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Working-Class Graduates' Perceptions of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens Training and Its Impact on Their Life Choices and Future Success

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Working-Class Graduates' Perceptions of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* Training
and Its Impact on Their Life Choices and Future Success

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine working-class graduates'

perceptions of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training. This purpose was accomplished

through a qualitative analysis of data. The data was collected from interviews of graduates and

teachers. Following the coding process, graduate data was then reduced to the following

categories: social awareness, relationship development, teamwork, communication skills,

empathy, self-awareness, and self-confidence which created the themes of interpersonal skills

and intrapersonal skills. Four additional graduate themes were created from decision-making

data: weighing pros and cons, prioritizing outcomes, thinking long-term, and real-life

applications. Additional graduate data was provided from a survey on grit. Teacher data was

reduced directly to the following themes: increased self-responsibility, increased awareness and

respect for others, increased goal planning skills, and improved relationships. Graduates

indicated that the training courses had a positive impact on their life choices, future success, and

decision-making skills. Yet, graduates only scored slightly above the mean on a grit survey.

Teachers believed the training course benefited the working-class students. The graduates

indicated some of the success of the course stemmed from the teachers. The perceptions of the

working-class graduates and the teachers in this study provided understanding and knowledge

that could help school leaders make curriculum and policy choices to help improve their school

culture and climate in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. As a child, when I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up – my answer was a doctor. This was not the kind of doctor I was thinking, but I finally made it. Mom (Libby Ashley), thank you for helping this little boy's dream come true. Thank you for always encouraging me, believing in me, answering the phone when I called no matter the time, and helping to create the man I am today. Dad (Kenny Ashley), thank you for being my dad. Thank you for helping this working-class kid become something more. Thank you for telling me to go to college, and thank you for instilling in me a strong work ethic, integrity, and perseverance. Lauren (my beloved wife), thank you for everything. This only happened because of you. Thank you for driving me to Fayetteville for class, finding one more article, proofreading, encouraging me, pushing me, and especially sacrificing your time to parent our children in my absence. You are a wonderful mother and wife. To Anna Zimmer (my AZ girl and daughter), you were with me from the start. You took the first trip with me to Fayetteville for class at two months old. Thank you for being proud of me and giving me the time to write and finish this. I am so proud to be your dad; I love you. To Slayton (my best buddy and son), thank you for always encouraging me and making me feel like the best dad ever. I am so proud to be your dad; I love you. Thank you both for sacrificing part of your childhood for me to complete this dissertation journey. To all my other family and friends that have given support and sacrificed time, I thank you. Finally, I thank my heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, for giving me this awesome support system and for answering my prayers by blessing me with wisdom beyond my years. Without His strength and wisdom, being a doctor would still be just a dream.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Problem

Every year, students across the country begin a journey – a journey called high school – and in just a few short years, it comes to a screeching halt. These students consider themselves grown and leave the confines and routines of high school to enter a world of freedom and opportunity. Unbeknownst to them, their freedom may be their downfall; their opportunity could be their misfortune. This is a familiar story that occurs every year after students leave high school. For thirteen some-odd years, they know what they are going to do every August – start school – but this August is different. There is the unknown; will it be college, military, work, or a career?

The future is unsure, but most students want to have more, produce more, and be more than when they were children. Students must determine what this feeling of "more" really is for them. Currently, there is a push in American education to prepare the vast majority of students for college. In 2010, 75% of high school students stated they planned to attend college (MetLife, 2011). However, based on the national ACT results in 2017, only 39% of high school students are actually prepared for college (ACT, 2017).

Many students graduate from high school, but life is not as easy as they thought it would be. Some students are unable to achieve the hopes and dreams (i.e., the "more") they had for their lives. Rossi & Mebert (2011) found "working high school graduates" have more depression, anxiety, and decreased life satisfaction when compared to college graduates or current university students. They also found the "working high school graduate" tend to lack a future time perspective and development a mentality of "just getting by" (Rossi & Mebert, 2011). Many graduates face this problem. They leave high school without a plan, no idea of

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what to do next, or no habits around which they could build their lives. This problem cannot be easily remedied or answered because it is unique for every graduate and his/her individual situation. Research offers a variety of solutions to explain their feeling; some research states they feel unprepared due to an increased focus on high-stakes testing during school years (Livingston, 2010), lack of family involvement (Halawah, 2006), lack of parental understanding of how to help graduates plan (Nagel, 1999), disconnect between teachers and students (Kline & Williams, 2007), and a lack of student initiative (Johnson, Duffett, & Ott, 2005).

Johnson, Duffett, and Ott (2005) surveyed more than 1,300 young adults, and the vast majority of them never planned to end up without a two or four-year degree. The young adults were operating from a survival mode and did not have a purposeful plan to follow. Without additional education or training, these young adults are frequently unhappy in their jobs and do not see their current positions as future careers when compared to their peers with additional education and training. Forty-eight percent of this group stated their current position is "just a job to get by" (Johnson, Duffett, & Ott, 2005).

On paper, these students state they have a plan, but many graduates simply "try out college." They do not recognize their lack of commitment. Nor do they realize their lack of skills limit their ability to perform at an adequate college level. It is no surprise that of the more than twenty million students enrolled in a college degree program, 50% will not graduate and 30% drop out in their first year (Johnson, Duffett, & Ott, 2005).

Overwhelmingly, students agree they could have done more in high school to be better prepared for their future, but also believe their school should have done a better job in helping to prepare them for a successful future (Johnson, Duffett, & Ott, 2005). The schools work to have

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the students prepared in math, science, and English, but what about attendance, timeliness, work ethic, and social-emotional learning? These types of skills are required in all areas of life.

A student's home environment is as important as what goes on in school. Often, the parents of these children struggling to find success in life after high school struggled themselves. They may still be struggling to find life satisfaction. Their parents likely did not have a plan either (Nagle, 1999).

In research, these students have been described as working-class students. Hurst describes this group as working-class students due to the majority of their parents have working-class jobs. She defines their roles as "jobs with little prestige, little pay, and little power and autonomy. Historically these jobs have not required extensive formal training" (Hurst, 2012, p. 3). Although this term can include a variety of descriptors, working-class students are typically described by the following statements:

- not a major behavioral issue

- in regular education classes

- getting by making B's maybe a few A's and C's along the way

- planning to further their education with a "see how it goes" attitude

- parents never attended any kind of post-secondary education or only for a short period of time

- do not have parents or mentors that know how to help them after high school

- without an actual plan on how to succeed in life and in college (Hurst, 2012).

This systematic issue of working-class students and lack of future planning is far-reaching. It is the skills taught by educators that can positively influence the working-class student and this, in turn, can improve a community's well-being. This problem can be observed

as students graduate from high school. It is desirable that the working-class students improve over time as they take action and ownership in their ability to plan their futures. Their action and ownership not only enhances the student but also has a direct effect on the entire school system. As the student advances, so does the school system and this creates positive leverage for society.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine working-class graduates' perceptions of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training. More specifically, to determine if *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training is effective at the high school level and if working-class students are able to learn the higher-level skills needed to help them be successful in life after high school. What are the students' perceptions of how *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training has created change in their lives? What skills do they believe they acquired from completing the training course? How will the working-class students perceive these skills? It would also be helpful to know how the teachers of the program feel about their students before and after the training.

These working-class students are not equipped with the ability to make the choices needed to help them achieve a fulfilling life. Many of the working-class students do not have the family support system and higher level reasoning skills to aid them in fulfilling their stated desires following high school graduation. An intervention strategy that could have assisted these recent graduates early on in their lives is character education, or more specifically a social-emotional learning program. Character education is more of an umbrella term. Character can encompass many attributes, such moral and ethical values as respect, fairness, and caring – as well as responsibility, trustworthiness, decision making and self-management skills (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Ryan & Cooper, 2000).

Researchers have previously defined character education as intentional efforts by schools and teachers to foster good character in students and to help them acquire a moral compass. Character education teaches a sense of right and wrong, and the enduring habits necessary to live a good life. Character education programs also help teach the students to make informed decisions, communicate effectively, develop coping skills, and learn self-management skills that help an individual live a healthy and satisfied life (Ryan & Cooper, 2000). Social-emotional learning (SEL) is just one component of character education. SEL specifically focuses on self-awareness skills (understanding other people and their perception of you), self-management skills (accepting responsibility for one's actions), relationship skills, and decision-making skills (Collaborative for Academic, Socials, and Emotional Learning, 2018).

In 1976, Stephen Covey began to research a way to help people succeed and make a difference in their lives and in the lives of others. He began to study how to move people from being ineffective to becoming effective. Through his research, he developed seven habits and soon authored a book titled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. His book describes seven interrelated principle-centered habits (Covey, 2004).

Covey classified the first three habits together, and they were called private victory (Covey, 1989). These habits surround the idea of a person moving from dependence to independence (Covey, 1989). Habit 1 is Be Proactive, which is the power to choose and to take responsibility for the choice that is made. Habit 2 is Begin with the End in Mind, which means to have a mental plan and a written mission statement for one's life. Habit 3 is to Put First Things First. Covey says that this is managing one's time by doing what is most worthwhile first as it is aligned with one's mission statement (Covey, 1989). The next three habits are called public victory. These habits surround the idea of moving a person from independence to

interdependence (Covey, 1989). Habit 4 is Think Win-Win. Covey defines this as individuals

seeking mutual benefits in all interactions with others. Habit 5 is Seek First to Understand, Then

to be Understood, which means communicating well by careful listening and honest expression

of one's own point of view. Habit 6 is Synergize. Synergize means working interdependently

with others for a greater, more creative outcome than one would have had alone. The last habit

relates to renewal. Habit 7 is Sharpen the Saw, which Covey defines as a process of self-renewal

(Covey, 1989). Covey asserts that the habits are universal (Covey, Merrill, & Merrill, 1994;

Covey, 1999). Although the implementation of the habits is situationally and culturally specific,

the universality of them is shared (Covey, 1999).

Initially, Covey was not focused on the age the individual acquired the habits, but later he

realized the earlier in life a person put the habits into practice, the more successfully absorbed

and implemented they were. In 1998, Stephen Covey's son, Sean Covey, adapted the original

seven habits into a version for teens titled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and the

publisher's website states the book "applies the timeless principles of the 7 Habits to the tough

issues and life-changing decisions teens face" (Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2014). Covey's habits

are currently taught in elementary, middle, and high schools in the United States as a means to

improve schools. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* book has sold over five million copies

and is marketed as "a roadmap—a step-by-step guide to help you get from where you are now, to

where you want to be in the future. Your goals, your dreams, your plans." (Simon & Schuster,

Inc., 2014). The FranklinCovey website states: the objective of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective

Teens* workshop is to help youth: "gain greater control of their lives; improve relationships with

family and friends; increase self-confidence and self-esteem; make wiser decisions; overcome

addiction; define their values and what matters most to them; get more done in less time; be

happy; find balance between school, work, friends, and everything else" (Secondary education solutions, 2013).

