit.

The second shared theme regarding implementation was buy-in. Both teacher and student buy-in varied among the sites, but teachers from all three sites expressed a strong need for teacher and student buy-in in order for Crew to be successful. During focus groups, teachers talked about buy-in among staff being important to increase consistency of implementation, which ultimately led to more successful implementation of Crew. Teachers from all three middle schools reported that they perceived the majority of the staff had buy-in and saw value in Crew, but lack of buy-in was also brought up at the focus groups from each of the schools. Teachers who did not see value in Crew and did not implement Crew consistently presented a challenge to school-wide implementation of Crew.

While teacher buy-in was an important part of implementation, student buy-in was also important. Students who did not have buy-in for Crew presented a challenge at all three schools. From the data collected, teachers perceived that the majority of students demonstrated buy-in at each site, but students without buy-in presented a challenge. Students who did not have buy-in for Crew were brought up at all three sites, and teachers from each site shared multiple challenges surrounding this issue. Teachers had ideas about some strategies that worked with these students and expressed a desire to have more training and resources surrounding this issue.

Outcomes

After analyzing data from each of the three schools independently, I looked for themes that all three of the schools had in common. As I analyzed the data, I was surprised to see that all three middle schools had the same three themes emerge in regard to the teachers' perceived outcomes of Crew. Those themes were relationships, opportunities for leadership, and Crew all day.

Teachers from all three middle schools shared that they perceived one outcome of Crew to be more positive teacher–student and student-to-student relationships. Crew leaders said that they felt closer to the students in their Crew when compared to students that were not in their Crew. The teachers told me that meeting the families of Crew students during the student-led conferences was a practice that they believed enhanced the development of teacher–student relationships. Teachers also shared similar perceptions that Crew provided an opportunity for student-to-student relationships to improve. Many experiences were shared by teachers about students who were using content and common language that they learned in Crew in common areas like the playground and lunch room.

While teacher leaders were an integral part of Crew implementation, providing opportunities for students to be leaders was a theme that emerged from all three schools. Examples of activities where older students were leading younger students or vice versa provided opportunities for students to be leaders at all three schools. Teachers shared experiences around allowing students to act in a leadership role and how this may have helped to increase student buy-in for Crew. While all three schools had varied structures for Crew in place, multi-grade level interaction was an outcome which provided opportunities for students to exhibit leadership qualities. Teachers shared that students who may not experience successes on a consistent basis in academic classes could experience success in Crew by utilizing these opportunities to demonstrate leadership skills.

Another perceived outcome that teachers spoke about was that teachers and students were using content and common language from Crew throughout the school day. When I asked teachers about their perceptions about outcomes of Crew, they

specifically described the use of common language throughout the school day when describing the Habits of a Scholar (see Appendix B). Teachers from all three schools shared experiences about using Crew language and structures during academic classes and also about feeling supported by administrators to utilize Crew structures, like circling up, during academic classes. Teachers also shared that by using common language and structures of Crew outside of the Crew class, it allowed for the Habits of a Scholar to be evident throughout the school day.

Unique Qualities

Overall, the three middle schools shared several similarities regarding teacher perceptions of Crew implementation and outcomes, but the cases had some unique qualities as well. Each school had a unique class structure for Crew. Rocky Springs Middle School had mixed grade levels, and the other two schools did not. One of the schools had the same teacher stay with the same Crew all three years. At Elk Mountain Middle School, the same group of students moved on to a new Crew leader each year. Even though these differences were apparent, it seemed that each school had the autonomy to make the decision about which Crew structure worked best for their students.

Each school also had different ways that the lessons for Crew were planned. Again, it seemed that each school had enough freedom to plan Crew lessons in a way that worked best for their staff. I noticed that allocated time to plan Crew lessons varied among the schools. One of the schools said that they were beginning to get time during the school day to plan Crew lessons together. Another school said that they had plenty of time to plan Crew. The third school did not even bring time up as an issue. I found this unique, because teachers from the school that said they had adequate time

to plan thought that this time demonstrated that Crew was a priority in their building. The prioritization teachers perceived led to increased teacher buy-in.

Another theme that was unique among the schools came from Two Rivers Middle School. The teachers from this school discussed autonomy as a strength within their building. The teachers here really valued their freedom when planning lessons. The teachers shared that they had the freedom to use parts of the Crew lesson that they seemed to be applicable to their own Crew and that they could use materials planned for the entire school or design their own lessons. This autonomy gave them the freedom to cater the lessons to the specific needs of their Crew, and the teachers appreciated being able to do that.

Conclusion

The school district where this research occurred had recently implemented a new CE program called Crew. Crew is a specified time throughout the students' school day that focuses on character skills, social–emotional learning, and academic goal setting (Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, 2011). This comparative case study research collected data regarding teacher perceptions about the implementation and outcomes of Crew. Each of the three middle schools shared similar themes as well as some unique qualities. The shared themes about implementation were teacher leaders and buy-in. The shared themes regarding perceived outcomes were relationships, opportunities for leadership, and Crew all day. Chapter V will discuss the conclusions and implications from the previously reported findings.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After analyzing the data collected as described in Chapter III, I was able to identify several themes that were shared between the three middle schools. This chapter will provide conclusions and recommendations based upon those shared themes. The common themes regarding implementation were teacher leaders and buy-in. In regard, to outcomes the common themes were relationships, opportunities for leadership, and Crew all day. In Chapter V the findings from Chapter IV will be linked to the literature. Implications from the findings will be addressed. Following implications, I will make recommendations for leaders, list limitations of this research, and then address recommendations for future research and policy.

