

INNOVATION HOUR: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF A SCHOOL-WIDE
ADVISORY

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ABSTRACT

Innovation Hour is a unique advisory program that was created at Anywhere High School to foster increased student connectedness to school. Having a strong connection to school may help students thrive, building capacity and protective factors. A qualitative case-study methodology was used to explore the two research questions. First, what were students' and staffs' experiences with the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School? Second, did Innovation Hour meet the driving goal of connecting students to school? Four focus groups with students, teachers, and school counselors were conducted. A thematic data analysis was performed, and four themes were identified. A belief in Innovation Hour's student-led delivery and service focus emerged. Further, while buy-in and logistical challenges were significant, the students were resilient in their eagerness to lead. Limitations and directions for future research, as well as recommendations, were discussed.

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DEDICATION

For Bjorn, Henrik, and Jens. You are the best part of my day, every day.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Anywhere High School, a public school located in the Midwest, is currently one of the largest in its state. In addition to the approximate enrollment of 1,400 students, upwards of 50 students may enroll at the high school throughout the year. During the 2012-2013 school year, Anywhere High School experienced great tragedy with the death of five youth. Two students died by suicide, one due to a car accident, one due to cancer complications, and one due to natural causes. The community of students and staff were repeatedly shaken, and were in a perpetual state of grief and loss. There was a noticeable shift in the resiliency of the students; they were hurting and struggling to handle day-to-day stressors. Despite the students and staff rallying around each other in support, the environment still felt unstable. The school's Crisis Response Team, comprised of administrators and professional school counselors, saw increased reports of suicidal ideation among the youth following these events. Significant suicide attempts, where students required hospitalization, were also noted following these events. During the 2013-2014 academic school year, ongoing referrals continued to be made by the counseling office due to students' suicidal ideation.

In response to the five teen deaths that the community experienced during the 2012-2013 school year, Anywhere High School took several action steps to support its youth. It was no longer a lofty goal to ensure that every student was connected; it felt like a necessity. From this tragedy and built upon an existing foundation of Developmental Assets, Innovation Hour was born. This student-developed and student-led advisory period had the goal of ensuring that *every* student was connected to a group of peers and an adult throughout his or her time at Anywhere High School. We hoped that Innovation

Hour would be a way to proactively engage students, decreasing their engagement in risky behavior.

The struggles at Anywhere High School are not unique. The latest national Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) data from 2013 suggest that risky behaviors, such as suicide attempts (8%), consuming alcohol (34.9%), and using marijuana (23.4%), are either holding steady or on the increase among surveyed youth (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Further, research has highlighted a general decline in school engagement outcomes, such as school compliance and participation in extracurricular activities, as students progress through the secondary levels of education (Wang & Eccles, 2012). This information, coupled with the fact that students naturally pull away from familial support during adolescence, is troubling. Unfortunately, the large and often departmentalized nature of secondary schools does not help because it often limits opportunities to develop long-term meaningful relationships with peers and teachers, making it easy to feel anonymous (Van Ryzin, 2010; Wang & Eccles, 2012). Just as students are branching away from their support at home, they may be struggling to connect and disengaging from school.

There is hope. Research has shown that meaningful relationships at school can help protect against this documented decline in school engagement (Wang & Eccles, 2012). School connectedness, or how much a student feels included and wanted at school, has been shown to protect against current and future mental-health issues as well as to increase the likelihood of good educational outcomes (Bond et al., 2007; Goodenow, 1993; Shochet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague, 2006). One strategy that secondary schools have employed to foster these connections is school-wide advisories, or meetings that

happen outside class time with the purpose of connecting students to school (Galassi, Gullledge, & Cox, 1997). While the research is mixed in terms of the advisories' effectiveness, there is evidence to suggest that improving relations between students and teachers may lead to enhanced academic and personal-social outcomes for students (McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010). According to Bond et al. (2007), "along with connectedness to family, connectedness to school during adolescence has emerged as a key area for building protective factors for positive educational outcomes and lower rates of health-risk behaviors" (p. 357.e9).

This focus on what students need to thrive highlights a relatively recent growing body of research. While risk factors have driven psychology for the past 50 years, Positive Youth Development, a framework examining those protective factors that help youth thrive, is growing (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). The Developmental Assets developed by the Search Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, provide a framework for supporting youth, an example of Positive Youth Development. The 40 assets are strengths and supports that youth need in order to thrive. The Developmental Assets provide a common language and a set of beliefs to connect with youth. The present study seeks to tell the story about how one midwestern high school utilized the Developmental Assets as a foundation to create a school-wide advisory. Innovation Hour, an original advisory program, was developed by a team of students and teachers at Anywhere High School in order to address an engagement problem. The present study explores the students' and teachers' experiences with Innovation Hour, and whether they perceived that it impacted students' connectedness to school.

Statement of the Problem

There are documented benefits for taking care of students' head and *heart*; we want them to be academically *and* emotionally successful. Having a strong connection to school may help students thrive. While high school may be a time rife with risk and struggle, it can also be a time to build capacity within our students, to arm them with protective factors. The experience of developing and implementing Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School was unique, and this process may shed light on how schools can utilize a strengths-based approach to support youth.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study is twofold. The primary goal of this study was to understand the students' and staff members' experiences with the creation and implementation of a school-wide advisory, Innovation Hour. A qualitative case study research design (Stake, 1995) was used to increase the understanding about Innovation Hour's inception and implementation, informing subsequent development of advisories programs at the secondary level. Second, the case study approach lent itself to programmatic evaluation, meaning that it helped explore whether students and staff perceived Innovation Hour to have met its primary goal of connecting students to school.

Research Questions

The present study featured two guiding research questions. First, what were students' and staff members' experiences with the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School? Second, did Innovation Hour meet the driving goal of connecting students to school? Creswell (2007) calls for subquestions that further guide case-study research.

The subquestions for the present study are as follows:

1. What happened? How would students and staff describe the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour?
2. What meanings or beliefs did students and staff construct about Innovation Hour?
3. Do students' and staff members' stories reflect the broad goal of Innovation Hour: engaging and connecting students to school?

Significance of the Study

One of the overarching goals for the present study was to explore whether an innovative education program, Innovation Hour, was effective in connecting students to school. Every school has its own unique needs, but one of Anywhere's greatest needs at the time of Innovation Hour's creation was fostering positive relationships between students and teachers. Giving students and teachers who were involved in Innovation Hour a voice contributes to further program refinements, along with providing information to other schools that may wish to establish a similar program. Further, as part of continuous improvement, it is helpful to examine what is happening during Innovation Hour to explore whether the program is an effective way to build Developmental Assets.

Worldview

Two major theoretical paradigms, or worldviews, were used in the present study: social constructivism and Positive Youth Development. These worldviews described the beliefs I brought to the research, the lens I used when reviewing the data, and the way in which I work with students as a professional school counselor. First, social constructivism, according to Creswell (2007), was defined as a worldview where

“individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (p. 20). Each student may have developed a different view or meaning of his/his experience with Innovation Hour, and focus groups allowed these complex views to come to light. This perspective was also present within the data-collection method (i.e., focus groups) because a social dynamic is present among the focus-group members (Merriam, 2009).

Second, a strengths-based, or protective-factor, lens was used when examining the data. As previously discussed, Positive Youth Development is a strengths-based framework with which to view youth. Rather than highlight the risky behaviors in which youth may engage, the present study looked for the strengths and supports which students have in order to thrive (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006).

Conceptual and Operational Definitions

The following definitions were used throughout the current dissertation research study:

Advisory: Also known as homerooms, advisories are meetings outside class time between a small group of students and a teacher (Van Ryzin, 2010) with the intent of building relationships in a nonevaluative setting (Galassi et al., 1997).

Developmental Assets: The 40 Developmental Assets are the internal strengths and external supports that youth must possess to thrive, as identified by the Search Institute (Starkman et al., 2006).

School connectedness: The definition of school connectedness by Goodenow (1993) was used: “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and support by others in the school environment” (p. 80).

School engagement: This term refers to the multidimensional construct that includes (a) school compliance, (b) participation in extracurricular activities, (c) school identification, and (d) subjective valuing of learning (Wang & Eccles, 2012).

Dissertation Overview

Innovation Hour, an original education program developed at Anywhere High School, was the focus for the present qualitative case study. This bounded system was explored using qualitative methodology, including focus groups and a review of survey data. The following two research questions guided the study: (a) What were students’ and staff members’ experiences with the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School? (b) Did Innovation Hour meet the driving goal of connecting students to school? A thematic data analysis was performed.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review examines the current knowledge regarding student engagement and school connectedness; provides a background of the 40 Developmental Assets explained by the Search Institute; and describes the introduction of the Developmental Assets, the impetus for Innovation Hour, at Anywhere High School.

Student Engagement and Connectedness to School

Previous research has explored varying constructs and their ability to support thriving youth (e.g., Shochet et al., 2006; Wang & Eccles, 2012); school engagement and connectedness are examples of such constructs. School engagement, a multidimensional construct, refers to three components of engagement: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Wang & Eccles, 2012). School connectedness has been defined as “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment” (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80). Essentially, school engagement is what students *do*, and school connectedness is how students *feel*.

Wang and Eccles (2012) conducted a longitudinal study about the influence of social supports on adolescents’ ($n=1,479$) school engagement. The authors had three goals for their research: (a) to explore whether changes in school engagement trajectory were, in fact, long-term changes; (b) to explore the association between gender and race or ethnicity on school engagement; and (c) to explore whether social supports play a role with influencing the components of school engagement. Data were collected at three points in time with self-administered questionnaires that were given to adolescents who were recruited in seventh grade, and interviews were conducted in their homes. The authors measured the following four outcomes of school engagement: school compliance,

participation in extracurricular activities, school identification, and subjective valuing of learning.

First, as was predicted, long-term negative changes were noted in the trajectories for the four outcomes of school engagement. Essentially, students became less engaged in school as they got older. Wang and Eccles (2012) hypothesized that this decline could be due to the structure of secondary schools, often leading to fewer opportunities for students to develop positive relationships with their teachers and peers. Second, while girls reported greater engagement in seventh grade, a similar decline for all outcomes was seen in both boys and girls as they entered secondary school.

Of particular interest to the present study were the findings on social supports (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Three sources of social support were of focus: parents, teachers, and peers. For the outcomes of participation in extracurricular activities, school identification, and the subjective valuing of learning, when students reported more support from parents, teachers, and peers during 7th to 11th grade, an increase for all three outcomes was noted. Thus, these social supports served as a protective factor against the normative decline with these aspects of school engagement.