High-pressure education does not always mean success outside of the high school setting. Just because a student can master a standardized test successfully does not mean they will have equal success in a professional work environment or the self-discipline to navigate the pressures of living independently. Zhao's (2009) supported the previous notion of successful school performance and high IQ are not necessarily reliable predictors of life success. Further, Zhao (2009) questioned whether the focus on academic skills valued in schools is actually relevant to the skills required to be successful in life. Although the typical focus on high academic performance will not go away, it is important to examine the idea of integrating curriculum to develop social and emotional competence into students' academic curriculum. Educators desire to teach skills that are relevant and assist students in being successful in the school environment and in life (Covey, Covey, Summers, & Hatch, 2014).

Research Questions

The primary research question is: how do working-class graduates perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training as having an influence on their life choices and future success? There are also sub-questions that will be examined. How have *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training affected their decision-making skills? How do the working-class graduates score on the Grit Scale (Duckworth, 2016)? How do teachers believe *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training benefits working-class students?

The study of working-class students' perspectives about *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training is important because I want to know if graduates think it changed their thought process and assisted them in achieving their goals. If they do not believe it helped, I want to

know why, and what the graduates think would assist them to reach their goals. I would like to learn if teaching *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training is effective at the high school level and if working-class students internalized and apply the executive functioning skills (problem-solving, conflict resolution, coping, and future orientated planning skills). Every freshman at Zimmer High School for the past eleven years has participated in the teaching *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training; if the intended results are not being achieved it is important to realize this in order to make changes to improve the course's effectiveness.

Research Approach

This qualitative study utilized a transcendental phenomenological approach. This study will seek to determine a deeper understanding of the working-class students' views of their opinions of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course. As described by Creswell (2009), some characteristics of this study are consistent with a case study approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 graduates of Zimmer High School from the past eleven years via the telephone. They were also asked to complete an online survey. Semi-structured interviews with the five of the teachers that currently teach, or have taught *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course at Zimmer High School were also conducted on the telephone. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identities. Interviews were then transcribed and coded utilizing multiple cycles.

Researcher Perspectives

As I grew up, my father always told me to be more than he was. As a teenager, I was not really sure what he meant, but now as a parent myself, I understand. I want more or better for my own children than I had. I desire for my own children to have a rewarding life where they

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are engaged in fulfilling work and contribute to the common good. I believe most parents feel the same way. They want their children to be more than just getting by in life.

Like most of my friends, when high school was over, I knew the expected thing was for me to go to college. I went and the first semester was incredible. I had more freedom than I had ever had before, but that freedom would be my doom during my second semester. Six months full of freedom produced grades that were weak and less than expected. The second semester was the changing point. I failed several classes, dropped others, and nearly flunked out of college. I was this working-class student, but I was a lucky one. Someone came beside me and helped me.

There are thousands of students who struggle with this same problem. As a former high school principal and now superintendent, I see this scenario too often. I understand these students and have become sensitive to their needs. Several years ago I went through *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* training. It was an eye-opening experience for me. I thought if this program could be adapted to high school students, it could make a difference in the outcome of the working-class student. With the help of twelve teachers, we started *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training six years ago. I did not teach any of the students but trained the teachers who taught it. I feel the program worked, but I am biased. The adult program helped me in the past, and I invested in the implementation of the teen program at a high school where I was previously the principal. This study will look at another local high school that has implemented *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* with their ninth-grade students. Currently, I am the superintendent of a rural district in the Mid-South, where we are now working to implement *The Leader in Me*, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* curriculum for elementary students, at the elementary school in our district. Although I believe the curriculum is beneficial

to any individual, I will do my best to set aside my bias to determine the actual benefit of the "working-class" students in this study.

Researcher Assumptions

Working-class students desire to make plans and execute them but are not equipped with the tools and decision-making skills to create and implement a well-developed plan. They are not able to anticipate issues, and when difficulties arise, they do not have the support system needed to navigate these challenges. I also assume their parents desire for their children to be successful and achieve their plans, but have difficulty knowing how to help.

Rationale and Significance

The reasons for this study comes from my desire to know if *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* is affecting the students' decision-making skills and assisting them in preparedness for life following high school graduation. As a high school administrator for eleven years, I too frequently saw the same story play out for many "working-class" students. Their future plans seemed to rarely come to fruition. This study will provide valuable research that will impact how secondary teachers, counselors, principals, superintendents, and parents educate students about their futures prior to graduation.

I want more and better for my own children than I had. Most parents feel the same way. The problem for most parents, like my father, is they do not know how to help their son or daughter achieve this. What if someone would have given these students something that could have contributed to carrying them past graduation? Would it change things? What if there was a way for graduates to have a plan, an idea of what to do next, or habits around which they could build their lives. Students would be able to leave high school with confidence. They could leave and have a desire to do something – something more. That something is not acquiring more

money, things, or stuff; but it is the ability to make a difference, change a path, become a better person, or help someone else succeed.

Definition of Terms

Character education program – is an umbrella term utilized to describe teaching a variety of skills to children and adolescence that will assist them to develop into moral, responsible, well-mannered, healthy, and successful adults that are capable of contributing to society. Some specific programs include, but not limited to, moral reasoning, violence prevention, social-emotional learning, life skills training, ethical reasoning skills, and conflict resolution training (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006).

Empathy – the ability to share and understand another person's feelings.

GPA – grade point average based on a 4-point scale.

Self-confidence – believing in one's own powers and abilities.

Social awareness – the ability to understand and respond to the perspective of others.

Social capitalism – refers to the unwritten rules of interaction and preferred tastes of the dominant social class (Bourdieu, 1984).

Social-emotional learning – is the process of acquiring and applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, show empathy to others, develop and foster positive relationships and the ability to make wise decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Socials, and Emotional Learning, 2018).

Teamwork – a group of people working together to accomplish a task that would be much more difficult or impossible to complete alone.

The Leader in Me – book written by Stephen Covey in 2008 and tailors the message of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* to children. *The Leader in Me* also consists of a curriculum

that is now utilized in over 3,400 elementary schools to incorporate the habits at an early age

(Leader in Me, 2018)

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens – self-help book written by Sean Covey in 1998 and is

primarily based on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* written by Sean's father, Stephen

Covey in 1976. The book's purpose is to assist adolescents in becoming more independent and

productive young adults (Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2014).

Working-class students – Following Hurst's (2012) definition working-class students for this

study will be defined as students with the following chariteristics: not a major behavioral issue;

in regular education classes, getting by making B's maybe a few A's and C's along the way; and

planning to further their education with a "see how it goes" attitude.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine working-class graduates' perceptions of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training. Specifically, to gain a deeper understanding of the working-class students' perspective of how *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training is assisting them to be more prepared for their futures. I sought to gain a deeper understanding of character education, particularly its history in the United States and current scholarly research, specifically regarding social-emotional learning programs. I examined current character education meta-analyses and sought to explore specific character education programs with high school students. Then I examined two meta-analyses that specifically focused on SEL programs and the effects this training has particularly on high schools students.

Next, I examined the current body of literature regarding working-class students and gained a deeper understanding of the research related to adolescent goal achievement. Finally, I sought to explore research on grit, the term researcher Angela Duckworth coined, and its relationship to student goal attainment.

Methodology

To complete this study, it was necessary to complete a critical review of current literature. To conduct the literature review, I used a variety of information sources including dissertations, professional journals, books, and periodicals. These sources were accessed through a variety of online databases: ProQuest Central, Ebsco Academic Search Complete, LexisNexis Academic, Google Scholar, and Eric (Ebsco). Keywords utilized in searches included, but not limited to: higher level reasoning skills, character education programs, social and emotional learning programs, values education, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, *The Leader In Me*, working-class students, grit, noncognitive components, student success, student

goal attainment, student decision making skills, and student future planning. I selected studies published in peer-reviewed journals.

When looking at historical studies, a specific time frame was not utilized. However, when searching for recent literature, I sought to include studies completed in the past ten years, but made exceptions if a particular study provided critical information (for example, the inclusion of a meta-analysis from 2005). Since the body of literature regarding *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* is shallow, I included studies as early as 2005.

Character education programs are interventions that are implemented for one purpose – to help improve students. When a new intervention is added, it is important to evaluate its effectiveness. If an intervention is not effective, the reason must be studied. The results of the previous studies should then help determine the next intervention. This process of interventions, research, and change is an ongoing process to help students improve.

History of Character Education

Character education began long before formal education began. Years ago, character education was integrated into all aspects of education (O'Sullivan, 2004). As times and people have changed, the definition and meaning of character education have also changed (Glazner & Milson, 2006). Thomas Lickona (1991) defined character as "knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good" (Glazner & Milson, 2006, p.532). Character education can include anything from values clarification, to citizenship, to moral guidance. In the fourth century, Plato and Aristotle believed the role of education was to train good and virtuous citizens (Glazner & Milson, 2006; McClellan, 1999). Throughout the history of American education, the emphasis placed on character education has fluctuated. In early colonial America, the moral development of the youth was of great importance in all aspects of life from school, church, work, and in the

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home. With the emergence of the division between church and state, the conflict arose over whose moral values should be taught in schools (Glanzer & Milson, 2006).

Two Supreme Court decisions in the mid-1960s continued to secularize character education in public schools. These two decisions made prayer and religious teaching unconstitutional in public school (Brimi, 2009). At this point, public schools began utilizing values clarification program which allowed a child to clarify his values without any interference from another person (Glazner & Milson, 2006).

In the late 1960s, James Comer began piloting a program called the Comer School Development Program at Yale University. He believed the child's experiences at home dramatically affected their ability to achieve in school. Also in the 1960's, a movement among mental health practitioners developed a set of guidelines for teaching social-emotional learning in school (Smith, 2013).

In 1994, the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was created. The concept of SEL was propelled into the popular culture in 1995 with a book by New York Times science reporter Daniel Goleman. Goleman published *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, in which he argued that character matters and, more significantly, the skills that build character could be taught (Coleman & Argue, 2015).