Implementation Themes and the Literature

In regard to implementation of Crew the themes that all three middle schools had in common were teacher leaders and buy-in. Teacher leaders were present at each of the middle schools, and they were a strength for Crew implementation. The data revealed that buy-in from both adults and students was an integral component for successful Crew implementation. Collecting data on the shared strengths and weaknesses of implementation at all three of the middle schools provided information for administrators who are seeking to implement a character education (CE) program like Crew.

Teacher Leaders

Williams (2000) stated that leadership was found to be the most essential element for initial and ongoing success of CE programs in schools. Teachers from all three schools spoke about how the presence of teacher leaders was helpful in making Crew implementation more successful. I was able to examine artifacts from each research site that provided additional evidence of the importance of these teacher leaders. The Crew calendar from Two Rivers Middle School had examples of lessons for each day and resources for teachers to use during those Crew lessons. I also examined the calendar that Kristin from Elk Mountain Middle School had created and shared with her team. Teachers from Rocky Springs Middle School shared a PowerPoint presentation with me that other teachers could use during Crew classes.

While each school had teacher leader groups that were set up in a different manner, the teacher leaders were an important part of implementation at each school. Through trial and error, schools developed their own structures for utilizing these teacher leaders. For example, teachers from Rocky Springs Middle School expressed frustration initially when trying to plan Crew lessons by themselves. They believed that they did not have the time to plan quality lessons for Crew individually. The teachers shared with me that the groups of teacher leaders at their school formed "organically." These teacher groups had asked for allocated time to create Crew lessons to share with teachers and had just been granted this time from their building administrator. The teachers from the focus group valued this allocated time for planning Crew lessons.

Teachers from Elk Mountain Middle School had one building Crew leader who provided professional development for the staff. The teachers told me about the

excellent modeling that this teacher leader provided for the staff during professional development time. This professional development was ongoing and a regular part of the school's scheduled time devoted to professional learning. This structure sounded very successful in the building and was supported by the literature. Berkowitz and Bier (2005) mentioned professional development as one of the most important components in successful programs and went on to state that professional development should be ongoing for all involved in implementing the CE initiative and its elements. The teachers from Elk Mountain Middle School split up the work of planning the Crew lessons according to what worked for their grade-level team. One team shared their method of each working on a set number of lessons, while members of another grade-level team told me about how they used a calendar and contributed to the calendar when they could.

Teachers from Two Rivers Middle School were initially required to contribute a certain number of lessons to a calendar shared with all of the Crew leaders. The teachers felt that this method was not successful. The teachers from the focus group shared with me that they did not feel like the shared lessons were authentic, and they thought that the quality of the lessons was low. The teachers believed that this was because each teacher may have been creating lessons for a grade level or class that he or she would not be using in their own Crew. One teacher leader "revamped" the shared document, and teachers shared that they thought the quality of lessons had improved as a result. Another teacher created community service project sign-ups at the school. Teachers could sign up for a project to complete with their Crew that would benefit the entire school. Teachers from Two Rivers Middle School shared that

they felt like they could use the lessons provided or plan their own Crew activities, and they liked that.

In order for the teacher leader structures to be successful, administrators needed to provide structures for them to exist. By providing these structures, the administrators could ensure that if one teacher leader were to leave the position, another teacher leader would be able to step into that role. Administrators must recognize the importance of teacher leaders and keep the structures in place for this leadership to exist.

Each school had their own method of planning Crew and had the freedom to develop a system that worked in their building. Each building had its own evolution of a method for how Crew planning and professional development was done. These teacher leaders worked together with Crew leaders, groups, and individually to provide professional development, resources, and lessons for Crew leaders in their schools.

Buy-in

During the focus group, teachers at the three middle schools discussed how those teachers and students who did not buy-in to Crew presented challenges for them in implementing the program in their classes and school-wide. However, teachers from all three schools reported both teacher and student buy-in as high. Teachers from all three of the focus groups addressed buy-in levels from both staff and students.

Teacher buy-in. A couple of different reasons were brought up during the focus groups for low buy-in from some teachers. One reason that teachers brought up was that some teachers thought academics should be the priority in school. Another reason was a lack of accountability for teachers to implement Crew.

A United States Department of Education (USDE, 2008) study found that staff support of CE could be a barrier to implementation. This research found that some teachers believed that school should be a place where only academics are a priority. Charlie, a teacher from Two Rivers Middle School, had shared that some teachers did not think it was their job to teach social–emotional learning in school, which demonstrated the presence of the same barrier listed by the USDE (2008) study mentioned above. Kate, a teacher from Elk Springs Middle School, mentioned that historically, some teachers had total buy-in and some teachers had no buy-in. Jamie, a teacher from Elk Mountain Middle School, shared a story about a teacher who had let students do homework every day during Crew. This presented a challenge for implementation because the students were not familiar with the common language, structure, and content of Crew.

Teachers also shared that low accountability to implement Crew could have perpetuated a lower level of buy-in from some teachers. Charlie, a teacher from Two Rivers Middle School, stated, "Some people do not implement Crew at all, and there really is no accountability to those people that just blow off Crew." The lack of accountability was cause for concern and mentioned in the literature by Berkowitz and Bustamante (2013). Berkowitz and Bustamante spoke about successful implementation of CE programs and encouraged accountability by stating, "creating a policy and holding all stakeholders accountable is also an important part when prioritizing programs within a building" (p. 10). Perhaps lower accountability for teachers to implement could have been one of the factors that contributed to some teachers' low levels of buy-in for Crew.