Interestingly, in terms of school compliance, students who received more support from parents and teachers reported increased school compliance from 7th to 11th grade. However, when students reported an increase in peer support, a decline in school compliance was noted. Further analysis was conducted, and it revealed, “The association between peer support and behavioral engagement was negative only for those youth who reported hanging out with antisocial friends” (Wang & Eccles, 2012, p. 890). If students were connected to students who had antisocial values, this decrease in school compliance

held true. On the other hand, when students reported being connected to largely prosocial friends, the opposite was true; students reported an increase in school compliance. While a troublesome finding, a promising piece of data emerged. According to Wang and Eccles (2012):

In terms of positive school behaviors, the youth most at risk are those who have little social support from their parents and teachers coupled with strong social support from their peers. In contrast, social support from one's teachers and parents can totally counteract the negative influence of peer support on positive behaviors. (p. 891)

Thus, despite the commonly held belief that peers are the strongest influence during adolescence, parents and teachers may still serve as a protective factor for student engagement.

The authors also noted differences with regard to race/ethnicity. An increased school identification and subjective value of learning was seen among African-American adolescents with peer social support, "indicating that peer influences serve as a stronger protective or buffering effect among African American than among European American adolescents" (Wang & Eccles, 2012, p. 891).

School connectedness' impact on students' mental health has also been a focus of recent research (Bond et al., 2007; Shochet et al., 2006). In a study of Australian grade seven and nine students ($n=2,022$), Shochet et al. (2006) explored whether school connectedness could predict future mental health and overall functioning for students. Participants completed various measures for depression, anxiety, strengths, and school connectedness at three points in time (pretest, posttest, and 12-month follow-up). Results

supported the initial hypotheses. First, as hypothesized, school connectedness was strongly and negatively correlated with both current and future self-report symptoms of depression, anxiety, and overall functioning. Second, the authors hypothesized that school connectedness could predict symptoms one year later. This finding was true for depressive symptoms in both boys and girls, for anxiety symptoms in girls, and for general functioning in boys. Finally, the hypothesis that prior mental health would not predict school connectedness one year later was also supported. Given the size of the correlation, the relationship between school connectedness and depressive symptoms was of particular interest. Shochet et al. concluded school connectedness may be an underemphasized factor in adolescent depression.

Bond et al. (2007) found similar results when they explored the impact of social and school connectedness on late teenage risk behaviors. In a longitudinal study of Australian youth ($n=2,678$), the effects of social and school connectedness on teen substance use, mental health, and long-term academic outcomes were explored. Data collected from students participating in the Gatehouse Project, an intervention designed to increase connectedness to school, were used in the study. Data were collected in three waves: (a) Year Eight, prior to the intervention; (b) Year Ten, the last year of secondary school; and (c) one year post completion of secondary school. Students completed a questionnaire with the following measures: mental-health status, substance use, academic outcomes, social connectedness, interpersonal conflict, student connectedness, and family measures. The school-connectedness measure included commitment to school, relationships with teachers, relationships with peers, opportunities to participate, and belonging.

Much like the Wang and Eccles (2012) study, students with a strong connection to peers, but not adults, were at greatest risk. For example, Year Eight students who reported low school connectedness were more likely to report symptoms of depression and to use substances in Year Ten. Students with low school connectedness in their early years were also less likely to finish school. On the other hand, students with strong school and social connectedness had the best outcomes during later years.

The studies by Wang and Eccles (2012), along with Bond et al. (2007), highlighted the importance of getting students connected to school early because school connectedness may be an important protective factor against future mental-health concerns and may increase the likelihood of positive academic outcomes. Bond et al. (2007), stated, “Enabling, encouraging and resourcing schools to focus on relationships – between students, between teachers, and students, and between students and learning, is likely to be key to effective interventions” (p. 357.e16). Identifying ways to foster these connections is the next challenge for schools.

Advisories

One way in which schools can help students thrive is through advisories. Starting largely as a middle-school philosophy to support students through the challenges of adolescence, the “primary goal of advisory programs is usually to create tighter relationships between adults and students to foster a more supportive school climate overall” (McClure et al., 2010, p. 5). Advisories are typically structured with a small group of students and a nonevaluative educator, meeting for brief periods, to address various pre-determined topics (McClure et al., 2010).

In a study of secondary school advisories, Van Ryzin (2010) explored whether students ($n=209$) at two small secondary schools would identify their adviser as a mentor or secondary attachment figure. Students and advisers at these schools interacted on a daily basis, with the adviser focusing on learning goals, problem-solving academic difficulties, and being a general supporter for the student. The student-to-adviser ratio was approximately 12:1, and students remained with their adviser for multiple years. At three different points in time, participants completed measurement scales on the following: attachment network, closeness to adviser, felt security with adviser, engagement in learning, perceptions of adviser and peer support, psychological adjustment, and academic achievement.

According to Van Ryzin (2010), “The primary purpose of an attachment relationship is to engender a sense of felt security, with the caregiver acting as a secure base and safe haven” (p. 133). Results indicated that 81 of the 199 students, or 40.7%, identified their adviser as an attachment figure, meaning that students identified their adviser as someone who provided a sense of security. While best friends and mothers were identified higher on the attachment hierarchy, advisers were identified as at least a secondary attachment figure. This relationship’s influence on school was also of interest. Students who identified their adviser as an attachment figure were more engaged in school; they made quicker gains in terms of academic-achievement measures and reported more hope in their ability to achieve their goals. Interestingly, students who did not identify a mother as an attachment figure were more likely to identify their adviser, which may highlight the protective nature of these relationships for students without ideal relationships at home.

The influence of relationships was also the focus for a national study of adolescents ($n=1,817$) that was conducted by Scales, Benson, and Roehlkepartain (2011). Three developmental strengths and the role they play in adolescent thriving were the focus. The three developmental strengths were (a) sparks, (b) the relationships it takes to foster them, and (c) how empowered students feel to make contributions to society. An adolescent's spark was described as his/her unique passion or interests. Eligible participants, adolescents who were 15 years of age, participated in an online survey that measured the three dimensions.

The researchers hypothesized that possessing the three developmental strengths would be associated with more positive academic, social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes (e.g., GPA, attendance, or leadership) (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011). Second, the researchers expected sparks, relationships, and empowerment to contribute more to positive outcomes than demographic characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Both hypotheses were supported. First, adolescents who possessed developmental strengths were more likely to experience positive outcomes. It is important to note that the more developmental strengths the adolescents possessed, the more likely they were to experience positive outcomes. However, only 9% of participating adolescents possessed all three strengths; 21% had two of the three strengths and 28% only had one of the three strengths. Second, when comparing the contribution of demographics to strengths, the strengths contributed more to the variance for 8 of the 13 outcomes (e.g., GPA, leadership, purpose, or mastery goals).

Interestingly, possessing two of the three strengths contributed to individual positive outcomes, but societal well-being—evidenced by civic engagement—was only promoted when youth possessed all three strengths. According to Scales et al. (2011):

when inner strengths, such as sparks, are aligned with positive ecologies, as reflected in plentiful relationships and opportunities, adolescents are empowered not only to pursue their own interests but also to use those interests and passions to contribute to social good. (p. 273)

In order to promote thoughtfully engaged youth, students must be able to identify their sparks, and to feel empowered and supported to use them.

The Developmental Assets

The study by Scales et al. (2011) highlights a research shift from adolescent risk behavior and how to prevent it to identifying what youth need to thrive, a movement defined as Positive Youth Development. A large contributor for this movement is the Search Institute's Developmental Asset framework. The Search Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has identified 40 Developmental Assets that students need to thrive. Through empirical research, both internal and external assets have been shown to both increase a student's likelihood for success and to decrease his/her engagement in risky behaviors (Starkman et al., 2006). There are 20 external and 20 internal assets. External assets are those relationships and opportunities that are afforded to youth; these assets are divided into four categories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, and Constructive Use of Time. Internal assets are the guiding values and skills that help a young person navigate through life; these assets are divided into four categories: Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competence, and Positive Identity. The

Developmental Assets offer a strengths-based approach to work with youth, one that focuses on building relationships and skills rather than focusing on student deficits (Starkman et al., 2006).

The Developmental Assets play an important role in schools. The assets have a relationship with risk-taking behaviors; the fewer assets the student has, the more likely he/she is to engage in behaviors, such as drug/alcohol use or sex that put him/her at risk (Starkman et al., 2006). On the flip side, the more assets a student has, the less likely he/she is to engage in those same behaviors. Further, students with a higher number of assets are more likely to be successful and engaged in school, and to have a stronger belief in their self. Youth are said to be “asset rich” when they have anywhere from 31-40 assets (Starkman et al., 2006). According to Scales et al. (2011), “Typically, young people with 31-40 assets do better than those with 21-30, who in turn do better than those with 11-20, and all those youth tend to do better than youth with 0-10 assets” (p. 264). The average 11th grade student only has 17.6 assets. There is a noticeable trend in the reduction of assets as the student gets older, so just when students are faced with more challenges, the number of assets they have for protection drops.

The Developmental Assets are just a framework, a way in which to partner with youth. There is no magic formula or manual that will show schools how to build more assets for their youth. Asset building is a process. Using the Developmental Assets within a school depends on the unique needs of that building. According to Starkman et al. (2006):

One thing we’d like to stress, whatever path you choose, is that you walk down it conscientiously and intentionally . . . focusing on even a small number of assets

can make a huge impact when you choose the assets for good reasons and when personal and program actions are intentional, effective, and sustained. (p. 47)

An advantage with this approach is that the assets are not mutually exclusive, meaning that, if you intentionally build one asset, it will likely have a spill-over effect, impacting other assets. Starkman et al. (2006) provide actions steps to introduce the Developmental Assets. These steps include generating awareness about the framework and assessing students' current asset levels. Asset-building development is sustained when key relationships with stakeholders are formed and when the school environment fosters asset building by intentionally using programs and resources. With these action steps in mind, Anywhere High School looked to integrate the Developmental Assets within its school climate.

The History of Developmental Assets at Anywhere High School

The following section describes the integration of the Developmental Assets at Anywhere High School, starting with a small leadership team and culminating with the creation and implementation of an advisory period for all students: Innovation Hour.