In 1983, the United States Department of Education issued a report titled *A Nation at Risk*. This report stated that the country's mediocrity and loss of focus on high expectations and discipline required to meet those expectations were eroding the country's educational foundation (Johanningmeier, 2010; Stedman & Smith, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* renewed the country's focus on academic achievement, especially in the areas of math, science, engineering, and foreign

language to aid in allowing American students to be competitive in the new global village (Johanningmeier, 2010).

By the late 1980s, many communities across the country began to reintroduce character education programs locally in their schools. There was a nationwide call for school leaders to determine a list of character qualities or virtues that everyone could agree on to serve as a guiding principle for character education programs. For the first time, state laws were attempting to create a secular approach to character education (Glazner & Milson, 2006). Following the Columbine shootings in 1999, the national support for character education funding was at an all-time high. Programs such as Character Counts and Six Pillars of Character became very popular and were being implemented in many schools across the nation (Brimi, 2009).

Throughout both the first Bush administration and the Clinton administration funding for school-based character education increased rapidly (Rossomando, 2008). In 1993, the United States Department of Education created the Character Education Partnership (CEP) to lead the country's character education. The CEP identified the following as the main reasons for incorporating character education in schools: to improve school climate and culture, increase teacher satisfaction, enhance student achievement, and prevent disruptive behaviors. Their report stated effective curriculum was needed to lead the change in students' behavior (Mulkey, 1997).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law was enacted in 2001. NCLB began the process of revamping the nation's school to increase test scores. This Act required each state to create measurable goals to improve student academic performance (Brown, 2013). Although the character education movement was growing in popularity, the ability to determine the effectiveness of each program was a challenge. Soon the educational community recognized

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their valiant efforts were not creating the intended change in student behaviors. Drug Abuse

Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) is an example of a modern national character education

program that received significant funding, but research did not support the effectiveness of the

program. Numerous studies were conducted throughout the 1990s and early 2000s citing the

ineffectiveness of the program. Studies showed participating in the D.A.R.E. program did not

have any impact on adolescents' drug use (Lynam et al., 1999).

Following the lack of carryover experienced in early modern character education

programs in the 1990s, the government recognized further assistance was needed to help develop

effective programs. The United States Department of Education has continued to expand the

support for character education. The government provides grants to assist in designing,

implementing, and sustaining effective character education programs for students (Rossomando,

2008).

Best Practices for Effective Character Education Programs

Each year thousands of character education programs are completed, but many of these

programs are not effective in meeting their desired objectives. Frequently teachers view the

program as another activity they are forced to fit into their day, and students recognize it as free

time; therefore, programs are executed with very little preparation or fidelity. Numerous studies

support the notion that character education programs do little to create change in student

behavior and their future decisions (Davis, 2003). The body of research concerning character

education programs is controversial.

There is also extensive research which supports the notion that well planned and executed

character education programs can create positive, long-lasting change in students' lives. In 2005,

the CEP completed a study analyzing more than 100 character education and two meta-analyses

that accounted for more than 100 additional studies. The purpose of the study was to determine common elements in previously successful character education programs (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). From 1995-2001, United States Department of Education's CEP provided 45 grants for pilot projects to implement character education programs that adhered to their eleven principles. This initiative thoroughly analyzed each study to gain additional insight into elements that aided in their success and also aspects that created infective programs as well (United States Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2008). In 2010, Stedje also completed a character education literature review and comprised a list of best practices for character education programs. All three studies determined character education programs can create change in students' lives if they are designed and implemented correctly (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Stedje, 2010; United States Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2008).

Each of the reports emphasized the importance of staff training to the effectiveness of a character education program. Training all staff provides everyone the same information needed to provide the students with a clear, consistent message (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Stedje, 2010; United States Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2008). Effective character education programs do not typically utilize only one delivery strategy. Some programs use whole school reform models, classroom lesson-based models, target behavior models (e.g., bullying prevention), integrated component models, or a combination of delivery methods. Schools also can choose to utilize an already developed program, use a combination of several programs or create their own grassroots program (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Typically, the most successful strategies include direct instruction on character attributes, peer interaction during

small group time, and provides role-play and cooperative learning (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Stedje, 2010).

Effective character education can have many different outcomes. Berkowitz and Bier's 2005 study stated the following:

> Character education affects various aspects of the "head" (knowledge, thinking), "heart" (emotions, motivation), and "hand" (behavior, skills). There is evidence that character education frequently improves academic performance, reduces risk behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, pre-marital sexual behavior), increases desirable behaviors (e.g., altruism), and improves social-emotional and pro-social competencies (e.g., socio-moral reasoning, problem-solving skills, emotional competency). (p. 6).

The most effective programs also encourage student input and reflections. The purpose of a character education program is not to teach the student a standard set of responses. Actual moral development occurs when an individual can internalize a value and be able to apply that idea in a real-world environment. Effective training teaches students to utilize ethical reasoning to apply sound judgment to each situation they encounter (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Stedje, 2010).

Effective character education programs are integrated throughout the students' day and not just a thirty-minute unit two times a week. A program is most effective when teachers learn how to incorporate the character education principles into all aspects of their curriculum; the teachers consistently take advantage of the teachable moments that naturally occur throughout the day (Stedje, 2010). It is beneficial when the entire school community shares a clear and consistent character related message; this includes recess, lunch, and athletic events (Character Counts 5.0, 2016).

Family involvement is a critical component that significantly affects the success of character education programs. When families have opportunities to participate in their children's character education programs, the programs are more likely to be perceived successful.

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Effective programs provide parental training and also might include the parents in the design and delivery of the program (United States Department of Education, 2005 & Stedje, 2010).

Effective character education programs typically create a steering committee to provide direction and leadership, instead of placing one person in charge of the initiative. This steering committee is charged with the responsibility of selecting and keeping track of the measurable goals of the program. The committee can work together to direct the program, answer questions, facilitate training, and solicit parental involvement instead of relying on one person to lead the initiative (Narvaez, Bock, Endicott, & Lies, 2004).

The most effective programs also choose specific aspects to measure. Collecting data enables the steering committee knowledge of the long-term effects of the program, but also helps to prevent them from losing sight of the end goal throughout the process (Growing Character, Cultivating Achievement, 2007). The most common approach is for school officials to collect student performance data on attendance, discipline, and academic performance. Different character education programs choose to measure various types of data; it is important to measure variables meaningful to the school and community. Collecting and evaluating data takes time, but the result of the analysis provides insight into where the greatest needs are and where efforts should be directed (Stedje, 2010).

Research suggests character education programs are most effective when they begin in elementary school (Narvaez, 2010). An effective character education program includes a system that reinforces positive behaviors, help youth better deal with life, and avoid becoming involved in harmful behaviors. When initiated in the elementary grades, the training typically begins before the problem behavior emerges (Battistich, Schaps, Watson, & Solomon, 1996). Overall,

teachers do not believe the character education programs utilized in the high school setting are age appropriate (Romanowski, 2005).

Time constraint was the most common issue cited by the United States Department of Education pilot study project (United States Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2008). Developing new initiatives requires a significant time investment for all staff, particularly of teachers, who already have numerous responsibilities demanding their attention. Curriculum development and publicizing the effort also takes time (Stedje, 2010). Teachers already struggle to address objectives required by their course's frameworks; adding new character education curriculum creates an even greater time constraint in the classroom. A second issue reported was insufficient staff support of the program (United States Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2008). For a program to be effective, it takes a significant time commitment from teachers and administrators. The success of a character education program will be compromised if there is a lack of cooperation between administrators and teachers. Administrative support, particularly support of the school principal, is a major factor in the success of a character education program (United States Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2008).

Meta-Analyses on Character Education Programs

Despite the rapidly growing interest in and implementation of character education, Berkowitz and Bier (2007) recognized there was not a comprehensive review of the research base for effective practice. In 2005, they completed an extensive project to look at existing research to help determine what is truly meeting the desired outcomes in character education. Berkowitz and Bier identified 109 research studies that included character education results and evaluated each of these studies for the scientific rigor of its research design. This study

determined 33 effective character education programs, which included 69 research studies on these 33 specific programs (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). Berkowitz and Bier's study also found approximately 50% of the research studies included in the meta-analysis were deemed successful in achieving the desired outcomes of the particular character education program (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007).

Diggs and Akos (2016) completed a meta-analysis similar to Berkowitz and Bier's, but their study only includes programs with middle school students and studies published since the previous meta-analysis in 2005. Diggs and Akos found the majority of the programs included in the 2005 meta-analysis were conducted with elementary students. The 2016 meta-analysis initially screened 133 studies, but only eleven of the studies met their research criteria. Their results show character education programs in middle school successfully decreased problem behaviors and increased pro-social behaviors, but this study did not show a meaningful effect on the students' academic outcomes. Given the small sample size, the results of this meta-analysis must be taken lightly but highlight the need for increased research on populations other than elementary students (Diggs & Akos, 2016).

However, the body of research does not universally support the benefits of character education programs. Results of a 2010 meta-analysis commissioned by the United States Department of Education did not find character development programs improved student outcomes or teachers' perceptions of school climate. The sample included 84 schools that were utilizing one of seven frequently used school-wide character education programs with third to fifth graders. The study examined twenty student and school indicators including school climate, student behaviors, academic performance, and social and emotional growth (Ruby, Doolittle, & National Center for Education Research, 2010). Some character education advocates have

heavily criticized aspects of the study and do not feel the results are valid due to the short time span of the studies in order to determine the long-term effects (Sparks, 2010).

Character Education Programs in High Schools

A vast majority of the character education programs are completed in the elementary grades. In 2015, Lin completed a meta-analysis of citizenship programs in public schools. He found character education programs are typically utilized with lower grades; whereas, service learning and political simulations are included with secondary students. The challenge is developing character education programs that the secondary student will engage and positively benefit (Lin, 2015).

Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) completed a comprehensive four-year, multi-method study that included five large school districts. Four of the schools utilized prefabricated programs and the fifth school developed their own character education program. Each school was required to use a character education program. The degree of implementation and level of enthusiasm varied between schools significantly. Surveys, behavioral indicator data, and test scores were utilized to determine the effects of the programs. Overall, none of the schools experienced a significant change in their students' academic achievement. However, as a whole, they demonstrated a positive change in perceived behavior related to character education and also certain behavior indicators were positively affected, including decreased suspension rates, slightly increased the graduation rate, and decreased office referrals. The school districts recognized it was easier to implement the character education programs in an elementary than at the secondary level. The district that experienced the greatest benefit had a high minority, low- to middle-class population. Throughout the study, the staff and administration maintained their enthusiasm. They viewed their "character education program as a solution to the problem rather

than an additional administrative task" (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006, p.113). The school with the most comprehensively implemented character education programs experienced the greatest improvement in perceived character related behavior and decreased suspension rates than a school with less well-implemented programs (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006).