Teachers thought that effective professional development had contributed to higher levels of teacher buy-in among the three middle schools. This was supported by the literature. Williams (2000) mentioned how professional development, such as what occurred in two schools in this study, was important when implementing a CE program. Williams (2000) stated, "understanding how character develops and methods that are utilized to teach character are necessary topics for professional development" (p. 38). The teachers at Rocky Springs Middle School and Elk Mountain Middle School thought that this professional development was part of the reason that buy-in levels for Crew were high at their school. (Teachers from Two Rivers Middle School did not mention professional development).

Student buy-in. Teachers also told me that they perceived a small number of students as having low levels of buy-in for Crew. These few students who had lower levels of buy-in presented a challenge for the successful implementation of Crew. Teachers from all three schools shared about experiences they had when students did not show buy-in for Crew. Kristin, a teacher from Elk Mountain Middle School, shared an experience about tough kids in her Crew and how they sometimes refused to participate. She quoted some of the kids without buy-in for Crew as saying, "I am not playing this game. I am going to sabotage everything you do because I have the power over all the other kids." Charlie (from Two Rivers Middle School) went on to talk about feeling "major anxiety" when he had kids with low levels of buy-in as part of his Crew class. He said, "I have gotten major anxiety with impending Crew time when I had sabotagers. No matter what I did, they would sabotage because they needed attention. It was very stressful knowing it was like almost Crew . . . ." Kate, a teacher from Elk Springs Middle School, also spoke about how a handful of students with low

buy-in can cause disruption. She stated, "a couple of kids can really wreck it." These students who did not demonstrate buy-in for Crew presented a challenge for teachers to implement Crew successfully.

Teachers did talk about using strategies that they thought contributed to increased levels of student buy-in. To begin with, the teachers must show high levels of buy-in and to increase levels of buy-in for students. Kristin (from Elk Mountain Middle School) spoke about asking her students about their families and about personal information as a way to attempt to increase student buy-in. This relationship building was mentioned in the literature as a way to increase student engagement. Klem and Connell (2004) found that students who perceive their teachers as creating a caring and structured learning environment (much like what Kristin described above) are more likely to report engagement in school. Kate shared that Rocky Springs Middle School had different "house colors" that Crew classes belong to. She shared that she believed that the house colors were a success, even with students who had low levels of buy-in for Crew. When discussing a recent Crew activity that involved the house colors, Kate shared, "I mean, even my most anti-Crew kids bought into it." Kate also discussed how she believed that helping the students academically with something they were struggling with helped increase student buy-in for Crew. She said, "I think it can be one small thing that you find clicks. Like talking to them about a class that they are struggling in and then e-mailing that teacher, and then giving them the feedback and offering to help." Ben, a teacher from Elk Springs Middle School, talked about a group of students that he had and how completing a service learning project changed the buy-in level for his class. He said the experience had "brought the kids together." The service learning project provided an opportunity for students to be

of service and to experience an intrinsic reward, which was discussed in the literature by Berkowitz and Bustamante (2013). Berkowitz and Bustamante mentioned empowering children and shifting the reward system from extrinsic to intrinsic as one priority for a successful CE program. By incorporating a service learning project leading to intrinsic rewards Ben was able to increase the buy-in level for his Crew class. These were some of the strategies teachers found that they believed contributed to increased levels of student buy-in.

Outcome Themes and the Literature

After collecting data about the implementation of Crew, I collected data about the teachers' perceived outcomes of Crew. When looking at outcomes, the three shared themes that emerged were relationships, opportunities for leadership, and Crew all day. Teachers perceived one outcome of Crew was increased positive teacher–student and student–student relationships. The second outcome theme from all three schools was that through the Crew structure, opportunities for leadership were provided. The third outcome theme was Crew all day. The data revealed that common language and Crew structures were being used throughout the school day. These themes were similar in each of the three middle schools.

Relationships

All three schools had evidence through artifacts and data collected from the focus groups that revealed increased perceptions of positive relationships between teachers and students, as well as between students and other students. These perceived increases in positive relationships could serve as a springboard for other positive experiences regarding school. Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos (2011) reported that improving students' relationships with teachers had positive, long lasting impacts on

academic and social development. Klem and Connell (2004) found that students who perceive their teachers as caring and have a structured learning environment are more likely to report engagement at school, and high levels of engagement were also associated with higher attendance and test scores. Jamie, a teacher from Elk Mountain Middle School, stated that, "I feel like I have become a lot closer. I mean my relationships with my students have become closer. I am a lot closer to my Crew students than any student I have for academics." One teacher from Two Rivers Middle School spoke about how his students still shared a very special bond with each other even after moving on to the high school, and he attributed that to the Crew class that they shared together three years ago.

Teachers from all three schools perceived more positive student–student relationships as an outcome that they attributed to Crew as well. The literature supported this increased student–student relationship. Pinto (2012) stated that Crew builds relational character and helps model conflict–resolution skills, problem solving, and personal communication skills. This building of personal communication skills was evidenced when Ben shared his observations from the cafeteria at Rocky Springs Middle School. He thought that students from different grade levels were interacting more during lunch time. He stated that:

> Even in the cafeteria, I have seen more mixed kids, like, we used to have eighth-grade hall and sixth/seventh-grade hall and now they are all over the school, and I see them interacting more and hanging out a little bit more on their own and during lunch time. I think that's cool.