The Early Years

During a site-based, leadership-team book study, a small group of teachers decided to focus on the students' social-emotional needs to complement an already existing group of teachers who were examining academic needs. Because two members of the group, myself included, had previous experience with the Developmental Assets from the Search Institute, we decided to start our work by exploring how that framework could assist us in providing for the students' social-emotional development. We began by presenting information about the Developmental Assets to teachers during professional

development. These sessions were different from the other content- or curriculum-based professional development happening in the building; we were addressing the “heart” of students while others were going for the academic “head.” The professional development ranged from an overview of the assets to providing teachers with an opportunity to discuss how to implement asset-building activities with their lesson plans.

While, as a professional counselor, it felt like a breath of fresh air to talk about students’ social-emotional needs during professional development, it was apparent that we needed to take “baby steps” for our staff members. We needed to create buy-in that supporting social emotional development was an important part of their role as teachers. We tried things such as sharing survey data with them, highlighting the inconsistencies between teachers who felt like they were role models for students, and the number of students who identified teachers as role models. Our school adopted Relationships as one of five strands of focus in professional development, largely because of the buy-in from the leadership team of teachers and our administration, solidifying our place within the building’s strategic plan.

As teachers were being introduced to the Developmental Assets, so were students. A student Asset Team was formed with the purpose of engaging the student voice with the task of improving the school’s climate. Students were selected based on teacher or school counselor referral. Students who were not engaged in other leadership activities were intentionally chosen to build leadership capacity in more students. Students on the Asset Team engaged in activities such as presenting to staff at professional development or assisting with classroom guidance at the middle-school level, all of which were developed and led by the students. The students took this work *very* seriously; if we did

not schedule meetings with them in a timely enough manner, they were knocking on our doors asking for a meeting to be scheduled. I will never forget the first time we had students present to staff during professional development. They came into school on their day off, in the morning no less, to speak about how they wanted to build a positive culture at Anywhere High School. They designed the presentation, divided up the speaking responsibilities, and even dressed up. The presentation was very well-received by staff, and the students were beaming.

The student Asset Team also participated in a team-building day during the school year. These events were held off campus, with the team first participating in a volunteer activity, followed by team development and reflection activities that were facilitated by students in a local university's master's counseling program. The leadership skills of students on the Asset Team grew tremendously; the students were becoming more confident in and passionate about connecting with their peers. More importantly, the students' bond as a group was strengthened. I found myself looking forward to meetings with them, excited to hear about their new ideas. I also felt sad that more students did not have the opportunity to be engaged in this way.

After three years of work at this level, both the student and adult teams decided that there was a need to increase the presence of the Developmental Assets. This drive was compounded by our experiences with tragedy during the 2013-2014 academic school year; five students died that year. Two students died by suicide, one due to a car accident, one due to cancer complications, and one due to natural causes. It was a tremendously trying time for the school community, and it underscored the need, along with the feeling

of urgency, to make sure every student was connected to a small group of peers and a consistent adult during their high-school career.

A small group of students and teachers began the work of creating a school-wide advisory period to increase relationship building within the school. We needed to make a big school feel smaller. The process started by holding after-school brainstorm sessions for students and teachers. This platform allowed everyone to share visions for an advisory period at Anywhere High School, no matter how far-fetched the ideas seemed. It was important that students had a voice because this program was for them. We also wanted to avoid a “canned curriculum.” We wanted to create organic, authentic relationships.

This task force met outside school hours to outline the goals of the advisory and to determine ways to implement a course of action. After several meetings, it was determined that the advisory period would be called Innovation Hour because one of the major goals of the time was for students to innovate together. Innovation Hour was created with the Developmental Assets in mind, building on the groundwork that had been laid in previous years.

2013-2014: Year One

After much development over the summer, Innovation Hour began during the 2013-2014 school year. All students were randomly assigned to small groups, with one teacher leader and one student leader. The intent was for students to remain with their Innovation Hour group for the duration of their time at the school.

The two teams (i.e., student Asset Team and adult Asset Team) were merged to form the Asset Team. Several tasks needed to be accomplished before the first Innovation Hour session. This group’s first task was to develop and facilitate a half-day training for the

approximately 120 students who would lead the Innovation Hour groups. The Asset Team also presented an overview about the structure and goals of Innovation Hour to all teaching staff. Live to Give was the focus for the first year of Innovation Hour because the Asset Team believed that engaging students in service projects together would be an effective relationship-building strategy.

While it was very challenging logistically, every student at Anywhere High School was engaged in an Innovation Hour group during the 2013-2014 school year. The primary focus during the first year was service, so groups were encouraged to develop a project of their choice during first semester. Unforeseen logistics put a damper on this freedom. Bussing students to their service sites on the Day of Service, for example, cost the school \$4,000 each time. The individuals involved with creating Innovation Hour's service component did not take those financial obstacles into account when designing the program. Thankfully, the administration was creative and found funding; we were fortunate that the administrators were supportive of the program.

There were also logistical challenges with letting groups design their own service project. For example, some groups wanted to fundraise, but the fundraising paperwork needed to be completed prior to school starting, so groups were not allowed to fundraise. Multiple groups chose the same service site, placing an undue burden on places in the community. Some groups did not follow the protocol that was established to outline and describe the projects, forcing the administration to deny their project. Some students and teachers took this rejection very personally; administrators were doing what they thought was best. Therefore, first-semester service projects were a mix of group-driven or assigned activities.

A Day of Service was performed in December of that year; approximately 1,350 students engaged in over 100 service projects around the community. I will never forget the anxiety that I felt as students were exiting the building, loading busses to head to their service projects. More importantly, I will never forget the smiles on their faces when they returned. *Something* happened when they were out serving together.

Due to the logistical challenges of coordinating so many service projects for the Day of Service, Innovation Hour groups were issued the challenge of finding a way to serve without transportation or money the second semester. This task was met with mixed reviews from students and teachers. Some groups felt their independence had been taken away—the new requirement was too great of a barrier--while other groups relished the challenge. A brief online survey was administered to students and staff at the end of the year in order to collect feedback about Innovation Hour.

2014-2015: Year Two

We are currently in the second year of Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School. We are calling it Innovation Hour 2.0. Significant changes have occurred this year. First, managing Innovation Hour is now largely done through the counseling department at Anywhere High School. There is a collective responsibility for the program. The Asset Team has largely disbanded due to capacity; the enormous behind-the-scenes prep that is necessary for Innovation Hour to happen made scheduling additional meetings with the Asset Team very difficult.

During the previous school year, the Search Institute's Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) was administered at the school to collect social-emotional data from our students. The DAP is a brief-assessment, developed by the Search Institute, that useful

when gathering information about students' strengths and supports. The counselors and school leadership team chose this assessment for its strength-based nature and focus on the Developmental Assets. We were saddened to discover that over half the students were asset-deficient (10% in the *Challenged* range and 43% in the *Vulnerable* range), with just 11% of students surveyed considered to be *Thriving*. Coupled with our alarming 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data that 11.5% of the surveyed youth at Anywhere High School reported attempting suicide, we knew that we needed a major overhaul of the social-emotional environment at school. Due to teacher feedback after the first year of Innovation Hour, we decided to shift some of the responsibility from our students during Innovation Hour sessions, instead developing a curriculum for teachers to implement.

The curriculum was intentional, focusing on the behavior matrix that had been developed at the school during the previous year. This behavior matrix, or The Four Rs as we called it, focused on Respect, Responsibility, Relationships, and Rigor. Each Innovation Hour session addressed one of these Rs along with the behaviors they entailed. Lessons were also designed to address our growth areas as identified by the DAP results. For example, during the past two years, we have been lowest in the Constructive Use of Time category, which includes the assets of Creative Activities, Youth Programs, Religious Community, and Time at Home (Search Institute, 2007). We built a lesson about all of the activities offered at Anywhere High School; the lesson included a description of each activity and encouraged groups to have a discussion about various barriers for participation.

We did, however, continue to invest in the leadership skills for the Innovation Hour student leaders. The students participated in a half-day training about the revised

structure of Innovation Hour. Further, they engaged in a full-day of training that was facilitated by Sources of Strength, a national suicide-prevention program. It is the hope that, by developing the leadership skills of approximately 10% of our student population, the students will be better equipped to connect with their peers in more meaningful ways.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of student engagement and connectedness, illustrated the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets, and described the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that was used for the present study.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for the present study, including an overview of qualitative case studies as well as the data-collection and analysis procedures. The present study features two guiding questions. First, what were students' and staff members' experiences with the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School? Second, do students perceive that they are better connected to school due to Innovation Hour? Further subquestions are as follows:

1. What happened? How would students and staff describe the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour?
2. What meanings or beliefs did students and staff construct about Innovation Hour?
3. Do students' and staff members' stories reflect the broad goal of Innovation Hour: engaging and connecting students to school?

Design of the Study

Qualitative methodology drove the present study. According to Merriam (2009), "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). A qualitative approach enabled me to explore the meaning students and staff have attributed to Innovation Hour as well as to explore whether Innovation Hour met its primary goal of connecting students to school, the purpose of the present study.

According to Merriam (2009), there are four hallmarks of qualitative research. First, there is a focus on the process, understanding, and meaning of an individual's

experience. A second unique characteristic of qualitative research is the use of the researcher as the primary instrument, the human instrument (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers seek to understand participants' experiences with a certain phenomenon, staying true to the participant's perspective versus the researcher's perspective. Third, the qualitative research process is inductive; pieces of information from a variety of sources are combined to form a larger theme, concept, or theory (Merriam, 2009). Finally, qualitative research allows for a rich, thick description of phenomenon. Participants' words and the meaning the individuals have given to their experiences are part of the final product with a qualitative methodology (Merriam, 2009). The present study was guided by these four characteristics of qualitative research along with the case-study methodology.

Qualitative Case Study

While qualitative methodology was the overarching framework, a qualitative case study served as the primary method for the present study. Creswell's (2007) definition of case study was used. He defines case-study research as follows:

a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collecting involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes. (p. 73)

For this study, the case is Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School during the initial years of creation and implementation.

Creswell (2007) provides five steps to conduct a qualitative case study; he adapted them from Stake (1995). First, the researcher must determine whether the research question(s) can be addressed by case-study methodology. The central question for the present research study is as follows: What were students' and staff members' experiences with the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School? The case is bounded by location: Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School. Further, the focus of the present study is the program's creation and implementation, bounding the case by time.