Going for the Goal (GOAL) is a program designed to teach adolescents specific skills needed for life. GOAL focuses on three objectives: goal setting, problem-solving, and social support. The study took place in Canada with twenty freshmen who volunteered to participate in the program. The students were divided equally between the control and experimental groups. The training sessions for the experimental group took place for ten weeks with an hour session each week. One week after the last session, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants. After analyzing the interviews, the data showed that the students in the experimental group were developing the skills the program was designed to teach. They could recall the strategies they learned during the sessions when interviewed. The control group did not know specific skills that would have assisted them in meeting the three objectives of the program but could provide a general statement about each. The students who participated in the program reported learning how to set goals, problem-solving skills, and how to seek social support (Forneris, Danish, & Scott, 2007).

In 2012, a life-skills training program was conducted in Ahvaz, Iran. This was an experimental program that consisted of twenty-six students; thirteen students were placed in the experimental group, and thirteen students were placed in the control group. The participants completed a pretest regarding their current life satisfaction. The experimental group then received sixteen hours of life-skills training. Following the training, both groups completed a post-test. The experimental group did have a greater life satisfaction score following the life-

skills training. However, the research does not provide details on specific interventions utilized in to order replicate this study nor do the researchers provide a copy of the life satisfaction survey administered (Farhady & Moghadamnejhad, 2012).

Teachers' Perception of Character Education Programs

In 2009, a survey study was completed to examine teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and techniques regarding SEL in the classroom. The subjects consisted of 264 K-8 teachers from Oregon and Illinois. Overwhelmingly the teachers believed SEL was important and they also overwhelmingly believed improving their students' social-emotional skills improve academic outcomes. Of the teacher's surveyed, over half were currently implementing some type of character education program in their classrooms. However, only 50% of the teachers felt they should be the ones responsible for carrying out the program in the classroom. Overall, the teachers believe the schools should take an active role in implementing the program. The teachers also stated receiving training/support from a variety of professionals would be helpful and increased academic demands decrease the time allowed for SEL with state and federal requirements (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009).

In 2013, a second study was completed with student-teachers to gain an understanding of their perceptions of character education programs, particularly their feelings on the importance of character education and its inclusion in the school curriculum. This study consisted of 263 student-teachers. The results of the survey indicate high levels of support for character education among student-teachers. They also desired additional education on the inclusion of character education training in their collegiate coursework and also strongly supported the inclusion of a course dedicated to character education training (Beachum, McCray, Yawn, & Obiakor, 2013).

Meta-Analyses on Social-Emotional Learning Programs

Two meta-analyses were completed focusing particularly on SEL programs. The most comprehensive was completed in 2011, and it was followed with an additional meta-analysis published in 2017. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger (2011) included 213 SEL programs representing 270,034 students from kindergarten to 12th grade. To be included in the meta-analysis, the program had to be universally applied throughout the school. The results of this study showed the students that participated in the SEL programs showed significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, and academic performance that reflected an 11% gain in their academic achievement. The students also demonstrated decreased conduct issues and emotional distress. The meta-analysis also demonstrated a statistically significant effect size of 0.30. Durlak et al. (2011) found that 33% of the studies also collected follow-up data. The result of both the initial data and the follow-up data were very similar, suggesting the students retained the benefits they acquired during the SEL programs (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (2017) completed the second meta-analysis which only included studies not analyzed in the previous meta-analysis. Taylor et al. (2017) reviewed 82 new SEL interventions representing 97,406 students from kindergarten to high school. The results on the 2017 meta-analysis demonstrated statistically significant positive effects of the SEL interventions for each of the outcome categories addressed. The seven categories included: SEL skills, attitudes, academic performance, conduct problems, drug use, positive social behavior, and emotional distress. Once again, the follow-up data was not significantly different from the initial data immediately following the interventions. The data also showed the benefits

of the SEL interventions were similar regardless of school location, student race, or SES

background (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017).

Social-Emotional Learning Skills in High School Students

Davis, Solberg, de Baca, and Gore (2014) examined the extent to which SEL skills could

be utilized to predict academic outcomes in high school students. The purpose of the study was

to explore whether non-academic skills such as motivation, social connections, school

importance, academic self-efficacy, and managing psychological and emotional distress could

possibly identify potentially at-risk students earlier in their academic career. The sample size

included 4,797 students from a large high school. Davis et al. (2014) found that high school

students in the top 25% of the class academically reported higher social-emotional skills than the

students in the bottom 25% academically at the end of their eighth-grade year. The study found

the students' perceived importance of going to college and their level of physical and

psychological stress were the two factors that explained the greatest variance in the students'

GPA in their high school years. Finally, Davis et al. (2014) suggested the combination of the

following subscales effectively categorized the students that are making progress towards

graduating high school versus the students that drop out or fail numerous courses. The five

subscales are meaningful motivation, classroom efficacy, physical symptoms, academic stress,

and importance of college (Davis, Solberg, de Baca, & Gore, 2014).

Research on the 7 Habits Curriculum in Schools

The FranklinCovey website states "the objective of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective*

Teens workshop can help youth: gain greater control of their lives; improve relationships with

family and friends; increase self-confidence and self-esteem; make smarter decisions; overcome

addiction; define their values and what matters most to them; get more done in less time; be

happy; find balance between school, work, friends, and everything else" (Secondary education

solutions, 2013). As the public grows more familiar with the content of Covey's books and

training programs, the research pool regarding *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* should

also increase. It is very shallow, especially in the area of education. Traditionally, *The 7 Habits*

of Highly Effective People have been implemented in the business setting, but more education

entities are incorporating the training.

The FranklinCovey organization has published several case studies regarding the

implementation of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* in secondary schools and *The Leader*

in Me in elementary schools. Currently, there are four dissertations on the effectiveness of *The*

Leader in Me in elementary schools (Andersen, 2011, Barkley, 2013, Cirrus-Major, 2008,

Muskett, 2008 & Wilkens, 2013).

However, there is only one published dissertation on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective*

Teens curriculum. In 2013, a dissertation examined the influence of *The 7 Habits of Highly*

Effective Teens curriculum on the attendance, discipline referrals, and academic achievement of

110 tenth graders students at a rural high school. This study utilized a pre-test, post-test, and

control group design. The experimental group completed a three-week course led by the school

counselor based on the information from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* book and *The 7*

Habits of Highly Effective Teens Personal Workbook. An analysis of covariance showed there

was not a significant difference in any of the three outcomes included in the study. One

limitation of this dissertation was it did not include any specifics regarding the interventions

utilized including curriculum, teaching methods, or specific activities (Austin, 2013).

The FranklinCovey Foundation also published three case studies regarding *The 7 Habits*

of Highly Effective People implemented into the education setting; however, each of these

studies was conducted by the Center for Advanced Research at the FranklinCovey organization, which calls into question the reliability of the results. It is unlikely the FranklinCovey organization would publish research that does not convey positive results from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* training. It is imperative to understand these studies have a high likelihood to contain some bias. Also, another limitation of these case studies is the exclusion of the methods and details of each study. The authors do not include their methodology, surveys, response rates, or timelines; and there are only two case studies where the results included standardized test scores. The data from another study was obtained by a third party research organization that was collected by the school district not related to the FranklinCovey organization.

Sarah Baile conducted the first case study on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,* and her results were summarized by Dean Collinwood. Both Baile and Collinwood are employed by the FranklinCovey organization. Baile interviewed the employees at six educational institutes where *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* were taught to a relatively high number of student or staff members (Baile & Collinwood, 2008). Baile found that in the six organizations she studied, the participants perceived an improvement in themselves and possibly their organization (Baile & Collinwood, 2008). As stated earlier, the critical weakness is the inadequate information regarding the methodology. The author does not divulge the criterion for her school selection process. The study did not include any negative comments from the over 100 participants (Baile & Collinwood, 2008).

In another case study, Collinwood examined the impact of the implementation of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* in the high schools of Guatemala. After the implementation of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* in the high schools of Guatemala, surveys were

conducted. Parents, students, teachers, and community members were all surveyed to help

determine if the implementation of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* affected Guatemala

(Collinwood, 2008). The survey consisted of three focus areas. The first area focused on what

family members noticed about the student after *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* seminar

program. The second area focused on the feelings of the parents, and how the training

influenced their entire family. The last area focused on the evaluation of community service

projects completed by the communities (Collinwood, 2008). Results from the surveys provided

very favorable results regarding each of the three focus areas. Ninety-five percent of the parents

stated they saw a change in their child's attitude following the training, 89% of the parents stated

their families benefited from the training. The two terms the community members most

frequently utilized to describe the community service project were "effective" and "well-

planned" (Collinwood, 2008).

Collinwood and the FranklinCovey organization conducted a case study that analyzed

twelve schools that had implemented *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* during the 2007-

2008 school year. Six of these schools described themselves as fully implementing the

curriculum, and six said they moderately implemented the training. The case study does not go

into the details as to why or how the schools applied *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

The study analyzed each of the schools' reading and math scores, the staffs' opinion of the

schools' overall environment, and the students' perception of the classroom culture (Collinwood,

2009). The study stated the results are considered only preliminary data. Overall, the schools

which fully implemented the training received more positive changes than those that only

moderately applied the training (Collinwood, 2009).

Joseph Welsh Elementary is another school that experienced positive results after implementing *The Leader in Me* training at their school. Joseph Welsh Elementary is located in Alberta, Canada. They began training their staff in the spring of 2007 and fully implemented the training program during the 2007-2008 school year (Collinwood, 2010). The principal had previous experience with *The 7 Habits of High Effective People* curriculum; he believed this training was what could make his already good school a great school. The school felt they immediately experienced favorable results after implementing *The Leader in Me* curriculum. In 2009, in partnership with the FranklinCovey organization, the school examined the data from the previous two years. They utilized their discipline records, test scores, and data from a yearly survey administered by a third party vendor to gain an understanding of the teachers', students', and parents' opinions of the school culture (Collinwood, 2010). *The Leader in Me* training positively affected the discipline; academic performance; and the teachers', parents', and students' perception of the school's overall culture.