Problem solving skills were evidenced when Amanda talked about students solving a problem in the lunchroom. Amanda shared about a buddy lunch table that one of the Crew classes had worked on at Two Rivers Middle School. She went on to say that

some students were eating lunch alone, and one of the Crew classes wanted to find a solution for the problem, so the buddy table was created. Each day during lunch time, a different Crew class would take over and sit at the table. This was a space where students could go to meet new friends, so that no student had to sit alone during lunch. Tammy shared an experience where a student had broken a leg on the playground and how she was impressed at the compassion that the students demonstrated. Teachers who participated in this research noted several instances where they believed Crew had a positive impact on student-to-student relationships.

Opportunities for Leadership

Through the Crew class structure, students were provided with opportunities to act as leaders in both group and individual settings. Berkowitz and Bustamante (2013) discussed how empowering children and shifting rewards form extrinsic to intrinsic (as evidenced in the leadership experiences) was a priority for a successful CE program. This empowering of students is evident when students have opportunities to be leaders. Letting students lead Crew shifts the rewards from extrinsic to intrinsic by having the success of the experience act as the reward. Throughout the school year students have a chance to lead an all-school Crew. All-school Crew is an event where the entire middle school comes together and participates in a Crew class together. Different grade levels lead the all-school Crew at different times. When discussing a recent all-school Crew, teachers reported the experience as being successful and that opportunities for leadership supported increased levels of buy-in from students. Teachers repeatedly talked about experiences where they perceived that providing opportunities for students to be leaders led to increased engagement in Crew class. Mary, a teacher from Elk Mountain Middle School, spoke about letting her students

lead Crew and noted that, "they took ownership for it, they led it and they were very proud of themselves in the end." This feeling of being "very proud" that Mary described is also an example of the intrinsic rewards that Berkowitz and Bustamante mentioned earlier. Phyllis, a teacher from Two Rivers Middle School, talked about how students demonstrated compassion when older students were given the chance to lead younger students through Crew. She spoke about this as a very positive experience. I was able to examine the lesson plan she was speaking about, and the lesson plan was specifically set up to allow for the older students to act in a leadership role. The Crew structure provides opportunities for students to lead in various capacities, and teachers reported experiencing success when students took advantage of these opportunities.

Crew All Day

The USDE (2005) stated that common purposes in CE agendas included involving the whole community and making CE an integral part of educational processes. I heard teachers speaking about how they were utilizing the tools that were explicitly taught in Crew throughout the school day. By taking Crew out into the entire school day, teachers and students were able to make CE an integral part of educational processes. Teachers from Rocky Springs Middle School spoke about students interacting more in school, especially in common areas. Students at Rocky Springs Middle School were members of a mixed grade level Crew class. One teacher from Rocky Springs Middle School described the interactions between students outside of Crew class to be increasing. He said that, "Kids from my Crew are good models, and I see them around school helping each other. And it was already mentioned but communicating with different grade level kids, you know, buddying up." Mary, a

teacher from Elk Mountain Middle School shared with the group that interactions within her grade level had become more positive and that Crew taught the students how to treat one another. These perceptions of increased interactions between students demonstrated an involvement of the entire school community in Crew. By bringing Crew content outside of Crew class time, the students and teachers were able to make Crew an integral part of the educational process at each of the schools.

Teachers also shared evidence that through Crew structures, common language was being used throughout the school day. Berkowitz and Hoppe (2009) stated that schools that create a mission statement and use common language often experience success with CE. During the focus group and while looking at the artifacts, evidence surfaced that supported this use of common language throughout the school day. This use of a common language that was introduced through Crew was present throughout the school day, and the research supported that this is a necessary part of successful Crew implementation.

Implications

As a result of the findings of this research, three implications came into view. In regard to implementation of Crew it is important that administrators from all levels demonstrate support of the new initiative. Several pieces are necessary for implementation to be successful, and it is important that leaders recognize these pieces and take steps to address all of them. The next implication is the use of modeling Crew structures and the use of common language throughout the school district at all levels. Last, structures must be in place to ensure increased levels of buy-in from all stakeholders involved in Crew implementation.

Leadership

Teacher leaders are an integral part of the process when implementing a CE program like Crew. These opportunities for teachers to be leaders must be a priority of leaders at both the school district and building levels. These leadership opportunities need to be explicitly provided to teachers by administrators at the district and building level. Teachers from all three schools talked about the teacher leaders as a strength in implementation of Crew, so explicitly providing these opportunities for teachers is necessary.

Leaders at the district level must provide a level of consistency and structure for Crew and balance that with a level of autonomy at the building level. This structure was created in the Snowy Peaks School District by providing each school with consistent and specific requirements and expectations for Crew (see Appendix A). While providing non-negotiable requirements for Crew is necessary, it is also necessary for the school district leaders to give autonomy to each building to make some of the decisions. Each school needs this autonomy from district leadership to make their own choices about structures that would increase the likelihood of success for Crew at the building level. For example, leaders at the building level must have freedom in scheduling, grade level composition of Crew, and groupings of specific students. This consistency and autonomy also needs to be provided by building leaders to create opportunities for teacher leaders to determine and act upon the needs of each individual school.

The building leaders must allocate resources, which include money in the budget for Crew, time for planning and reflection, and opportunities for quality professional development. These structures need to be provided to the teacher leaders.