Second, the case must be identified (Creswell, 2007). Both Stake (1995) and Merriam (2009) have discussed how innovative educational programs may be cases, with Merriam stating, "Case study has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations, evaluating programs, and informing policy" (p. 51). Case studies lend themselves to researching phenomena that are complex and functioning. This within-site case explores Innovation Hour, an advisory program at Anywhere High School. The very name, "Innovation Hour," highlights its identity as an original educational program; therefore, a qualitative case-study methodology is an appropriate fit.

Third, researchers must draw upon multiple sources of information to explore the research question (Creswell, 2007). The present study utilized focus groups and reviewed survey data. Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, and Robertson (2013) stated, "the case study approach allows for a holistic understanding of a phenomenon within real-life contexts from the perspective of those involved" (p. 1268). Focus groups with student and adult members of the Asset Team, as well as Innovation Hour's student leaders, were

facilitated. Further, survey feedback collected from students and teachers after the first year of Innovation Hour was reviewed to allow for a thick description of the case.

Fourth, specific strategies of the case-study methodology were employed with the data analysis. Boblin et al. (2013) utilized a qualitative case study (QCS) approach when exploring the implementation of a nursing best-practice guideline. Through the QCS methodology, such as focus groups, individual interviews, and document review, the authors identified case-based themes. A similar method was employed for the present research study. Finally, a detailed case report, including an interpretation of the implications, was provided (Creswell, 2007).

Sample Selection

The research site for this study was Anywhere High School, a public 10th-12th grade high school in a midwestern state. During the first two years of Innovation Hour, approximately 1,350 students were enrolled.

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select students and staff to participate in the focus groups. According to Merriam (2009), “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). Selecting students and staff to participate was purposeful because they were the individuals who helped design and facilitate Innovation Hour. Therefore, all students and adults who were members of the Asset Team in 2013-2014 were invited to participate. Innovation Hour is the “case,” so it makes good sense to include those individuals closest to its creation in the sampling. Additional students who had been leaders for Innovation Hour were also randomly selected to participate in the focus groups in order to add

additional perspectives to the case. Finally, all members of Anywhere High School's counseling department, except me, were invited to participate.

Data-Collection Methods

Exploring multiple sources of information is a defining characteristic of case-study research (Stake, 1995). Case studies typically employ observations, interviews, and document review (Merriam, 2001). Merriam (2001) stated, "Rarely, however, are all three strategies used equally. One or two methods of data collection predominate; the other(s) play a supporting role in gaining an in-depth understanding of the case" (p. 137). The methods used depend on the case and the research questions. Information collected through focus-group interviews was the primary source of data for the present study, with document review serving a supporting role.

Focus groups. Focus groups were conducted with students, teachers, and school counselors. Focus groups are conducted with a group of people who are knowledgeable about a topic of interest and may be used for exploratory or descriptive research studies as well as for program evaluation (Kress & Shoffner, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The use of focus groups for both research types applied to the present study, given the guiding research questions. The case-based nature of the present study allowed for focus groups to gather data about how students and staff members experienced the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour, and whether they perceived it as impacting students' connections to school.

Guidelines for facilitating focus groups were followed (Kress & Shoffner, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Members of the Asset Team had a unique perspective about Innovation Hour because they were the individuals who primarily developed the program.

Purposeful sampling was used to gain an understanding of their perspective (Merriam, 2009). While it is recommended that focus groups be comprised of individuals who do not know one another (Merriam, 2009), the focus-group individuals for the present study are familiar with one another. Because the work to develop Innovation Hour happened together, focus groups were a natural extension of this process.

Student and adult focus groups were conducted separately to encourage honest and unfiltered responses to the interview questions (Appendix A). Focus groups were conducted at Anywhere High School in a private setting, outside school hours, so that class participation and instruction were not impacted for students and teachers. Focus groups were audio and/or video recorded. While recording was a more intrusive way of collecting the data, it ensured that each participant's voice was captured (Merriam, 2001). Video recording was only used for the larger focus group with student leaders because I needed the video to identify individual participants and their contributions.

A semi-structured interview was used for all focus groups (student, teacher, and professional school counselor; Merriam, 2009). In a case study exploring the implementation for a nursing practice, Boblin et al. (2013) stated, "The questions were broad statements, modified to suit the category of the participant" (p. 1271). Because participants represented two levels (student and adult), two developmentally appropriate interview schedules were developed (Appendices A, B, C, and D). Patton (2002) recommended six types of interview questions: (a) experience and behavior, (b) opinion and values, (c) feelings, (d) knowledge, (e) sensory, and (f) background/demographics. These six question types were included in the interview schedule.

I moderated the focus groups. As recommended, I was familiar with the group process through training as a professional school counselor (Merriam, 2009). According to Kress and Shoffner (2007), “it is important for focus group moderators to be clear about their past or potential future relationships with focus group participants and to strive to be aware of any potential ethical issues that may arise . . .” (p. 191). Because I am employed at Anywhere High School as a professional school counselor and work with both the students and staff participating in the focus groups, information about my role in the research study was included with the informed-consent process.

Document review. Focus-group interviews were the primary method of data collection; in order to gain further perspectives about Innovation Hour, survey feedback from participating students and teachers was also reviewed and coded. The addition of survey data allowed for a thick description of the case (Merriam, 2009). Data from the following surveys were reviewed:

- Innovation Hour Feedback Results: Student Version. In the spring of 2014, an Asset Team member created an informal survey with SurveyMonkey; the survey elicited feedback from students about Innovation Hour. All students at Anywhere High School were invited to provide feedback.
- Innovation Hour Feedback Results: Teacher Version. In the spring of 2014, an Asset Team member created an informal survey with SurveyMonkey; the survey elicited feedback from teachers about Innovation Hour. All teachers at Anywhere High School were invited to provide feedback.

Data Analysis

The inductive process of data analysis is a hallmark of qualitative research. Taking a step back from the collected data allows the researcher to look for patterns and to identify themes (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The present study uses both general qualitative data-analysis procedures and more specific strategies for qualitative case-study research.

Braun and Clarke (2006) provided six phases of thematic analysis that were used for the present study:

- In Phase 1, the goal was “familiarizing yourself with your data” (Braun & Clare, 2006, p. 87). During this data-analysis phase, I first transcribed all audio recordings from the focus groups and reviewed video recordings. Transcribing enabled me to identify individual participants and to accurately represent their input. I then read through the data multiple times, looking for initial patterns or themes that were noted in the transcript margins.
- Phase 2 involved “generating initial codes” (Braun & Clare, 2006, p. 87). After a first review of the data, I began to generate a list of initial codes. Phase 2 collected basic elements of the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) advised three strategies for this phase; the strategies were followed. First, I coded as many themes as possible. I had an initial list of 24 codes. Second, when the data were extracted, contextual data were included. Finally, the extracted data were coded multiple times because they initially fit within many different themes.
- Phase 3 involved “searching for themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Once the list of codes was generated, I began to look for larger themes among the

codes. I used multiple mind-maps during this phase to obtain a visual of the data; the mind-maps helped to identify where there was possible overlap among the themes. Extracted data were then organized within the identified themes. I also color-coded the data in the transcripts to ensure that all data fit within the identified themes.

- In Phase 4, the task for the researcher is in “reviewing themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This review included two levels. First, coded extract data were reviewed by reading all extracts and deciding whether they formed a theme. At this level, I began to reassign data to different themes or to consolidate multiple themes into a broader theme. The second level of analysis began once I had developed a thematic map. The entire data set was re-read during this phase in order to ensure that the themes accurately reflected the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “At the end of this phase, you should have a fairly good idea of what your different themes are, how they fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data” (p. 92).
- Phase 5 involved “defining and naming themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). During this phase, the “story” of each theme was told through organized data extracts. Subthemes emerged through this process, especially because some themes included large amounts of data. Theme names were developed to clearly communicate the themes’ meanings to the reader.
- Finally, in Phase 6, the researcher is tasked with “producing the report” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Once themes were clearly identified and defined, the final report told the data’s story. Chapter 4 provides data extracts

that were chosen to bring the data to life and to validate the themes. Further, it was important to choose data pieces that illustrated the multiple sources of the voices for the focus group and survey data (i.e., students, teachers, and school counselors).

In addition to the general steps of qualitative data analysis just described, a careful and detailed description of the case as well as self-reflection were also included (Creswell, 2007).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Establishing trustworthiness is a process. Creswell (2007) described eight validation strategies, such as prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checking, or clarifying researcher bias. He recommended using at least two strategies when establishing qualitative data's trustworthiness. I used the following strategies:

- First, I employed triangulation, or the use of multiple information sources, to gather various perspectives. Focus groups and a document review of the survey were performed for the present study in order to gather multiple vantage points of Innovation Hour. In addition, the focus groups included students and staff members who were at various points of “closeness” to the development of Innovation Hour, again allowing for multiple perspectives.
- Second, I had prolonged engagement in the field. I was heavily involved with Innovation Hour from its inception as well as being part of the school culture and structure. This perspective aided in the data-collection and analysis process.

- This “closeness” to the research required another strategy, clarifying my bias. Through a statement about my role in the research, including past experiences and assumptions relevant to the case, the reader could understand how those perspectives may affect data interpretation.
- Finally, a thick description of the data was employed as a validation strategy. This process enabled the reader to decide whether he/she can generalize the findings to other settings (Creswell, 2007).

The Role and Bias of the Researcher

I was in my fifth year as a professional school counselor at Anywhere High School. I was heavily involved with the development of Innovation Hour, going back to the initial steps of introducing the Developmental Assets to the staff. While my primary role for Innovation Hour was to supervise the Asset Team and student leaders, I became one of the de facto Innovation Hour leaders during the first year by assembling curriculum for teachers and student leaders, receiving emails and phone calls from teachers about the process, and problem solving that subsequently took place. Needless to say, I was strongly invested in Innovation Hour’s success. I believed that the program can be an important way to get every student connected with a small group of peers and an adult mentor in the building. Feeling a connection to school can be especially challenging in a large high school, and I noted this challenge while working at Anywhere High School. I was mindful of my bias to the program in the data analysis, and I took steps to objectively look at the collected data. For example, the initial phase of the data analysis was the most difficult for me because it felt the most personal. Hearing student stories, especially those that involved struggles, was hard for me. Consultation with my adviser,

as well as stepping away from the data for a brief period of time, allowed for some clarity.