Working-Class Students

Working-class students are underrepresented in the current body of literature. Recent literature on the working-class students specifically addresses their collegiate experiences. Warnok and Appel (2012) sought to gain a deeper understanding of the working-class students' experiences in graduate school. This study compared the challenges the working-class students faced to their middle-class peers. Two-hundred and thirty-seven Ph.D. sociology students across the country completed the survey. The results from this study indicate working- and lower-class students believe they are less prepared academically and receive less academic support than their peers from the middle- and upper-class. These students appeared to be lacking in financial assistance and academic integration in comparison to their peers. The working-class

students were also less likely than their middle-class peers to develop a cohort to assist in navigating through graduate school together. The working-class students are less likely to talk to their family members about difficulties they are having at school. Cumulatively, the working-class students receive less support than their middle- and upper-class peers financially, emotionally, academically, and socially (Warnok & Appel, 2012).

Of the few studies completed on working-class students, the vast majority of these are qualitative studies, mostly ethnographical studies, of students' lived experiences. The purpose of Soria, Stebleton, and Huesman's (2013) study was to gain a deeper understanding of the differing collegiate experience of working-class students versus middle- and upper-class students. An online survey was completed by 58,017 students at six large public universities. In the 2013 study, only 18% of the respondents classified themselves as working-class students; whereas, in 2006 45% of Americans were classified as working-class (Soria, Stebleton, and Huesman, 2013). The working-class students had statistically significant differences on all measures of social and academic integration from their middle- and upper-class peers. The working-class students reported lower satisfaction with their collegiate experience and a lower sense of belonging and satisfaction on their college campus. The working-class students were more likely to say their poor math and English skills created difficulties with their collegiate courses. They also reported poor study skills, which led to decreased collegiate success. The results of this study magnify the differences between working-class students and middle-class students that collectively create academic difficulties for the working-class students (Soria, Stebleton, & Huesman, 2013).

As a high school teacher, Bloom (2007) recognized the lack of follow through in the seniors at the urban high where she taught. Every spring, the working-class students would be

confident they were attending college, but the next fall Bloom stated she would see these same students and they had already dropped out of college within a few months or never even started. Bloom completed a multi-site ethnological study at three urban high schools. The researcher spent a year at each school doing participant observations, focus groups, and individual interviews to gain a deeper understanding of why many of the working-class students do not ultimately attend college. From her research, Bloom developed three main roadblocks that deterred these students' path to college: fear of financial risk, psychological risk, and social concerns. The students also experienced self-doubt and fear throughout their senior year. These students were fearful of being rejected by their choice college and deep down expressed beliefs of not being "good enough" to be successful in college. They also struggled with the notion of disappointing their families. The same parents would say they wanted their children to attend college but were unable to support their children emotionally through the process (Bloom, 2007).

In England, Demie and Lewis (2011) completed a study with the British working-class students. The focus of their mixed method study was to gain a deeper understanding of their barriers to increased academic achievement. The study stated there was significant confusion regarding the definition of "working-class students" among participants in the study; Demie and Lewis defined working-class students as students that qualify for free lunch in their schools. The study utilized focus groups, data analysis, and case studies of certain schools. A significant finding explaining the students' level of academic achievement was the parents' decreased engagement in their child's education and the parents' attitude to their child's education. Demie and Lewis' study found the working-class students felt marginalized and did not have a strong interest, nor the support needed to reach their academic potential. The study also found the

working-class parents were not as supportive as would be needed to assist in shifting their children's perspective on the value of education. (Demie & Lewis, 2011).

High School Students' Goals and Decision-Making Skills

Teenagers positively benefit from setting goals for their future to assist in proactively managing the transition from high school to their next endeavor in life (Borders, 2009). Students with parents that are actively involved in goal planning have greater success at eventually realizing their aspirations (Eccles, 2007). Structured and active parenting has been shown to strengthen their teenage child's expectations for success and assist in developing their autonomous motivation (Dietrich, Parker, & Salmela-Aro, 2012). Conversely, the lack of parental engagement negatively affects their child's interest and activity in fulfilling their career aspirations (Farkas & Grolnikc, 2010).

In 2008, Massey, Gebhardt, and Garnefski completed a meta-analysis regarding adolescent goals. This study included literature from the previous 16 years which consisted of 94 studies. They found that teens strive to reach goals which are attainable for them, according to their demographics and social setting. Factors which potentially influence adolescents' goals include age, family characteristics, ethnicity, gender, location, and socioeconomic status. A teenager's approach to their goals, particularly following high school graduation can significantly shape their self-perception and long-term well-being.

Their life goals are typically framed by the social and economic resources surrounding them (Carroll, Hattie, Durkin, & Houghton, 2001). Adolescents with a supportive family and adequate financial resources are at a significant advantage. From early to mid-adolescent years, parents have the greatest impact on their children's choices (Massey, Gebhardt, & Garnefski, 2008). However, following this period, the influence of their close peers affects the decisions

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they make more significantly (Cohen & Cohen, 2001). Depending on the nature of the relationships, research supports both positive and negative effects of one's peer influences (Barry & Wentzel, 2006; Cohen & Cohen, 2001; Mrug et al., 2014). Examples of positive benefits stated are cooperation, helpfulness, and empathy (Barry & Wentzel, 2006). A few negative aspects of peer pressure include deviant behavior, delinquency, and physical and nonphysical aggression (Mrug et al., 2014).

In 2013, Lee, Leon Jara-Almonte, and Young completed a study addressing students' life choices after graduation. Following high school, teenagers have four possible life choices: attending college or trade school (student), working while attending school (working-student), entering the workforce (worker), or neither attending additional schooling or entering the workforce (unemployed). The goal of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of factors that increased the likelihood of students selecting each of the four options. The data utilized in this study was obtained from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, which studied 15,000 students and followed them for four years (Lee, Leon Jara-Almonte, & Young, 2013).

Socio-economic status (SES), aptitude in math, and financial aid were the three variables that appeared to have the greatest effect on a students' post-high school role. The higher the SES and the greater their aptitude in math, the more likely they would choose the student role. Also the lower the SES, the more likely they were to enter the worker or unemployed role. As commonly recognized, children with greater financial resources have more options than those with lower incomes. If a student does not apply for funding, they have a minimal chance of continuing their education following high school. Also, the parental expectations were a lot higher for the student group versus the other three options. Overall fewer women chose the worker role than men. Parental involvement and high parental expectations both play an

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important part in a child choosing to continue their education (Lee, Leon Jara-Almonte, &

Young, 2013).

Teachers, who are typically part of the middle-class, frequently struggle with their

students' lack of engagement in their education. Hendrickson (2012) sought to gain a deeper

understanding of why students fail to engage in high school and develop a plan for their futures.

The population was a rural school in the Appalachian area with primarily white, working-class

students utilizing classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. From classroom

observations, the researcher identified students either unengaged in class or resisted classroom

projects. The three most important themes were uncovered: the differences in their families'

values and expectation, the relevance of their education, and misunderstandings between

teachers and students. Several of the students stated their parents did not know much about

college or did not encourage college. The majority of the jobs in the area are unskilled laborers.

Their families want them to stay close and going to college would likely require the students to

move away from their close-knit families where they are comfortable. Although the students

seemed to label their academic courses as useless, they all appeared to understand the value of

graduating high school. These students believed they learned the things they needed to know for

life outside of school or in their vocational classes. The students also did not feel the teachers

understood their situations. Due to their increased job and family responsibilities, completing

homework, which they deemed meaningless, was not their priority. The students felt some of

their teachers did not understand or respect them (Hendrickson, 2012).

Grit

For centuries, intelligence was considered the key to success. It is now apparent

intelligence is not the only required component of achievement. We all know intelligent people

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who are not very successful and likewise other not as intelligent individuals who are also very successful. Throughout Angela Duckworth's research, she has repetitively discovered an individual's level of grit is the most important factor in determining success. Grit is defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit involves working diligently toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over the years despite failure and periods of difficulty (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). In an attempt to assess an individual's level of grit, Duckworth developed a test called the Grit Scale where an individual rates themselves on eight to twelve items. The following are examples of three of the items included: I overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge, setbacks do not discourage me, and I finish whatever I begin. The participant utilizes the Likert Scale to select one of the five following options: very much like me, mostly like me, somewhat like me, not much like me, and not like me at all (Duckworth, 2017).

Duckworth has completed numerous studies on grit predicting success with a variety of populations including Ivy League students, West Point candidates, and National Spelling Bee contestants. Repetitively, Duckworth has found grit is the greatest predictor of success. Duckworth published six individual studies, and each study found grit accounted for success more than one's intelligence measured by IQ (Duckworth et al., 2007).

With Ivy League students, Duckworth found that students with higher IQs had less grit than their peers who scored lower on an intelligence test, which suggests that an individual who is not quite as intelligent as their peers can overcome their deficit by working harder than their peers. Duckworth found their determination and effort proved beneficial. The students with the highest grit scores had the highest GPAs, not the most intelligent students. At West Point, the US Military Academy, a soldier's grit score was the best predictor of their success in the

Academy's challenging summer training program known as "Beast Barracks." Grit mattered more than intelligence, leadership ability, or physical fitness. Also, at the National Spelling Bee, the contestants with the highest grit scores were the ones most likely to advance to the final round. Duckworth theorized their success was due in part to their determination to study longer than their peers and not because they were merely better spellers than their peers (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Over the past 10 years, the idea of grit's relationship with success has received significant attention both in the mainstream and academic communities. In 2016, Crede', Tynan, and Harms completed a meta-analysis review of the grit literature with a focus on the relationship between grit and the following: performance, retention, conscientiousness, cognitive ability, and demographic variables. This meta-analysis included 73 studies that met their inclusion criteria. They found that grit was strongly correlated with an individual's level of conscientiousness, but that grit is not as strongly correlated with performance and retention. However, this study found the greatest predictor of academic performance was related to perseverance and not grit. This meta-analysis calls into question the notion of utilizing grit to predict success. It is hard to accept the results of this study when taking into account Duckworth's definition of grit, "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth et al., 2007). The results of the meta-analysis state "perseverance is the predictor of success and did not correlate passion at all with the other variables" (Crede', Tynan, and Harms, 2016). Numerous studies included in the 2016 meta-analysis also reported similar results. Their results cited various other noncognitive skills, such as conscientiousness, self-control, emotional stability, and consistency, as the greatest predictor of success rather than Duckworth's term of grit (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014). Of

the 73 studies included in the meta-analysis, 28 were unpublished doctorate dissertations or master theses.