The teacher leaders must be given the autonomy and trust to make decisions that will work best for their buildings' specific needs. This includes how best to plan for Crew lessons, prioritizing which resources to spend money on, which kind of professional development is valuable, and how to group students for Crew. The teachers work with the students every day and can use this information to make informed decisions about Crew structures in their school. Eventually, this teacher leadership model coupling both structure and autonomy would spill over into Crew classes, with teachers allowing students to take on leadership roles. Choices and autonomy should also be provided to the students so that the students can make important decisions about issues that impact them. In addition to providing explicit opportunities for leadership at all levels, it is also important that all administrators involved in Crew implementation consistently model the desired Crew structures and Habits of a Scholar.

Modeling

When implementing a new initiative, leaders must continue to encourage people, exude energy and enthusiasm for continuing the change, and find ways to continue communicating the message (Burke, 2014). This encouragement needs to be present from leaders at all levels who are involved in the implementation of Crew. Administrators must provide encouragement and enthusiasm surrounding Crew to maintain the initiative. Administrators must also model good character and Crew structures beginning at the school district level. Teachers need to provide this encouragement and enthusiasm for their Crew classes as well. Teachers from Elk Mountain Middle School spoke about how the modeling through the professional development was so successful. Jamie told me about how the modeling was effective because teachers could use the tools in Crew right away.

Much like the outcome theme, Crew all day, the modeling of these common structures throughout all interactions within the school district allows for the use of common language and consistency across the board. Modeling of good character by the adults who are involved in the lives of children is an integral part of a CE program that works (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013). This modeling of good character is an important component and must be present at the district leadership level, the building leadership level, and also among teacher leaders. Beginning at the school district level, modeling of Crew structures needs to take place during staff and community interactions. This needs to include structuring building-level staff interactions in a way that supports the Crew structures as set forth by the Snowy Peaks School District (see Appendix A). When looking at district-wide goals for Crew, Snowy Peaks School District specifically lists modeling as a goal for staff when interacting in meetings and other events. District Leaders must model the Crew structures and conduct interactions among staff in a way that fosters the Habits of a Scholar as set forth by Crew. In addition to consistent modeling of Crew structures, the third implication is that all stakeholders must have buy-in for Crew.

Buy-in

Leaders from all levels must show buy-in for Crew. If administrators do not demonstrate buy-in for Crew, then teachers, students, and community members will be less likely to show buy-in for Crew. Through this research, the data showed that when teachers had buy-in, perceptions surrounding the entire Crew experience were that of a more successful implementation. Administrators must demonstrate value and necessity for Crew through professional development opportunities in order for levels of buy-in to increase. Structured conversations must take place between administrators and

Crew leaders about how teachers are implementing and perceiving Crew. School leaders and all stakeholders involved with Crew should certainly spend time demonstrating the importance and necessity of Crew to staff and students.

Students with low levels of buy-in presented a challenge at all three of the schools. Multiple examples of students who did not buy-in to Crew were given by teachers. Teachers reported that these students had a negative impact on Crew classes. In order to increase student buy-in for Crew, teachers must communicate the relevance to students about why Crew is being implemented. Teachers must consistently model the Crew structure and utilize the common language and Habits of a Scholar consistently. Lastly, teachers must authentically demonstrate buy-in themselves for Crew to increase the likelihood of student buy-in.

By educating all stakeholders (including students) about why Crew is being implemented, it could be expected that fidelity of implementation may increase. In instances where the relevance is communicated with Crew leaders and students and buy-in still stays low for those individuals, a structure should be put in place to create dialogue between administrators and those with low buy-in for Crew. This structure should seek to understand why those certain individuals are showing low buy-in for Crew and work towards creating a plan to increase buy-in for those individuals.

Recommendations to Leaders

The purpose of this study was to collect data regarding teacher perceptions of implementation and outcomes of Crew. These recommendations are the culmination of my data collection and analysis and the literature review surrounding CE program implementation and outcomes. Administrators from Snowy Peaks School District can utilize these recommendations to improve the Crew program within the district.

Administrators from other school districts can use these recommendations when implementing a new program like Crew. It should be noted that these recommendations were already occurring in several instances at each of the research sties.

The first recommendation for leaders is that relevance and necessity for Crew must be addressed for all stakeholders. In order for teachers to see value in Crew and take the time to implement with fidelity, they must first know why Crew is important for both staff and students. The school counselor and/or administrator should spend time educating the staff about how Crew is designed and how that design can specifically match up with the developmental level of students at the school. Teachers from all three schools talked about buy-in from teachers and why buy-in was so important. Tammy attributed much of the success of staff buy-in for Crew implementation at Rocky Springs Middle School to the school counselor and the way he educated the staff and community about the importance of Crew. (Teachers from Elk Mountain Middle School and Two Rivers Middle Schools reported high levels of teacher buy-in but did not elaborate on why the buy-in for Crew was high.) Both the data and the literature support educating parents and caretakers of students about the importance of Crew. By showing the value of Crew to all of the adults involved in the students' lives, buy-in could be increased and consistency of Crew values could be demonstrated for students. This consistency and the modeling of the adult buy-in could increase the chances that students would also see the relevance and importance of Crew. Demonstrating the importance and relevance of Crew to students is also important so that the students understand how Crew can be of benefit to them as well.

Providing time for teachers to reflect on and discuss Crew practices is my second recommendation to administrators. Allowing Crew leaders this time to communicate with each other should be built into the professional development schedule on a regular basis. I recommend that this be a practice at both the building and school district level. Teachers from all three research sites were appreciative of the reflection time that the focus groups provided. The reflection time was appreciated by the focus group members because teachers were able to share successes and failures of their own Crew experiences. These discussions also provided a sense of camaraderie between teachers. Teachers could feel supported in realizing that they were not alone in how they felt about aspects of Crew. Teachers from all three schools shared instances where they felt like they needed more time to discuss these successes and failures of Crew and topics like grading of Crew.