Research Steps

The present study used the following research steps:

- Participants (student and adult) were invited to the study by the researcher, being informed about the risks involved through informed-consent procedures as outlined by North Dakota State University's Institutional Review Board.
- Focus groups (student and adult) were held (outside school hours) with participants at Anywhere High School.
- Focus groups were audio and/or video recorded and transcribed.
- Survey data were reviewed by the researcher.
- The researcher coded the data (focus group and survey) for case-based themes.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the methodology for the present study, including an overview of qualitative case studies. Five steps, as described by Creswell (2007), of case-study research were employed. When conducting this with-in site case study of Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School, multiple data sources were gathered to be consistent with case-study design. An inductive data-analysis procedure was used, including both general qualitative data-analysis steps as well as a detailed description of the case and setting.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The purpose of this research study was twofold. First, a primary goal was to understand students' and staff members' experiences with the creation and implementation of a school-wide advisory, Innovation Hour. A qualitative case-study research design (Stake, 1995) was used to increase the understanding of Innovation Hour's inception and implementation, informing subsequent development of advisory programs at the secondary level. Second, the case-study approach lent itself to programmatic evaluation, meaning that it helped to explore whether Innovation Hour promoted an increased connection to school.

Two research questions drove the study. First, what were students' and staff members' experiences with the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School? Second, did Innovation Hour meet the driving goal of connecting students to school? Additional subquestions further guided the case study (Creswell, 2007):

1. What happened? How would students and staff describe the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour?
2. What meanings or beliefs did students and staff construct about Innovation Hour?
3. Do students' and staff members' stories reflect the broad goal of Innovation Hour: engaging and connecting students to school?

Chapter 4 provides the research findings based on an analysis of the focus-group and survey data.

Background

Four focus groups were conducted for the present study. The following individuals participated: (a) student Asset Team members, (b) Innovation Hour student leaders, (c) professional school counselors, and (d) teacher Asset Team members.

Four students, three former students and one current student, participated in the student Asset Team focus group. Eight students who were Innovation Hour student leaders participated in one focus group. Four professional school counselors (the entire counseling department except for me) participated in a focus group. Finally, five teachers, adult members of the Asset Team, participated in that focus group.

Study Findings

The following themes emerged from the data:

1. Buy-in was a significant challenge for students and staff when implementing Innovation Hour.
2. Logistics were a barrier when implementing Innovation Hour.
3. Innovation Hour was defined by its student-led delivery and service focus.
4. Student and staff leaders saw signs of progress with connecting and engaging students to school because of Innovation Hour.

The four themes are described below along with quotations from the focus-group data to illustrate each theme. It is important to note that pseudonyms are used to protect participants' confidentiality.

Theme 1: Buy-in was a Significant Challenge for Students and Staff When Implementing Innovation Hour

Participants discussed how buy-in for Innovation Hour was a challenge, perhaps the greatest challenge for the initiative. Cam, a student leader, stated:

A lot of people don't like it. And, I don't think it's that they don't like being involved in some way, but I think it's because of how it's executed again . . . and how the teachers aren't very excited about it either, it doesn't seem like. So, with that, or teacher excitement that they have, then the students just kind of feel the same way about it.

Cam's statement illustrates why this theme was further divided into the subthemes of (a) Teacher Buy-in Challenges and (b) Student Buy-in Challenges.

Teacher buy-in challenges. Teacher buy-in was a challenge for staff and students. Ted, a professional school counselor, stated:

I think we may have jumped the gun just a little bit with the small group of kids who were super excited about it [student-led Innovation Hour] . . . but now what we're realizing . . . is that there is that teacher buy-in that needs to happen and that's not necessarily there . . . not from all, not from everybody.

Part of teacher buy-in may have been due to lack of teacher preparedness to handle the new role. Gary, a professional school counselor, discussed teachers' abilities to help create student buy-in, stating:

One would think that they're doing the same kind of motivational teaching, to get their students excited and feeling like their subject matter is relevant somehow and being, wanting to, wanting to learn more, wanting to come to class and learn

about whatever they're teaching, and . . . so why wouldn't they have this schema for doing this? I don't know . . .

Anywhere High School employed approximately 120 teachers. When asked how many teachers would volunteer to facilitate Innovation Hour, participants approximated 30-40. Teacher survey data also provided documentation for this theme. For example, one teacher said, "I understand the motivation to create new relationships for students. However, the whole experience felt forced and artificial."

Sally, an adult Asset Team member also saw challenges with staff buy-in. She described interactions that she had with staff regarding Innovation Hour:

Some of the staff that are negative towards it and verbally communicate that . . . I think that sends a message to the students too, that, um, so that's frustrating. We all know that when you try something for the first time that it's not going to go perfectly, so um, to try to you know, talk it out, listen to my fellow staff members who are frustrated, to then, also try to explain, "You do understand this is the first time," to you know, kind of, ease their feelings just a little bit too, but it was frustrating . . .

Students were attuned to this negativity, especially sarcasm, by teachers regarding Innovation Hour. Zach, an Asset Team student, described hearing teachers talk about Innovation Hour: "Like, their tone of voice when they bring it up, like, 'Ooo, we have Innovation Hour' . . . it's just kinda like a downer on the student leaders." The following exchange occurred between the focus-group facilitator and student Asset Team members:

Facilitator: What does a not "pumped up" teacher look like or sound like?

Zach: You can just hear the sarcasm in their voices . . . like . . . some teachers will change . . . one day, they'll be pumped up and excited, and the next day, they'll be like . . . you can just hear the sarcasm in their voices when they talk about it.

Marie: They're just not excited about it; it's not something they would only do in school, so they don't want to be a part of it, almost . . .

Having teachers who were not invested in the process was a challenge for student leaders who were also trying to create student buy-in. Jennifer, an Innovation Hour student leader, stated:

Our teacher last year was very condescending it seemed like, in a way, like any time we would come up with an idea, he would be like, 'Oh no, you can't do that, blah blah . . .' and so, in that way, he wasn't really helpful in motivating the students, so that was a really big challenge.

Marie, another student leader, further stated:

Yeah, like the teachers who were on board, like, thought we were doing good things . . . that felt good, their interaction . . . interacting with them was easy. But, those teachers who weren't really into what we were doing, they just sort of blew us off.

Student leaders were looking for an ally in the classroom when they were trying something new and trying to get their peers on board, and they did not always find one.

Student buy-in challenges. A second subtheme was about student buy-in for Innovation Hour. There were various challenges with student buy-in during the first and

second year of Innovation Hour. Student leaders struggled with challenging group dynamics. Ryan, a student leader, stated:

I feel, some days, it's hit or miss. Like, some days when we have extra time, we'll play Hang Man or something, play a game, and it seems like they are collaborating and we are blending a little, and then other days when we're trying to have a discussion, it seems like everyone is off on their own, or they have one friend in there and they're just kind of with them the whole time . . .

Many students discussed how it was challenging to lead an Innovation Hour when students did not interact with one another and when no one was talking.

Bruce, a teacher, also discussed challenging group dynamics as well as the willingness or ability to navigate that difficulty:

I think it depends on who your kids are, who your leader is, because I mean our group, we could go on for at least an hour . . . we could probably go a whole day with stuff . . . you know, really. And then some groups just can't, whether that charisma isn't there for the leaders or whatever else. And that's a big thing, a big part of it too . . . how comfortable are both sides? Teacher leader? Student leader? How comfortable are both sides . . . with facilitating this conversation? And, can they spark that, that next level of questioning?

When reviewing the anonymous teacher survey data collected after the first year of Innovation Hour, many teachers seemed to believe that their group's success depended upon the student leader. For example, one teacher stated:

From what I observed, the Innovation hour groups were only as good/strong as their student leader. Some student leaders were absent, or didn't go to meetings so

didn't know what was going on, or did not lead the Innovation hour meetings and were meek and quiet. Great care needs to be taken to ensure that we have effective student leaders or make sure to place a more tentative leader with a charismatic teacher that will assist them . . .

This statement illustrated another element to the buy-in challenge. There was disagreement from students and staff about whose responsibility it was to help garner buy-in for Innovation Hour among the students.

Student focus-group members perceived that there was a certain amount of buy-in from their peers that was linked to the student-led delivery during the first year of Innovation Hour. When that delivery method changed, the second-year participants had concerns that shift hurt student buy-in. Ted, a professional school counselor, stated, "I think that the kids who are involved are the ones who are, somewhat liking Innovation Hour, and the ones who aren't, just aren't because it's just like another thing they're supposed to do." Brynn, an Asset Team student, echoed this sentiment stating, "they see it as another class, so they are supposed to go to it, so they go to it." Some students even stated that they felt students attended Innovation Hour to avoid detention. Kim, an Innovation Hour student leader, talked about struggling to lead her peers during Innovation Hour:

Just trying to get people excited, especially with things that we're doing now [second year], students don't really care about them, really I thought, in my group, the different rigor things that we had to do . . . like explaining the 4 Rs [curriculum]; none of the students in my group really cared about that at all, so it was super hard to get anyone interested or involved at all.

Student buy-in then, even from student leaders, seemed to largely hinge on the original student-led delivery of Innovation Hour. The following text is a discussion between the facilitator and a student leader:

Jessa: I think the hard part, too, is, like, we're a leader, but we don't really have control over anything, so it's not like we can really even offer them an incentive or like, something more interesting, you know what I mean? Because we're like "Oh, you should come!" But we don't know what's going on . . .

Facilitator: So, you're like a cheerleader just getting them through the door?

Jessa: Yeah, but, we don't even know what to cheer about most of the time!

Students understanding Innovation Hour's purpose seemed to be an ongoing part of student buy-in.

Theme 2: Logistics were a Barrier When Implementing Innovation Hour

Participants discussed the logistical challenges for implementing Innovation Hour, many of which could not have been predicted. Ben, an adult Asset Team member stated, "Yeah, the logistical and monetary burden was more than I ever imagined it would be . . . crazy." Student Asset Team members also felt the burden of unforeseen logistics. Zach, stated, "Yeah, we had a bigger dream of things than what we could do, like, even just as simple as bus rides [laughter]; we couldn't get bus rides!"

The first major logistic discussed was money, especially in relation to how it impacted Innovation Hour's service component. The following feedback came from the anonymous teacher survey after the first year of Innovation Hour:

There was no money, opportunities were limited because [because] it had to be during school hours, we put in 2 different proposals [proposals for service projects] and both were turned down - it did not seem like there was room for 'innovation' because [because] of all the constraints. I think this is a great idea but without more funds and support it is lack luster.