 In response to increased research seeking to define and understand the noncognitive components of behavior, Duckworth and Yeager (2015), published an article discussing pros and cons of the various tools utilized to measure these "other" skills. The authors recognize in a new field of study there will be errors and imperfect science. Duckworth and Yeager stated it is imperative to utilize mixed methods approach to improve the validity and reliability of the studies in order to improve their understanding of goal attainment outside of an individual's cognitive ability (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

Summary

Character education is not a new idea in our country, but an avenue schools are increasingly embracing due to the moral decisions that negatively affect our nation's future. Since the 1980's, millions of dollars per year of government funds were spent on character education in schools. However, society began to realize not all these programs were making the desired impact. At this point, the research community sought to determine what factors created a successful character education program.

The field of research regarding character education is immense, including numerous meta-analyses. The vast majority of the research involves programs in the younger grades although the need for continued intervention is evident with secondary students. The goal of character education is not ultimately creating positive choices next week or next year, but positive choices for life. Adults that grow up and are able to achieve the goals they have set for their lives. The attainment of these goals typically requires additional training or college past high school graduation. Students from the middle- and upper-class typically have a strong

support system to aid in emotional and financially supporting them. This is not usually the case for working-class students. The working-class student is a group not well represented in research and caught in the middle. They are average students that do not receive significant amounts of attention but frequently have the potential to be active contributors to society if given a chance.

The *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training is a character education program that focuses on social-emotional learning which aims to provide teens with the skills required to have the opportunity to reach their aspirations. Currently, the body of literature addressing *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training is very shallow. Limited dissertations and studies completed by the FranklinCovey organization have been completed on *The Leader in Me*, but only one recent dissertation has been completed on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* program. A significant gap in literature exists around the high school working-class student and the effect of a character education program (specifically SEL programs) on their goal setting skills and their ability to achieve their goals following high school. Could the *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training have any impact on the working-class students' life choices? If working-class students learn to define their goals and receive training to prepare them for their futures, will their chances of fulfilling their goals increase?

Of course, there are a few students that can overcome statistics and can achieve their dreams even though their upbringing and social class did not support their accomplishments. Researchers have sought to define this ability, and through the years it has received a variety of terms: noncognitive skills, character, social-emotional skills, and a growth mindset are some of the terms that have come into play. Angela Duckworth chose the word grit to define the measure of self-control, persistence, and awareness that are strong determining factors of success.

The primary research question is: How do working-class graduates perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effectively Teens* training as having an influence on their life choices and future success? There are also sub-questions that will be examined. How have *The 7 Habits of Highly Effectively Teens* training affected their decision-making skills? How do the working-class graduates score on the grit scale (Duckworth, 2016)? How do teachers believe *The 7 Habits of Highly Effectively Teens* training benefits working-class students?

Conceptual Framework

The amount of research on character education is broad, deep, and mixed. With the vastness of available studies, there is also variability. As the Character Education Partnership confirms, character education training can be beneficial for creating change when the program is completed well. The challenge is gaining buy-in to invest the time and resources to execute the program effectively.

For the past 25 years, businesses and individuals have been reaping the benefits of FranklinCovey's book, The *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Today thousands of elementary and high schools are also incorporating the training in their curriculums. Outside of dissertations and Covey's organization's research, there is insufficient research available. While some parents raise their children to embody Covey's mentality of "highly effective people," this attitude is foreign to the majority of American students.

Working-class students are capable of developing and achieving their short- and long-term goals. These students frequently do not have parental support to create and execute plans to achieve their dreams following high school graduation. I sought to understand what impact completing *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training has on these working-class students. I aim to understand these effects from both the students' and teachers' perspectives.

Following the tremendous media attention the term grit received, a wave of researchers has since stated other specific nonacademic skills account for the success. However, their descriptions of the other characteristics are all very similar to Duckworth's definition of grit. Through this study, I sought to determine if there is a relationship between the recent graduate's ability to achieve their plans and their Grit score utilizing Duckworth's Grit Scale.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine working-class graduates' perceptions of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training. In addition, it was to determine if *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training was effective at the high school level and if working-class students were able to learn the higher level reasoning skills (decision making and problem-solving skills) needed to help them be successful in life after high school. Being well prepared allows teens the opportunity to accomplish their desired goals. The perspectives of these working-class students are the views from which they see their futures. Working-class students can be described with the following statements:

- not major behavioral issues

- earning average grades in regular education classes

- planning to further their education with a "see how it goes" attitude

- parents never attended any kind of post-secondary education or did so for only a short period of time

- do not have parents or mentors who know how to help them after high school

- without exact plans on how to succeed in life and in college (Hurst, 2012).

This issue of working-class students and future planning is far-reaching. It is the skills taught by educators, such as *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, that can influence the working-class students and this, in turn, can improve a community's well-being. It is important to understand that this problem can be observed as students graduate from high school. Working-class students may attempt college, try to find employment, or drift from possibility to possibility hoping that their lives change. It is also desirable that working-class students improve

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over time. This improvement can be defined as the students' actions and ownership of their abilities to plan and meet their goals for the future. This action and ownership not only improve students, but has a direct effect on the school system, and creates a community which has leverage or an advantage over other communities.

The primary research question was: How do working-class graduates perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training as having an influence on their life choices and future success? There were also sub-questions that were examined. How have *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training affected their decision-making skills? How do the working-class graduates score on the grit scale (Duckworth, 2016)? How do teachers believe *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training benefits working-class students?

Although *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* can be utilized with all high school students, this study focused on the working-class student. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training can equip students with skills to make more informed, thoughtful choices, and help them understand how they can effectively set and achieve their goals (Covey, 1998). These skills can be utilized to help form the framework upon which to build a life after high school. If students have a plan, an idea of what to do next, and habits around which they could build their lives, they can leave high school with confidence.

The study of working-class students' perspectives about *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training is important because I wanted to know if graduates thought it helped them to become "something more." If they did not believe it helped, I wanted to know why, and what the graduates thought would assist them to reach their goals. I wanted to learn if teaching *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course was effective at the high school level and if working-class students were able to learn the higher-level skills needed to help them be

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successful in life after high school. What were the students' perceptions of the how *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training created change in their lives? What skills did they believe they acquired from completing the training program? How did the working-class students perceive these skills? It was also helpful to know how the teachers who taught *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course felt about their students before and after the training. This study provides valuable research that will impact how secondary teachers, counselors, principals, superintendents, and parents educate students about their futures prior to graduation.

Johnson, Duffett, and Ott (2005) suggested that working-class students need some form of intervention. For these interventions to be included in the review, they needed to address and include high school students. The interventions must also have included character education. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training is a social and emotional training program, which is a specific type of character education program. Five studies on specific intervention programs were reviewed: two general character education studies, two life-skills training program studies, and one SEL training program study. The methodology for each study varied, as did the results. Williams, Yanchar, Jensen, and Lewis (2003) conducted a study of a character education program in Utah. Romanowski (2003) studied a character education program in Ohio. Farhady and Moghadamnejhad (2012) studied a life-skills training program in Iran. Forneris, Danish, and Scott (2007) conducted a study of a life skills training program in Canada. Davis et al. (2014) completed a SEL study at a large western urban school district.

As a researcher, there were aspects I took from each of these studies which assisted in designing my methodology to help meet the needs of high school graduates. The current body of research lacks studies that examine working-class students, and why these young adults are not living the satisfied lives they desire (Hurst, 2012). There is very little literature regarding their

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inability to achieve the hopes and dreams (or the "more") they plan for their lives. Research varies about why these young adults were not satisfied, but it was insufficient regarding the young adults' perceptions of the problem.

The working-class student, as defined in this study, is rare in current literature. There is an abundance of literature regarding the gifted and talented student, as well as the special education student; there is even important research about at-risk youth. Where is the information about these students who are in the middle – the working-class students? These are students who are left to sink or swim (Hurst, 2012).

In addition to the lack of research about the working-class student, there is limited literature regarding how to prepare students for work/trade instead of college. Most literature only discusses preparing students for college without recognizing the viable careers within vocational and trade industries. This information was difficult to locate or was not found in periodicals or scholarly journals. Research typically discussed preparing students for college curriculum without addressing other options and life skills.

There has been some research in education about *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens /People*. The FranklinCovey organization has published several case studies regarding the implementation of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* in schools. Covey has also written several journal articles on the topic. There have been six dissertations written about *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens /People*. Four of the dissertations studied *The Leader in Me* program in elementary schools including: Muskett (2008), Anderson (2011), Wilkens (2013), and Barkley (2013). One of the dissertations examined the effect of the implementation of the 7 Habits program in a kindergarten through eighth-grade school (Ciurus-Major, 2008). In 2013, Austin published the only dissertation examining *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* (Austin,

2013). Each of these dissertations took a unique approach in methodology. It should be noted;

when I began working on this dissertation in 2012, no studies had been completed with high

school students, at this point there was a gap in the literature.

This research study has sought to fill this gap. It will also contribute to the ongoing

research about high school students, but more specifically, it aims to provide answers to the

rarely mentioned working-class students. In addition, literature spends little time asking

questions about why the students are unsatisfied and just working a job to get by. The current

body of literature discusses different issues but does not uncover how to improve working-class

students or seek their opinions.

This chapter describes the study's research methodology, a brief literature synopsis, and

theoretical framework. The remainder of this chapter includes discussions around the following

areas: (a) research approach, (b) research site, (c) sampling, (d) information needed, (e) research

design, (f) data collection, (g) data analysis, (h) ethical considerations (i) trustworthiness, and (j)

limitations. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary and timeline.

Research Approach

Qualitative research is utilized as a means to explore and understand the meaning

individuals attribute to a particular problem (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is typically

used when little is known about a particular topic, as is the case for this exploratory study

regarding *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training program. Qualitative research is also

utilized when the participants belong to a closed group, "working-class" students and seeks to

interpret the meaning of the participants' lived experience from their perspective (Bloomberg &

Volpe, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patten, 2009). In contrast, quantitative research

examines the relationship among a variety of variables utilizing statistical procedures. Typically,

researchers use quantitative methods once there is a range of information known about a topic (Patten, 2009).

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological theoretical perspective. A theoretical perspective is an assumption about the given reality where the study takes place. Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that "phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a worldview" (p. 148). A theoretical lens is the way one looks at complicated things. I have chosen to look through the lens of a constructivist: "Constructivists view knowledge as socially constructed and may change depending on the circumstances" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604). People have multiple realities in their minds and thus gathering data in multiple methods from multiple realities is in order (Golafshani, 2003). Golafshani (2003) stated, "Engaging multiple methods, such as observation, interviews, and recordings will lead to more valid, reliable, and diverse constructions of realities" (p.604).