A third recommendation is that administrators develop a consistent protocol for measuring fidelity of implementation to ensure that all teachers are implementing Crew. Teachers from each of the three schools mentioned that they perceived that the majority of teachers implemented Crew in their buildings. However, teachers did not perceive that 100% of the teachers implemented Crew with fidelity. To measure fidelity of implementation, a checklist should be created based upon the Snowy Peaks School District's Crew Overview Document (see Appendix A). The checklist would include key items that are part of Crew throughout the school district. Examples of items that could appear on the checklist include:

- Are all parts of the Crew lesson present?
- Is the lesson part of a long-term unit plan?

- Is the room set up to facilitate Crew (usually a circle)?

- Does the lesson support one of the four purposes of Crew?

After collecting baseline data on Crew implementation, administrators should set targets on specific areas of implementation that need improvement. Teachers should be informed of the protocol and what targets are specific to their own school. For example, if some teachers were regularly lacking a reading as part of their lesson plan, the school leaders could set that as a goal and then measure the number of teachers including readings in their lesson plans before and after setting that as a goal. This protocol should be utilized by the entire school district to ensure consistency. Each building could set their own goals, but using the same protocol would increase the chances for consistency. By using a standard protocol at regular time intervals to measure fidelity of implementation, accountability would be present for teachers to implement Crew as prescribed. Allowing a group of teacher leaders, including representatives from each of the three middle schools, to create this measurement tool and use it would give ownership of the process back to the teachers.

My fourth recommendation is to provide consistent and ongoing professional development for staff implementing Crew. This will ensure that teachers are up to date on current research and best practices, and this information can be used immediately in Crew classes. Continuing to model the Crew class structure during this professional development is important so that school staff can experience Crew in the same way that students experience Crew. Teachers from all three of the schools shared that professional development time was important when planning for and implementing Crew. Continuing to provide consistent and ongoing professional development would demonstrate to teachers that Crew is a priority in the building. In schools, competition

between different initiatives can create challenges when implementing new programs. By providing ongoing and consistent professional development, administrators can demonstrate to staff that Crew is an initiative that takes priority.

Another recommendation for administrators would be to allocate resources for Crew. Resources like time and money are necessary when implementing a new program. If adequate resources are not allocated towards implementing the new program challenges can arise. For example, teachers in this study could not plan quality, meaningful lessons without the resource of time. School leaders should incorporate time into the normal schedule for teachers to plan Crew lessons and share information about Crew experiences. Money for supplies, professional development, and curriculum should be regularly allocated by administrators to increase chances for success when implementing a new program. Teachers from the middle schools in Snowy Peaks School District were able to articulate an appreciation for school leaders and the time given to plan for Crew. Most teachers also expressed feeling that the tangible resources were adequate and that they felt that this access to resources was important.

One final recommendation that I have for leaders is to create policy mandating CE in schools. Effective school programming must be supported by federal, state, and local educational policy as well as administrators (Durlack & Weissberg, 2011). For CE programs to be a priority in schools, legislation must exist in support of CE. I would recommend a policy that offers structure and choice for schools and school districts, much like the Crew program in Snowy Peaks School District. To provide the structure, the policy should state that schools must have a CE program in place with certain required elements. Examples of those required elements could be things like

community involvement, a long-term plan for the initiative, allocated resources, a mission statement, goals of the program, and evidence of a certain number of hours per week devoted to CE. This structure must be balanced with choice so that the program can match the specific needs of the school or the school district. For example, schools need to have the choice to decide the objectives and goals of the CE programming. Those objectives need to be based upon the needs of the school and decided on by school districts and individual schools. A clear and concise mission statement should be developed at the school or school district level based upon the unique goals and objectives of the CE program. Schools need the freedom to decide on details like curriculum, scheduling, professional development, and the way the students are grouped. In order for a program to be a priority, legislation must be in place to support that program. For a CE program to be successful in a school, some choice has to be given so that the program can address the unique needs of the school.

The data I collected provided insight into teachers' perceptions of the implementation and outcomes of the Crew program. Recommendations for administrators were based upon data I collected through focus groups, artifact collection, and detailed field notes. I was able to use the data and couple that with information from the literature review to create viable and feasible recommendations for administrators.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to note the limitations of this research. The study focused on collecting teachers' perceptions about the implementation and outcomes of Crew. I made every attempt to construct a trustworthy study, and the steps I took to do this are outlined in detail in Chapter III. In order to ensure trustworthiness, I used member

checking, a peer review process, reflected on my own biases, and triangulated the data. Specifically, I used member checking at the conclusion of the focus groups and also with the participants after completing data analysis. I had my research advisors and a colleague help me with the peer review process. Through this process, I revisited my data several times to make sure I was interpreting the data objectively. Through reflection of my own experiences, I was able to become aware of my biases and how the biases may have impacted my interpretations. As I stated earlier, data were triangulated by using focus groups, detailed field notes, and artifact collection. I took intentional steps to ensure trustworthiness, but some limitations were still present. Those limitations include my own personal biases, biases of teachers who participated in the research, and length of time of data collection.

All of the data I collected during this research were filtered through my own lens and views of Crew. I am a strong advocate for CE and Crew, and this support can lead me to be biased in favor of Crew. I also worked in the Snowy Peaks School District in the beginning of my doctoral studies, although not during the data collection phase of this research. Additionally, I worked on the district committee that developed the Crew program as specific to Snowy Peaks School District. Several measures were taken to offset my personal biases to increase the trustworthiness of the study and these were discussed in Chapter III.