This statement illustrated another logistical challenge: the choice between allowing groups to develop their own service projects or having the projects assigned. Students wanted the freedom to choose their service projects. Ryan, an Innovation Hour student leader, stated:

I feel like last year they told us they wanted the classrooms to come up with their own service project, and my class came up with one, and they switched it. They told us it wasn't good enough or that there wasn't a good enough plan. And we came up with another one, and they told us it wasn't a good enough plan again, so they came up with one for us. . . . I just feel like they didn't give us an opportunity or a reason to why we couldn't end up doing what we wanted to do.

Students also provided feedback about the number of groups that were assigned to each service site, concerned that too many students were placed at one site, limiting the opportunity for engagement.

Another logistic that was frequently discussed was the amount of time for each Innovation Hour session. The first-year Innovation Hour sessions were one hour in length and were held every other week. Teachers and students complained about the length of time in their survey feedback, asking for Innovation Hour sessions to be shorter and less frequent. The second year, there were only eight Innovation Hour sessions that were 30

minutes each. Focus-group participants discussed the change. Here is an excerpt from the teachers' focus group:

Doug: And like, I don't know, the times need to be longer, but . . . maybe more frequency to it? I think.

Ben: It's funny because last year "They're too long!" and then this year, "They're too short!" [laughter]

Professional school counselors also discussed their concern about the second year's structure, wondering if the time component might have been one of the biggest barriers in building relationships. Lori, a professional school counselor, made the following statement when asked how to improve Innovation Hour in the future:

definitely the structure, you know, re-evaluating what the structure should look like . . . how often they should be meeting, and getting other people involved in that discussion besides us because we have a narrow perspective too compared to the rest of the staff and administration, making that decision as a whole if we really want to invest in this, then we have to do it right.

Theme 3: Innovation Hour was Defined by its Student-Led Delivery and Service Focus

Perhaps the strongest theme for the present study, students and teachers were clear about their belief that Innovation Hour was defined as a student-led program. This theme emerged largely due to students' and teachers' frustrations with changes to Innovation Hour during the second year. This theme was further divided into the following subthemes: (a) Negative View of Structure Change, (b) Additional Supports, (c) Belief in Leadership Abilities, and (d) Service Focus.

Negative view of structure change. During focus groups, many participants compared and contrasted the two varying structures of Innovation Hour: student-led and teacher-led. The format was changed because of teacher feedback after Innovation Hour's first year. It became evident that student and teacher leaders preferred the original format. Student-led delivery defined Innovation Hour for them. Asset Team teachers had concerns with the structure changes. They discussed how the 4 Rs curriculum and associated activities felt disjointed when compared to the first year when all activities revolved around the final service project. For example, here is an exchange between two teacher leaders:

Doug: What I've struggled with this year leading a group is, is between the activities; they seemed a little disjointed. Last year . . . just a connectedness with it [the activities] and then that connection with seeing, whatever it is that we're doing. Something coming from that. Like we did that, um, school . . . the school thing, the how can we improve the school thing, and I don't know, it's kind of amazing when all of the kids . . . it might seem silly or dumb to us, you know, muffins [Muffins were eliminated from the school's breakfast offering due to new nutrition regulations; students were upset and talked a lot about how to get them back.] . . .

Ben: Yep. [laughing]

Doug: So let's figure out a way to bring that back, or obviously we're not going to retrofit windows in the building, to actually like, have it be addressed . . .

Ben: Some application . . .

Doug: Yes, some application.

For teacher leaders, this lack of student voice and action during the second year was a concern.

The biggest worry for staff and students was how the change impacted student leadership. Some staff had concerns that giving teachers more control during the second year hurt student leaders. Ben, an Asset Team teacher, stated, “some of the leaders have, I guess, diminished in their care, and so now [second year], they are actually some of the biggest naysayers in the groups, so they hurt Innovation Hour even more.” This change in student leadership buy-in was echoed by Thomas, a teacher, who stated:

I feel, even this year, they aren’t sure what their role is sometimes since it is more on the teachers. Like at what point should I step in or do I step in at all? Um, compared to last year where it was kind of on them . . . sometimes it went really, really well. Sometimes, obviously, it failed miserably, but I think they had more of a defined role at that time.

The adults were disappointed and frustrated, but no one criticized and felt the second-year shift more than the students. Ryan, a student leader, stated:

It seems like this year they just kind of gave up on us, and um, on letting us be leaders at all, making it all teacher-led which means we’re not leading at all, but we are still classified as them, and we just sit in the background.

Brynn, an Asset Team student, also discussed this role confusion:

I feel like the student leaders feel like they have no purpose because it’s the teachers that are doing it . . . um . . . I know in my classroom the student leaders

are never utilized. . . . I don't think anyone even knows who they are . . . the teacher will just put on the PowerPoint, and we kind of just awkwardly go into the task. Um . . . I feel like I liked it better last year because I wasn't part of a group [Her role was to support Innovation Hour student leaders in the classroom.], and I feel like I had more of a purpose.

Students who were a part of creating Innovation Hour were frustrated and called for Innovation Hour to return to its roots. The following text is an exchange between the focus-group facilitator and student Asset Team members:

Facilitator: Ok. How could Innovation Hour be improved in the future?

Zach: Not teacher led!

Brynn: Yeah, exactly. That killed it.

Facilitator: You think that killed it?

Zach: Yeah, [laughter] absolutely.

Further, students and teachers reported missing the initial excitement behind the original format of Innovation Hour.

Marie, a student leader, stated, "I feel like it was a lot more powerful when it was led by students . . . it meant more almost when students were doing it and teachers weren't." When asked to imagine whether there was a compromise between the two structures, students struggled to see how that would work and were pretty firm in their perspective that Innovation Hour needed to be led by students.

The general population of students had the opportunity to anonymously provide feedback about Innovation Hour after the first year. They, too, liked the freedom during

the first year of Innovation Hour, especially in choosing their service projects. It was different than the usual day-to-day routine. Now, Innovation Hour seemed forced.

Additional support. Rather than drastically changing the format of Innovation Hour, students in the focus groups called for additional support as a way to solve some of Innovation Hour’s first-year challenges. For example, Ryan, a student leader, stated:

I feel like they, they didn’t map out exactly where they wanted each day to go, and, um, they kind of just gave us a packet and said, “Here you go, you know, do your own thing,” and I didn’t know what their vision of leadership, what they, what we were supposed to do was . . . So I think that . . . maybe a class every week to kind of get together, like what we’re doing now, and have each leader talk about what’s going well in their classes, what’s not, so they can kind of collaborate with other leaders to talk about what would work better in each group.

Teachers also called for additional student supports. For example, an anonymous teacher-feedback statement said, “Students didn’t know how to lead. They need training before they are put in a situation. When I tried to guide the leadership, my suggestions were ignored . . .” The anonymous survey data strongly suggested that teachers felt the student leaders needed more support or guidance.

A few pieces of data suggested that additional support may be necessary for teachers, too, as Innovation Hour called for them to engage with students in a different way. An anonymous piece of teacher feedback read:

This is a bit out of my comfort zone, so I came away wishing I had been a better teacher leader. That being said I was trying to keep it focused on the student

leadership model as it was intended to be (I think). There are going to be growing things with this just as with any new and courageous endeavor. Great work! I'm glad we had this adventure. Next year will be better.

Belief in leadership abilities. Despite the challenges with buy-in and students' and teachers' frustrations with the format changes, there was still a belief in students' leadership abilities as was communicated by focus-group participants. Adult Asset Team members talked about their support for the students leading Innovation Hour. When asked to describe successes with Innovation Hour, Bruce stated:

I think any time, any time our kids are put on display, they are, when they are the ones on stage performing, those are the best parts of Innovation Hour because they're . . . they take it seriously, no matter who they are; they change . . . because they understand that they have a responsibility to somebody else at this point in time. And those, I think, are the best experiences in it.

Several other examples from staff emerged, highlighting the defining belief and importance of students as leaders. Sally, regarding her experience working with student leaders being trained the first year of Innovation Hour stated, "just interacting with the students and getting to see them in that leadership role, seeing them do that together . . . It was kind of nice getting to step back and not be the one teaching them stuff . . ." Ben echoed this sentiment, stating, "Yeah, that Microsoft thing [the initial training for Innovation Hour student leaders during the first year] was fun. I felt like, you coach them up and then let them do their thing. You know?" Gary, a professional school counselor, stated, "What motivated me, from what I understand is that, at some point, it came from students; it was something they thought we should be doing, and for me, that's huge."

This subtheme was where there was the biggest disconnect between teacher leaders and teachers in the general population, who provided anonymous feedback after the first year. There seemed to be a belief among some of the general teaching staff that not all students were prepared to be leaders. For example, one staff member stated, “As great as it is to get a cross-section of students to be leaders I really do think you need to get the true leaders in the school into those positions [student leaders in Innovation Hour] to build a positive atmosphere . . .” Therefore, while teacher leaders felt confident in students’ abilities to lead Innovation Hour, some general teaching staff members were hesitant.

Service focus. The service component of Innovation Hour seemed to be a defining characteristic for both the staff and student focus-group members. Students perceived that most service experiences were positive, even when groups did not get a choice for where they served. Here is an excerpt from Kim, a student leader:

People were kind of upset going into it, but like, I know our Innovation Hour teacher told us we were going to the old nunnery, so my, I don’t even know what that is [laughter . . .

[laughter by group]

. . . so my entire group the whole day was like “This is going to be so stupid. Why do we have to do this?” But then, like, when we actually got there, it was fun, so it was just kind of like being forced to do something, but then when you actually do it, it’s alright.

Anonymous student feedback from the survey that was given after the first year of Innovation Hour verified service as a defining feature of the program. When asked to

identify the best part of Innovation Hour, most students listed “service.” However, many students did call for more freedom or choice to decide on their service project.

Adults also saw service, an important act for students to experience, as a defining feature of Innovation Hour. Ted, a professional school counselor, stated, “They [students] actually did something where they put themselves second . . .”

Sally, a teacher, stated:

They [students] really like, they truly like serving their community. Some of them, I think, they were surprised. We went to a retirement, um, facility and played games with the older people there, and they just, they really enjoyed that. Some of them were surprised; they said they really enjoyed, you know, being around older people . . . [laughter] . . .”