Phenomenological approaches seek to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individuals' lived experiences: "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Patten (2009) stated examining perceptions is known as a phenomenological approach. How something is perceived is crucial because this study has determined how the working-class students perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training influencing their life choices and future success.

According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. For this study, a common meaning was sought for working-class students of their training in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*.

In addition to the phenomenological approach, some aspects of the case study approach were utilized. As described by Creswell (2009), some characteristics of this study are consistent with a case study approach. The characteristics include a detailed description of the setting and individuals followed, and the case study is bound by time and activity. The study was conducted at Zimmer High School; therefore, the participants only included former and current teachers and graduates from Zimmer High School. Creswell (2013) added that a case study can explore a single real-life case, will report on the case, and has a specific theme that has been uncovered. Case studies often end with a conclusion or essence formed by the researcher about the case or topic (Creswell, 2013).

With case study aspects in mind, phenomenology typically involves several lengthy, in-depth interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The purpose was to reduce personal experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. In the process, the I bracketed, or sets aside, my own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2009). I then collected data from persons who had experienced the phenomenon and developed a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals. In other words, the experiences of those participating in the study – those who have had a similar experience – were analyzed as unique expressions and then compared to identify the essence (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Creswell (2013) stated that the description consists of "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced it.

Research Site

Zimmer High School was the setting for this research study. Zimmer High School served as a pseudonym to provide anonymity to the actual school. It is located in the city of Zimmer,

which lies in Slayton County (also a pseudonym). Slayton County is in the central part of a southern state. According to the 2010 census, Zimmer had a population of 16,688 and a total area of 9.1 square miles (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Zimmer High School houses grades nine through twelve. There are approximately 2,700 students who attend the school. The high school has a total of 214 full-time teachers, six assistant principals, and one principal.

For the past eleven years, every ninth grader at Zimmer High School has been enrolled in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* course. This course was designed to help ninth graders successfully navigate high school. Students receive instruction on study skills, time management, and goal setting strategies by integrating FranklinCovey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* throughout the entire curriculum. Students are taught to explore their own interests and aptitudes in relation to possible careers and begin developing an education plan for the remainder of high school and post-secondary studies. One of the core goals of this course is to create a sense of belonging among students by having them become productive citizens of their school and the community (Arkansas Department of Career Education, 2009). The course was designed to spend half of the time in the classroom learning the content included in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* curriculum and creating their individual educational and career plans, and the remaining half engaged in experiential learning, which frequently occurs on the school's ropes course.

Zimmer High School has a student population that ranges from advanced national merit finalists to students who need around-the-clock care. The graduation rate for Zimmer has fluctuated between 89% and 79% over the past three years (Arkansas Department of Education, 2016). Yet the percent of students that actually end up attending post-secondary training or education is under 50% on average. Thirty-nine percent of the student population is living at or

below the poverty line, which is an indicator of low socioeconomic status (Arkansas Department of Education, 2016). With this wide variety of students, the working-class student was identified in this population.

This site was selected because of its accessibility and current implementation of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training program. The participants included the current and former teachers of the training course and working-class graduates from Zimmer High School. Working-class students were selected because of the limited research on this particular group. These students appeared to have access to fewer resources than other demographic groups in the high school. Working-class students many times fall between the cracks and do not either qualify or have access to various support systems (e.g., special education services, gifted and talented, extracurricular activities, etc.). The goal of this research study was to determine if these students perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training as having an influence on their life choices and future success.

Sampling

Three purposeful sampling strategies were used. The first was criterion sampling, which means all participants must meet one or more criteria as predetermined by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). For students, the criteria were graduation from Zimmer High School, completion of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* program, and having characteristics that would classify them as working-class students. For teachers, the criterion was teaching the training course. The second and third strategies were used solely for students. The graduates from the criterion sampling created a homogenous sampling. A homogenous sampling contains only participants with similar experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The homogenous sampling was refined to include working-class students with the most similar

characteristics. This homogenous sampling was then be used to create network sampling.

Network sampling took place by asking the homogenous sampling to identify and refer others

whom could fit within the already present homogenous sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Homogenous and network sampling allowed the criterion sample to be refined to include

more working-class graduates. These graduates provided productive interviews on their

perspectives of this program. These strategies were beneficial because they allowed the

working-class graduates to be targeted, and within that group, the graduates who could provide

the richest interviews. These strategies fit the purpose of this study because they allowed a

deeper understanding of the working-class graduates' perspectives (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Five teachers, who currently teach or have previously taught *The 7 Habits of Highly

Effective Teens* course at Zimmer High School were interviewed (see Appendix D) and 12

working-class graduates of Zimmer High School were selected through criterion, homogenous,

and network sampling (see Appendix E).

Information Needed

The information necessary to answer the research questions for this study was divided

into four categories: contextual information, demographic information, perceptual information

(see Table 3.1), and theoretical information. The contextual information described the culture

and organization of the program (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I previously interviewed the

director of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training program to gain a deeper

understanding of the history, objectives, procedures, and organization of the program. Through

the interviews with the graduate and teachers, I was able to gain a more thorough understanding

of the contextual information.

Table 3.1

Information Needed

Contextual Information	Demographic Information	Perceptual Information
History of *The 7 Habit of Highly Effective Teen*s at Zimmer High School	Year graduated high school	Student perspectives of *The 7 Habit of Highly Effective Teen*s course
School culture and environment	Current Status	Student's belief in how the course affected their lives
Organization of the program	Future plans	
	Education level	
	Participants	
	Occupation	

In addition to contextual information about the research site, demographic information about the participants was collected. This information included the year they graduated from high school, level of educational attainment, current role, and future educational and life plans. Perceptual information was the participants' description and explanation of their perceptions of the inquiry, in this case, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training. Perceptual information was gleaned primarily from interviews, which was the mechanism used to uncover the participants' descriptions of their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Literature sources provided theoretical information that was needed to determine what was already known about working-class students and *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training. Hurst (2012) described working-class students with a see-how-it-goes attitude. Other literature described why teens may face difficulty without a plan or preparation. These problems are exacerbated by an increased focus on high-stakes testing during school years (Livingston, 2010), a lack of family involvement (Halawah, 2006), a lack of parental understanding of how to

help graduates plan (Nagle, 1999), a disconnect between teachers and students (Kline & Williams, 2007), and a lack of student initiative (Johnson, Duffett, & Ott, 2005).

Research Design

The research design began with a review of the literature. The selected literature included studies about character education programs, social and emotional learning programs, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens, The Leader in Me*, other similar character education programs, and the working-class student. The data collection process then began. The participants were selected using purposeful sampling strategies (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Consent forms were obtained from the participants. The interviews were conducted using questions which helped answer the study's research questions. The interviews were recorded, and I utilized rev.com (an online transcription service) to transcribe the interviews. I then listened to each interview while reading the transcription data to detect and correct any errors made during the transcribing process. The transcriptions were then read multiple times to immerse myself in the data. Several coding cycles followed using different coding methods. Once the coding was completed, theming the data then occurred (Saldaña, 2013). Coding and theming the data provided an understanding of the research phenomenon through analysis and synthesis of the data. Figure 3.1 gives a pictorial representation of the research design.