The teachers who participated in this research were volunteers. While I was able to present my research during a time where almost all of the staff were present, not all teachers volunteered. The teachers who did volunteer may have been those who were more involved in Crew and saw the value in Crew. If a teacher had low buy-in for Crew or did not implement Crew with fidelity, it seems less likely that he or she

would volunteer for research surrounding Crew. This may have led to a slanted view regarding both implementation and outcomes of Crew. The teachers who participated may have had a more positive view of Crew and may have experienced more success when compared to colleagues who did not volunteer for the research. To remedy this bias, I tried to remain consistent with the questions I asked and to elicit both positive and negative aspects of Crew implementation and outcomes from the research participants.

I collected data from one focus group from each school. Due to school scheduling and my own schedule in writing this dissertation, only one focus group took place from each school. It should also be noted that I only had enough volunteers from each school to have one focus group. While I believe the data were saturated, it would have been helpful to have a second focus group from each school with the same members to gather more information from the teachers. The ideas from each of the focus groups were similar, and the data did begin to repeat. However, similar topics may have come up at each site because the members heard the other members talking about the same topics. I tried to limit the focus groups to one hour each in order to honor teachers' time and increase the chances that teachers would volunteer. I had a long list of focus group questions initially, and I did not have time to ask all of the questions I wanted to within the allotted time. At the end of the hour, in all three instances, I felt like I could have asked the teachers more questions about different topics. While I was able to ask the same questions at each location, I would have liked to ask more questions during each focus group. I know that I do not know everything about Crew in each building, and the data I collected only represent the perceptions of the participants in this research and our limited interactions.

Recommendations for Future Research

By having more than one focus group at each school, more data about Crew implementation and outcomes could be collected. This research provided data from one focus group for each school, but additional focus groups would provide additional data from teachers. Also, teachers selected for this research were volunteers and may have had a favorable bias for Crew. Conducting the research with random samples of teachers could allow for a more diverse group of teachers to share their perceptions, perhaps limiting the bias of the research participants.

Collecting additional data over time about long-term outcomes tied into Crew is another area where more research is necessary. Examining the data for longer periods of time would allow the researcher to see if changes in perceived outcomes became more pronounced as the program continued on over time. For this research, schools were in the third year of Crew implementation, so extending the research over several more years could provide more detailed information about perceived outcomes over time.

More research is needed in the field that involves the implementation of CE programs, along with the outcomes of those programs. Evaluating one without the other can lead to limitations in the research. Utilizing a consistent and objective protocol to measure fidelity of implementation is an area where future research is recommended. Measuring implementation of CE programming would allow researchers to deduce if the actual program is creating the desired outcomes or if challenges in implementation are clouding the data. Mowbray et al. (2003) listed the most common methods to measure implementation to be ratings by experts based on interviews, classroom observations, videotaping, and program documents and surveys

completed by those delivering or receiving the services. I would recommend a multiple-pronged approach to measure implementation that involves feedback from students and teachers.

One final recommendation for future research would be to learn more about the experiences of student leaders during Crew. Teachers from all three research sites spoke at length about opportunities for student leadership and how the opportunities for students to be leaders often produced positive Crew experiences. Specifically, examining the experiences of student leaders within the Crew class structure and how this impacts student engagement would be useful for teachers who are struggling with student buy-in for Crew and perhaps other academic classes as well.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to describe teachers' perceptions of implementation and outcomes of a newly implemented CE program. As a result of this research, several implications were made. Those implications include support from leaders, modeling of Crew structures, and building buy-in from all stakeholders. Recommendations were made to leaders as a result of this research. Administrators need to teach all stakeholders about the importance and relevance of Crew, foster regular communication between teachers about Crew experiences, develop and use objective protocols to measure fidelity of implementation of Crew, continue to provide ongoing and consistent professional development to staff, and continue to allocate adequate resources for Crew.

Data collected from all three schools demonstrated many strengths and challenges that teachers experienced as Crew was implemented in the Snowy Peaks School District. These data also revealed teachers' perceptions of the outcomes that

they can attribute to implementation of Crew. This research could be utilized in the

Snowy Peaks School District as integral feedback regarding their unique experiences

with Crew. This research could also be utilized by districts or schools looking to

implement or improve their own CE programs. As the findings of this study indicated,

programs such as Crew provide valuable benefits to students and the school culture.

However, such programs need to be structured and supported by administrators with a

balance of consistency and flexibility.

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APPENDIX A

**SNOWY PEAKS SCHOOL DISTRICT
CREW OVERVIEW DOCUMENT**

SNOWY PEAKS SCHO/OL DISTRICT
CREW OVERVIEW DOCUMENT

What is Crew?

- A dedicated time in the day to focus on character skills, social-emotional
  learning and academic goal-setting.

- Crew provides each student a relationship with an adult crew leader at the
  school, as well as a consistent and ongoing small-scale peer community.

- The crew model ensures that all students have an adult monitoring their
  academic and social well-being.

- It sets the stage for the development of deeper teacher-to-student and student-
  to-student relationships which increase feelings of belonging and supports all
  students' success.

Purposes of Crew

- Positive Culture: Build and maintain a positive school culture, climate, and
  community that connect to the broader community.

- Academic Advisement: Facilitate goal setting to develop college and career
  readiness.

- Character Development: Develop and maturate Habits of a Scholar (character
  skills) and support social-emotional learning.