An anonymous teacher comment from the survey data read, “Most of the students in my Innovation Hour really enjoyed planning and participating in the community-wide project.”

Theme 4: Student and Staff Leaders Saw Signs of Progress in Connecting and Engaging Students to School because of Innovation Hour

Implementing Innovation Hour was a monumental task, one with lots of logistical challenges. Despite these challenges, participants described small changes in how students at Anywhere High School may have been impacted to Innovation Hour. Ben, an adult Asset Team member stated, “Yeah, I think it showed them [students] that we cared enough to try something . . . like I’ve had students and teachers say that it doesn’t always work the way we thought it would . . . but at least we tried, and, they like that.” This

theme was further divided into the following subthemes: (a) Student Leadership Development, (b) New Relationships and Connections, and (c) Positive Side Effects.

Student leadership development. Perhaps the greatest indicator of new connection and engagement at Anywhere High School was in the student leaders themselves. Despite the challenges they endured with buy-in and logistics, student leaders remained confident in their abilities and were steadfast with their commitment to Innovation Hour. Students were proud of their involvement with such a major initiative. Marie, an Asset Team student, stated, “I think it felt good, like, just for everyone to know that it was us [students] and we like did it . . . like last year when people were excited about it, it felt really good to be a part of that . . .” Even Asset Team students, who were lesser known in the school prior to Innovation Hour, recognized their role to create change. Brynn, an Asset Team said the following when describing the Asset Team: “Yeah, we were like a behind-the-scenes group that did little projects to ensure like a better quality of our school . . . um . . . to ah . . . help generations coming up . . . and to um, help the people in the school now already have a better atmosphere.”

New relationships and connections. Focus-group participants reflected on whether Innovation Hour fostered new connections in the building. Gary, a professional school counselor, made the following statement:

I have to believe and assume and hope that there are students out there that have made new connections either with other students or teachers . . . it just, it just has to be. With that number of groups and that number of students, there has to have been new, meaningful connections made. . . .

Ben, a teacher, made a statement that illustrates how, despite the challenges of Innovation Hour, there may be some small gains. He said:

And, what do you mean by connected? I mean, some of them still show up even though they seem to hate it? Like that one girl that I was telling you about . . . she shows up and doesn't say anything the whole time, but then she'll come to my classroom later one day randomly and visit with me. So, she's totally more connected to school even though she seems not to enjoy Innovation Hour at all, so . . .

Additional staff members' statements added to this sentiment that Innovation Hour had given them opportunities to connect with students that they may not have otherwise known even if, during the actual Innovation Hour period, students do not seem interested.

Teachers saw the Day of Service as one part of Innovation Hour that aided in establishing these new connections. Bruce, a teacher, stated:

There are a lot of kids, you know, that have that kind of heart who want to help people . . . and they don't succeed in school, so five days a week, they basically come here and eat and not see success, but that day they are able to see success. And those teachers are able to see them succeed, to see them in a different light. A lot of people were able to see their students in a way different light, you know, and I think that opened up a lot of eyes, I think, for our teachers.

Ben, a teacher, added, "Yeah . . . to see them [students] in a different light, and they see you a different light, like you're actually human and you do things outside of the school, weird [laughter]."

Students, too, saw small signs of change. Jessa, a student leader, reflected on the growth she saw between the first and second year of Innovation Hour:

The first year, everything was like super cliquey, like, nobody was interested in like, everybody chatting or working together, and I think that, like this year I think that's gotten better, like even when we're having a discussion, um, like people are interested in contributing and listening to other people and chatting with them, and like finding out where they're from and stuff, and like, it was a lot better I think this year, and I think that might have been some of the activities we've done.

Pieces of anonymous student feedback also illustrated this positive shift. Students were asked to identify what they liked best about Innovation Hour; they said things such as, “meeting new people and working together to make the school better” or “I like how we socialize with others.”

Positive side effects. Focus-group participants discussed other examples of changes in the school culture, possibly as a result of Innovation Hour. For example, Ben, an adult Asset Team member, stated:

I would say I feel like there are more of these types of things going on in our school now than my first five years here . . . just like “Random Acts of Kindness” weeks cropping up and people having these movements that they want everyone to follow and stuff. So, I think some of those things are what we had in mind for this, and I think it's been an accidental offshoot . . . which is really awesome.

Students also saw increased pride to be part of Anywhere High School. For example, Jennifer, a student leader, stated,

I think the connection to the school is becoming a little better because, last year, um, people didn't have the motivation, and they said things were stupid, but then this year when we started to do the video and we had to say how we're respectful, how we're responsible in the school, I feel like they took a lot more pride in themselves and each other, which was pretty cool.

Researcher Reflection

Being a leader for Innovation Hour has been personally and professionally challenging. Gathering honest feedback from key players in the movement was even more challenging, even emotional at times. I put a lot of thought and effort into this movement because I believe in it. I also felt protective of the people, especially students, who stepped on a limb to try something new. They signed up for the leadership opportunity; they volunteered, so hearing about the struggles they endured because of Innovation Hour was difficult, especially when it was at the hands of people who have the ability to be their greatest support, teachers. Gary, one of the school counselors, made the following statement during a focus group in reference to what other learning communities could take from our current situation: "I have to, again, think that other schools may be thinking about this, but not wanting to jump in and put your head on the chopping block and try it." The phrase "head on the chopping block" resonated with me. There is huge risk and vulnerability in trying to create reform in education.

It was a challenge for me to sit in the focus groups and not jump in to defend any of the statements or to fix the problem. It was also a challenge to look at the data through a strengths-based perspective in order to see what was working with Innovation Hour. Buried in some of the negative comments were statements of hope; these thoughts were

important for me to bring to light. It sounded like student leaders were very challenged by their peers and teachers, but despite all of that, they wanted to jump right back into the ring. They believed in this; they were frustrated with some of the results, but they still believed in the work. I heard a story of leadership development and the necessary support for students to take the risk to lead. I heard excitement in the students' voices when they described the process of creating Innovation Hour. I heard students excited about the opportunity to lead; they were proud to be part of a school-wide initiative and were proud to have a voice.

In listening to the focus groups, I became concerned about some things that people were not directly saying about our school's culture and the buy-in for Innovation Hour. It struck me that no focus group really owned its piece of the puzzle concerning Innovation Hour challenges. It seemed easier, or at least a more culturally acceptable, for people to point fingers than to reflect on their role in the solution. For me, that spoke to a culture shift that we need to make to support one another's vulnerabilities.

A statement from Brynn, an Asset Team student, gave me hope. She talked about her experience in leading such a major school-wide initiative:

It was like something we just worked really hard on, and we talked a lot about and spent like extra time on it, and then just to see something like not work was, um, it wasn't fun . . . It wasn't fun to hear people saying it wasn't something they enjoyed; it wasn't something they looked forward to . . . but, like, you have to listen to that and like work from it instead of let it tear you down, I think.

There was a resiliency in her statement that boosted my spirits. She felt strong enough in her skills as a leader to take negativity and to learn from it. Sometimes, it can feel like

you are a minnow swimming in a vast ocean during reformative efforts, but it is clear that we are creating a pretty powerful school of minnows at Anywhere High School.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the research findings based on a thematic data analysis of focus-group data and survey data. Findings were discussed according to the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Focus-group data were the primary source of information, with survey data serving as a method of triangulation.

Four themes emerged from the data analysis. First, buy-in was a significant challenge when implementing the program. Second, there were logistical barriers during implementation. Third, Innovation Hour was defined by its service-led delivery and service focus. Finally, students and staff members saw signs of progress for connecting and engaging students at school because of Innovation Hour. Chapter 5 provides a Discussion of the results as well as recommendations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore students' and staff members' experiences with the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour as well as to explore whether they perceived an increased student connectedness to school due to Innovation Hour. Four focus groups were conducted with students and staff; survey data were used to triangulate the research findings. This chapter reviews, analyzes, and discusses the research findings. Limitations and areas for future research as well as Recommendations for Educational Leaders are discussed.

Discussion

Two research questions drove the present study. First, what were students' and staff members' experiences with the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School? Second, did Innovation Hour meet the driving goal of connecting students to school? Additional subquestions further guided the case study (Creswell, 2007):

1. What happened? How would students and staff members describe the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour?
2. What meanings or beliefs did students and staff construct about Innovation Hour?
3. Do students' and staff members' stories reflect the broad goal of Innovation Hour: engaging and connecting students to school?

The research questions were answered by the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Research Subquestion 1: What Happened? How Would Students and Staff Describe the Creation and Implementation of Innovation Hour?

Themes 1 and 2 highlighted the buy-in and logistical challenges of implementing Innovation Hour. Participants discussed the ongoing challenge of buy-in for Innovation Hour. Negative comments, such as those which were sarcastic in tone, were especially hard on student leaders who were taking a personal risk to lead Innovation Hour. Despite the challenges with buy-in, I did not, however, hear any groups call for Innovation Hour to end. They believed in the concept. The day-to-day activities at a school can be very predictable, and Innovation Hour was asking both students and teachers to do something different. Perhaps they were not ready or were not prepared for the shift.

Turnbull (2002) explored factors that supported teacher buy-in for school reform efforts. Factors included things such as adequate training, adequate resources, or control over how the reform looked in their classroom. It is possible that students and staff did not feel supported with their new roles during Innovation Hour, especially if necessary resources or training were not present. Participants discussed the struggle with group dynamics; it was especially difficult for them when students were not talking during Innovation Hour. These data suggested that groups were likely in the forming or norming stage of the group process (Capuzzi, Gross, & Stauffer, 2011). Students and staff may be largely unfamiliar with group process, and knowing basic information about group stages may be helpful in reframing some of the negativity associated with Innovation Hour.

Innovation Hour's logistical burden was more than any of us could have imagined. The amount of behind-the-scenes prep time required for Innovation Hour sessions was significant; in addition, there was the monumental task of organizing the

Day of Service each year. Feedback from the students and teachers illustrated how the difficult logistics were sometimes a barrier to relationship building and may also have hurt buy-in. When put in a new position, like Innovation Hour called for, having logistical consistency may help people to feel safe and to feel like they have some control. When logistics shifted from the first to second year, not to mention throughout the year, this change undoubtedly caused some angst and frustration among students and staff. All logistical changes were made with good intentions, but feedback highlighted the need for further communication about potential changes for Innovation Hour.

Research Subquestion 2: What Meanings or Beliefs Did Students and Staff Construct about Innovation Hour?

Perhaps the most significant belief that emerged from the study was that of Innovation Hour being a student-led initiative, as discussed in Theme 3. Participants, especially students, believed that Innovation Hour was a unique opportunity for students to lead. There was something about Innovation Hour's original format that really resonated with students. When looking at this theme through a strengths-based lens, there may be an opportunity to build Developmental Assets through Innovation Hour. For example, the Search Institute defines the asset of *Youth as Resources* as follows: "Young people are given useful roles in the community" (Search Institute, 2007). Through Innovation Hour, student leaders had a voice and a role in the school community, and focus-group students took that responsibility seriously.

Innovation Hour was also largely defined by the opportunity to serve by both students and staff – they believed the Day of Service was perhaps one of the biggest successes of the initiative. Other than feedback about logistical challenges for the service

dates, students and staff were largely positive with their descriptions for the Day of Service. Again, this component may build the asset of *Service to Others*, which is defined as “Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week” (Search Institute, 2007).

This belief in Innovation Hour as a student-led movement came to light most when students were confronted with the structure change. They were very disappointed and even hurt. Students had very strong descriptions for these structure changes; students described feeling as if they did not do a good enough job leading the first year; therefore, the opportunity was taken away from them. The momentum that Innovation Hour had going among the students during the first year seemed to be lost when more structure, curriculum, and teacher responsibility were introduced. Students even ventured to say that these changes “killed it.”

The second-year structure changes were largely made due to logistics and staff buy-in, not to support student growth. Innovation Hour, students felt, was supposed to be different than the typical experience they had at school; it was designed to encourage relationship building and student engagement. Students experienced much of the same when curriculum was introduced; they even started to view it as a class, something they had to attend to avoid detention.

Research Subquestion 3: Do Students’ and Staff Members’ Stories Reflect the Broad Goal of Innovation Hour: Engaging and Connecting Students to School?

In Theme 4, students and staff members shared examples of increased student connectedness that Innovation Hour may have influenced. Perhaps the most significant subtheme that emerged from the data was the student leadership that developed through

Innovation Hour. Despite all the struggles, despite encountering negativity from their peers and their teachers, and despite logistical struggles, I heard students asking to continue Innovation Hour. Even more encouraging, I heard students asking to lead. There was a resiliency in their answers; the students endured challenges and pushed through, asking to try again. To this end, Innovation Hour may be promoting school connectedness, especially with how committed students were to leading Innovation Hour (Bond et al., 2007).

Students wanted to lead, but they also wanted help in doing so. Unfortunately, in terms of school connectedness, it was disheartening that only one teacher was identified by name throughout the entire data set. I expected more students to talk about their connections to teachers. If an important protective factor for students is a relationship with teachers (Bond et al., 2007), how to further foster these relationships may be an area of growth for Innovation Hour.

Action Steps at Anywhere High School

The following list contains possible action steps for Innovation Hour at Anywhere High School that are based on the needs identified through the data analysis:

1. Town-hall meeting: Town-hall meetings for students and staff to provide input about Innovation Hour will be held prior to making further refinements to the program. The present study highlighted concerns about the present structure (i.e., teacher led, 30 minutes per session, and infrequent meetings during the school year). It will be important to engage students and staff in a solution-focused discussion about how to improve Innovation Hour.

2. Establish ongoing communication channels for students and staff: It will be important to establish a means for student leaders to express their feedback about Innovation Hour throughout the school year. I am disappointed that we did not know the extent of students' frustrations with the current structure because a solution may have been identified earlier. Monthly community meetings or an anonymous tip box, for example, may be a way for students to know there are established channels for them to provide feedback about Innovation Hour. It will be important to have a comparable format for teachers, too. Teachers need to be given an outlet where they can share questions, comments, or concerns that they may have about Innovation Hour.
3. Education and training: Student and staff feedback from the focus groups highlighted the need for additional education and training. For example, information about the group process, including what to expect during each stage, may be beneficial. It will be important for this training to be ongoing and in response to needs identified by students and staff.

Limitations and the Direction for Future Research

The following section provides a discussion regarding the limitations of the present study along with suggestions for future research. First, other than the anonymous survey feedback from students and teachers that was used as a method of triangulation, the present study did not give voice to the general population regarding Innovation Hour. Only those students and teachers who had a role in leading the initiative were included. Focus groups that include students and teachers from the general population, asking

about their experiences with Innovation Hour, is an area for future research, especially because Innovation Hour was designed for the general population of students.

Second, there were logistical factors within the focus groups that were limitations. The present study was time limited because the end of the school year was approaching. This brief timeframe did not give me time to facilitate more than one session with each focus group. Participants may have offered more in-depth feedback had they been given more opportunities to meet as a group. Also, the question order on the interview schedule may have limited feedback on aspects of Innovation Hour. For example, the question about the perceived influence of Innovation Hour on student connectedness was asked at the end of the focus group. Most participants seemed like they were beginning to disengage from the process when they knew we were nearing the end of questions. They may have given different, or additional insight, had that topic been one of the first questions.

Finally, the present study did not quantitatively evaluate Innovation Hour. Exploring ways to examine the measurable impact of Innovation Hour will be important. For example, trends in the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) or the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) may be appropriate.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

The following recommendations could assist students and staff who may be interested in starting a program that is similar to Innovation Hour:

1. Lay a foundation: The initial buy-in for Innovation Hour by administrators, teachers, and students came largely from our foundation of knowledge in the Developmental Assets. Teachers had been exposed to strengths-based

language years before starting Innovation Hour. Discussing the Developmental Assets and their importance in students' lives helped garner the buy-in we needed to start new programming.

2. Data: Data have played an integral role in creating, implementing, and sustaining Innovation Hour. For example, the need for this type of programming was highlighted in our 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) data. Collecting survey data from students and staff after the first year of Innovation Hour influenced the changes that were made for the second year. Even if these changes were not as effective, the act of giving the general population a voice about the program was beneficial.
3. Student voice: When given the opportunity and a supportive environment, students will tell you what they need. We started the dialogue about a potential advisory program with students, not teachers or administrators. The students were candid about what was missing in the school and were excited to lead. They became the face of Innovation Hour, meeting with everyone from teachers to district-level employees when we first started to gather support for Innovation Hour.
4. Garner administrative buy-in: Innovation Hour would not have been implemented without our administrative team. These individuals were instrumental in identifying the logistical issues that people without their training missed, such as financing for bussing or how to adapt the class schedule to accommodate Innovation Hour. The administrators also helped

lend credibility to the program, especially when first gaining buy-in from teachers.

5. Involve and address teachers' needs: Next to students, teachers are the greatest asset to ensure the success of a reformative effort. If teachers are invested in a movement, it may encourage students to do so as well. Adequate training, resources, and ongoing support are integral for supporting teachers who are called to interact with students in a different way during an advisory program, such as Innovation Hour. Some essential training, for example, may be about the group process, including what to expect during each group stage.
6. Create a system of continued communication and support: One of the greatest identified areas of growth within our program was the need for continued communication and support, especially because buy-in is an ongoing process.

Conclusion

Innovation Hour is a unique advisory program that was created at Anywhere High School to foster increased student connectedness to school. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore students' and staff members' experiences with the creation and implementation of Innovation Hour as well as to gauge their perceptions of whether Innovation Hour influenced an increased student connectedness to school. What emerged was a story of resiliency and willingness to *innovate* among our students and staff. Despite its challenges, students and staff believed in the importance of Innovation Hour; students believed in their abilities to lead a school-wide initiative; and everyone was eager to engage in something meaningful.

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APPENDIX A. SCHOOL COUNSELOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

School Counselors

1. Tell me about Innovation Hour.
2. What motivated you to be a part of Innovation Hour?
3. Tell me about a time that you felt Innovation Hour was going well?
4. What kinds of challenges did you experience with Innovation Hour?
5. Tell me about your interactions with students regarding Innovation Hour? With teachers?
6. What was it like leading such a major school-wide initiative?
7. What kinds of successes did you experience with Innovation Hour?
8. How could Innovation Hour be improved in the future?
9. Do you perceive students being more connected to school because of Innovation Hour? If yes, how so?
10. What else would you like to share about Innovation Hour?

APPENDIX B. STUDENT ASSET TEAM INTERVIEW GUIDE

Student Asset Team

1. Tell me about the Asset Team.
2. Tell me about some strengths of the Asset Team.
3. Tell me about some things that have been challenging with the Asset Team.
4. Tell me about Innovation Hour.
5. What motivated you to be a part of Innovation Hour?
6. Tell me about a time that you felt Innovation Hour was going well?
7. What kinds of challenges did you experience with Innovation Hour?
8. Tell me about your interactions with other students, your peers, regarding Innovation Hour?
9. What was it like leading such a major school-wide initiative?
10. What kinds of successes did you experience with Innovation Hour?
11. How could Innovation Hour be improved in the future?
12. Do you perceive students being more connected to school because of Innovation Hour? If yes, how so?
13. What else would you like to share about Innovation Hour?

APPENDIX C. STUDENT LEADER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Student Leaders

1. Tell me about Innovation Hour.
2. What motivated you to be a part of Innovation Hour?
3. Tell me about a time that you felt Innovation Hour was going well?
4. What kinds of challenges did you experience with Innovation Hour?
5. Tell me about your interactions with other students, your peers, regarding Innovation Hour?
6. What was it like leading such a major school-wide initiative?
7. What kinds of successes did you experience with Innovation Hour?
8. How could Innovation Hour be improved in the future?
9. Do you perceive students being more connected to school because of Innovation Hour? If yes, how so?
10. What else would you like to share about Innovation Hour?

APPENDIX D. TEACHER ASSET TEAM INTERVIEW GUIDE

Teacher Asset Team

1. Tell me about the Asset Team.
2. Tell me about some strengths of the Asset Team.
3. Tell me about some things that have been challenging with the Asset Team.
4. Tell me about Innovation Hour.
5. What motivated you to be a part of Innovation Hour?
6. Tell me about a time that you felt Innovation Hour was going well?
7. What kinds of challenges did you experience with Innovation Hour?
8. Tell me about your interactions with students and other teachers regarding Innovation Hour?
9. What kinds of successes did you experience with Innovation Hour?
10. How could Innovation Hour be improved in the future?
11. Do you perceive students being more connected to school because of Innovation Hour? If yes, how so?
12. What else would you like to share about Innovation Hour?