- Adventure: Foster adventure, health, fitness, and a love of learning.

Role of a Crew Leader

- An advocate who believes in all students' ability to achieve socially and
  academically and serves as a point of contact with families, staff members, and
  other supports.

- A facilitator who assists, guides, and enables the group to build strong relationships and work effectively.

- A coach, mentor and role model who gives constructive feedback and provides opportunities for practice and problem-solving.

- An academic advisor who helps set goals and monitor progress.

- A keeper of the intentional culture of the school and purposes of crew.

- As one crew leader said, "I'm on your side, I'm on your case, and I'm sticking with you no matter what."

Common Structures for Crew in All Schools

- Every student belongs to a crew with approximately 15-20 students and an adult crew leader.

- Schools dedicate time within their schedules for crew meetings, typically 30 minutes daily (elementary schools) or several times per week (middle and high schools).

- Crew meetings follow a long-term unit plan and a common format that includes an opening ritual, purposeful main activity, and closing reflection.

- Physical space is arranged to support student interaction, usually in a circle.

- Whole school, grade level meetings and celebrations occur to support school-wide culture building.

- Adults model being part of a school and district crew in how they interact, conduct meetings, and build positive relationships as colleagues.

- All instructional staff have a role in crew. In many schools, staff members are co-leaders of a crew.

How Does District X Support Crews and Crew Leaders?

- Provide ongoing professional development and coaching to crew leaders.

- Manage a district crew website with collective resources and materials.

- Define long-term curricular outcomes PS-12 for students in crew.

- Model the creation of crew in school and district meetings and activities.

- Invest in resources and import best practices from outside the district.

- Provide feedback and recognition to crew leaders.

Note. This document format has been altered and any identifying factors have been removed to protect the identity of the district in which research occurred.

APPENDIX B

**SNOWY PEAKS SCHOOL DISTRICT
HABITS OF A SCHOLAR**

SNOWY PEAKS SCHOOL DISTRICT
HABITS OF A SCHOLAR

Executive Skills: plans, organizes, and manages behaviors and responsibilities

Perseverance: persists through challenges

Enthusiasm: pursues passions and shows love of learning

Compassion: considerate and respectful of self, others, and the world around us

Teamwork: works with others to achieve a common goal

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE:	September 15, 2017
TO:	Grace Tennant
FROM:	University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[1097000-3] Teacher Perspectives On Implementation and Outcomes of a Character Education Program: A Comparative Case Study at Three Public Middle Schools
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Amendment/Modification
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	September 14, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE:	September 14, 2018
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of September 14, 2018.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Generated on IRBNet

APPENDIX D

**CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
IN RESEARCH**

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: *Teacher Perspectives on Implementation and Outcomes of a Character Education Program: A Comparative Case Study at Three Public Middle Schools*

Researcher: Grace A. Tennant, School of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

E-mail: Tenn9197@bears.unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this comparative case study is to gather teacher perceptions regarding implementation and outcomes of the Crew class, which has been recently implemented at the middle school level district-wide. I will collect data through focus groups with teachers, artifact and document collection, and by collecting field notes during the focus groups. Teachers from all three middle schools in the district will be invited to participate in a focus group with other selected teachers from their school that will last approximately one hour each. The purpose of the focus group will be to gather teacher perceptions regarding the Crew class. At the conclusion of the focus group, I will provide an oral summary of my notes to the entire focus group. I will transcribe the focus group and then send out my notes and interpretations so that members can make sure I am interpreting what was said in the most accurate manner. The information I collect will remain confidential, and pseudonyms will be utilized to ensure confidentiality of participants. The focus groups will be audio recorded, and I will transcribe the focus groups from this audio recording. During the focus groups, I will be taking field notes. The field notes will describe the physical setting of the room, observations that I make from the members of the focus group, interactions between the group, and any other observations that I think will add to the data collected during the focus group. Participants will be asked to provide artifacts and documents that elaborate on perceptions of the Crew class. Examples of these artifacts and documents can include: teacher made curriculum, district designed curriculum, teacher journals, logs, or plans, electronic curriculum, technology resources, meeting notes, etc.

_____
Initials

I will be assigning pseudonyms to participants and only I will know the name connected with the pseudonym. Data collected and analyzed for this study will be kept on my password protected computer and stored in my residence, which will be locked when I am not home. Your signed consent form will be kept in a locked drawer in my research advisor's office for three years. I will destroy the data that I collect once I have the dissertation completed.

Potential risks in this project are minimal. During the focus group, it is possible that participants may feel some anxiety or stress while speaking, or if another member Disagrees. Even though this study is not evaluative in nature, participants may experience some anxiety or stress when sharing work that they have created and/ or used in their classrooms. To counter these risks, I will make sure that the participants know the nature of the research and put forth every effort to create an environment in which customers feel comfortable speaking.

During the focus groups, you will be provided with light refreshments. Upon completion of the study, you will be given a $10 gift card from Amazon.com. I will also share a copy of my final dissertation with you when it is completed.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

_____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____

Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1) Let's go around and introduce ourselves. Tell me your name, grade level, subjects taught, and how you feel about being here right now.

2) Begin by telling me about a Crew class that you thought was very successful. Describe what you did, and what the students did.

3) What are the strengths of the implementation of the CE program at your school?

4) What are the weaknesses of the implementation of the CE program at your school?

5) What are some student outcomes you think came about as the result of Crew?

* I will then spend 2-5 minutes summarizing information and make sure I did not miss any big issues.