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┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐
│  Review of  │ ──▶  │ Selection of│ ──▶  │   Consent   │
│  Literature │      │Participants │      │    Forms    │
└─────────────┘      └─────────────┘      └─────────────┘
                                                 │
                                                 ▼
┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐
│Immersion in │ ◀──  │Transcription│ ◀──  │ Interviews &│
│    Data     │      │of Interviews│      │  Recordings │
└─────────────┘      └─────────────┘      └─────────────┘
      │
      ▼
┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐
│ 1st, 2nd, and│ ──▶ │ Theming the │ ──▶  │ Analysis and│
│ possibly 3rd │     │    Data     │      │  Synthesis  │
│coding cycles │     └─────────────┘      └─────────────┘
└─────────────┘
```
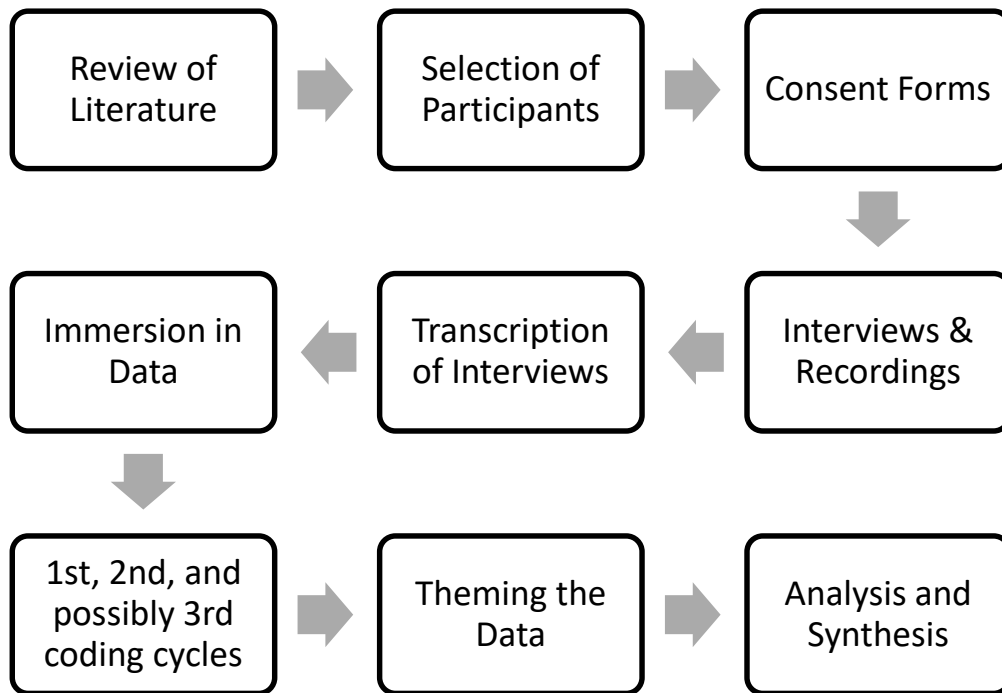
Figure 3.1. Flowchart of Research Design

Data Collection

I collected data from individuals who had experienced the phenomenon. Each of these

participants provided a consent form. After the consent forms were received, the date of the

interview the date and time of the interview was scheduled. Semi-structured interviews of

teachers and graduates were the primary method used to collect data. There was an interview

protocol for teachers (Appendix A) and an interview protocol for graduates (Appendix B).

Only two teachers at Zimmer High School currently teach *The 7 Habits of Highly

Effective Teens* course and three other teachers formally taught the course. Therefore, all five

teachers were interviewed. Initially, I planned to complete focus groups with previous graduates.

However, the process of making contact with the working-class graduates was more challenging

than expected. As a result, the research design was adjusted and I utilized semi-structured

interviews with all graduates and teachers. By having both sources of data, triangulation of the

data was more easily synthesized (Maxwell, 2013).

According to Creswell (2009), semi-structured interviews are useful when the participants cannot be directly observed and when they can provide historical data. They also allow researcher control over the line of questioning. Patton (2009) described semi-structured interviews as the most common data collection instrument for qualitative research. Semi-structured refers to the fact that the interviewer does not need to ask only the predetermined questions. Patton (2009) gave three reasons for this benefit: questions can be reworded for understanding and clarity; questions can be expounded for responses that are too terse; and additional questions can be asked in order to explore unexpected, unusual, or especially relevant material that is revealed. After the interviews were conducted, a link to an online survey was emailed to each participant. The survey was completed anonymously through the website, Survey Monkey.

A digital recorder was utilized to record the interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by using rev.com. Rev.com is an online portal that allows researchers to uploaded recordings so freelance transcriptionist can transcribe the recordings within 24 hours. These transcriptions created the data that was organized into electronic Word documents on the computer. The computer was an integral part of the qualitative research study. The computer was used as a storage device for uploaded interview recordings, an audio player for the interviews, and a word processor to transcribe the recordings. Creswell (2013) stated the importance of maintaining backup copies of all work. The computer and the cloud-based storage site Dropbox were used to store recordings, transcriptions, memos, notes, files, and other documents.

Data Analysis

The analysis approach that relates to the research approach of phenomenology is

transcendental phenomenology:

> In the transcendental approach, the researcher sets aside prejudgments regarding the
> phenomenon being investigated. Also, the researcher relies on intuition, imagination, and
> universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience, and the Inquirer uses systematic
> methods of analysis as advanced by Moustakas. (Creswell, 2013, p. 286)

The researcher describes the phenomenon being studied from personal experiences. These

experiences provide insight into why the phenomenon is being studied. It also adds depth to the

qualitative study because it provides a background and foundation for the researcher's

knowledge, biases, ethical considerations, trustworthiness issues, and limitations.

The data was then read, described, classified, and interpreted. This process is called

coding, and it was used to analyze the data. There were several cycles of coding utilized. The

first cycle was completed using In Vivo Coding. In Vivo Coding uses the participants' own

language to create the codes. In Vivo Coding can be utilized by all qualitative researchers, and is

easy for beginning qualitative researchers to learn how to code data (Saldaña, 2013). The second

cycle of coding was Emotional Coding. Emotional Coding provides insight into the graduates'

perspectives and feelings. The third cycle of coding was Eclectic Coding. Eclectic Coding

presents an opportunity to recode the codes created during the first two cycles. The final cycle of

coding was Focused Coding, which followed In Vivo, Emotional, and Eclectic Coding. It

categorizes the codes and provides the most common and significant codes for the research study

(Saldaña, 2013).

Once the data was coded, it was compiled into groups based on the codes. This process

is also called horizontalization of the data (Creswell, 2013). The data was then further

interpreted to create categories or themes. These themes were then reduced to represent the data.

This reduction finally created the essence of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013).

This helped to answer the primary research question: How do working-class graduates perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training are influencing their life choices and future success? These approaches provided the use of the graduates' own words to create codes. It then used the emotions, perspectives, and feelings, which is at the heart of phenomenology, to create codes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Finally, this approach used Eclectic and Focused Coding to provide the most significant codes that served to answer the primary research question (Saldaña, 2013).

Once coding was completed, the data analysis continued by creating categories and themes to organize the data. Theming the data is classifying it according to themes so that all related passages can be grouped for easier study and interpretation. The essence of theming the data is classification (Patten, 2009). The computer was used to help with data disaggregation, data development, coding, and theme. It helped by compiling, organizing, and managing data. I worked to group and classify the data into categories and themes according to the codes. Codes and categories allowed me to develop themes that helped to create the essence of the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013).

The following figures provide a visual to assist in explaining the steps above which were utilized to organize the data. Figure 3.2 details the steps employed to determine the specific theme of "interpersonal skills," one of the benefits of the training program for the graduates. Figure 3.3 details the steps employed to determine the specific theme of "intrapersonal skills." Figure 3.4 shows the process utilized to determine teachers' perceived benefits for their students.

Sample Codes				
experiences	time	meshing	beating around it	feeling
broaden my view	work closely	involved	forward	real life
understand people	closed door	application	refine	cross to bear
mean	talk	faith	share	reality
opportunities	trust factor	interact	patience	story
group activities	do things together	work together	wait to speak	serve others
aware of needs	get to know others	challenge them	open up	hear from people
open their eyes	mature	options	ownership	important
appreciate	invested	strengths	listen	understand

Categories				
Social Awareness	Relationship Development	Teamwork	Communication Skills	Empathy

Theme
Interpersonal Skills

Figure 3.2. Process Utilized for Data Analysis of Interpersonal Skills

Sample Codes	
boo hoo-ing	comfort zone
lack self-esteem	worthless
understand	believe
realistic	self-worth
abilities	leadership
value	successful
responsible	decide

Categories	
Self-awareness	Self-Confidence

Theme
Intrapersonal Skills

Figure 3.3. Process Utilized for Data Analysis of Intrapersonal Skills

Sample Codes			
driver	other lives	future	time
control	consequences	accomplish	care
blame others	learned	attainable	partner up
make mistakes	serving others	changing	change culture
in control	work hard	specific	gel together
proactive	influence	plan ahead	deeper level
take care	escape	fulfilling	real conversations
prioritizing	self-esteem	focused	work together
Themes			
Increased Self-responsibility	**Increased Awareness and Respect for Others**	**Increased Goal Planning Skills**	**Improved Relationships**

Figure 3.4. Process Utilized for Data Analysis of Teachers' Perceived Benefits

The transcendental approach was chosen because it provided the best method to answer the research questions. This approach helped to explain how the graduates perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* influencing their life choices and future success. It does this by systematically inquiring about the graduates' words and emotions. This approach was beneficial because it created the story of how the graduates feel about the program. Based on the analysis of the codes and themes, this approach provided the knowledge to make conclusions and research-related recommendations about the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

When research is conducted, especially qualitative, ethical considerations are explored and addressed. The most fundamental moral obligation is to minimize harm to the participants involved in the research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Participants are the most valuable assets in conducting research, and without them, there is no research; thus they must be protected at all costs (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

As *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course was investigated, several ethical issues were taken into consideration. These include: protecting the rights of the participants, protecting the participants from harm, and ensuring confidentiality of the participants. In addition, the researcher-participant relationship must be examined (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Protecting the rights of the participants were addressed through the use of informed consent (Appendix C). Informed consent seeks to ensure that all participants retain autonomy and the ability to judge for themselves what risks are worth taking for the purpose of furthering scientific knowledge (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Information about the purpose of the study and its risks and benefits were explained on the informed consent form.

Protecting the participants from harm was also addressed through the use of informed consent. Harm could occur if the participants felt discomfort when the interview is taking place. This was not physical harm, but mental or emotional harm. Some of the questions could have potentially sadden, frustrate, or anger the participant. If this does occured, participants could have ask to skip the question. This harm was highly unlikely, yet it must be considered. In addition, a time that was mutually suitable to both the participant and the researcher was selected.

Ensuring confidentiality of the participants was equally critical. The participants' names have not been used. On all transcripts and data collected, the participants were referred to by a descriptive term and number (graduate 1 or teacher 2). All other identifiable information was altered to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Cautionary measures have also been taken to secure all research-related data. This data is only accessible by me, the researcher. The primary safeguard for the participants was the

informed consent, yet additional safeguards were in place to further protect the participants and the data. These included satisfaction of all IRB requirements, advisor requirements, and continual transparency with the research participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Trustworthiness

In a qualitative study, the dependability or trustworthiness of the data is dependent on the researcher's level of integrity utilized in analyzing the data (Golafshani, 2003). I bracketed my previous life experiences to ensure my thoughts regarding this subject do not affect the data generated from the participants (Creswell, 2013). I included both positive and negative responses in my data analysis to ensure I am transferring exactly what the respondents stated (Golafshani, 2003). In addition to bracketing, triangulation was utilized. Triangulation helped to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to the research design and study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Two forms of triangulation were utilized. The first was data triangulation, which uses multiple data sources. This data was derived from the teachers and graduates regarding how *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training prepares students for life after high school (Patten, 2009). The second was methods triangulation, which uses multiple methods of data collection. Methods triangulation was utilized with graduates in the form of semi-structured individual interviews and a survey to collect data (Patten, 2009).

Limitations

Limitations are external conditions that restrict or constrain the research study's scope and may affect the outcome. The goal of the research was to address these limitations and provide full disclosure to all readers (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). A potential limitation could have been the age of the recent graduates. I worked to overcome this by explaining that there would be no repercussions to their answers and all information would be confidential.

There were limitations with the interviews. They provided indirect information filtered through the viewpoints of interviewees. They also provided information in a designated place rather than the natural field setting. Creswell (2009) shared that the interviewees may not be articulate or perceptive, and also could have biased responses when researchers are present during the interviews (Creswell, 2009). The success of the interviews depended upon the participants' abilities to express their feelings. The graduate interviews only took into account their perception, and the perceptions of their current or past employers or current or past professors was not included in this study. This limitation was addressed by attempting to create a very calm, safe interview environment.

Timeline

This research proposal was defended during in early November of 2017. In December of 2017, the research proposal was submitted to the Internal Review Board, and it was approved in March of 2018. The graduate and teacher interviews were conducted between May and August of 2018. Recent graduates (who are the primary participants) were selected using purposeful sampling methods. After all the interviews were completed, the interviews were transcribed. During August and September of 2018, the collected data was coded and themed. Once coding and theming were completed, the analysis and synthesis of the data were then completed. Chapters four and five were written in September and October of 2018. Chapters one, two, and three were also edited to complete the five-chapter dissertation. The projected completion of the dissertation is the fall semester of 2018 with December as a graduation date.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology utilized to conduct the qualitative study. This phenomenological study sought to gain a deeper understanding of how working-class graduates

perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training as having an influence on their life choices and future success? The study utilized semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed to discover themes obtained from the interviews. Interviews of the teachers and graduates were utilized to improve the credibility and dependability of the results. The goal of this dissertation was to contribute to the limited body of literature regarding working-class students and to provide a mechanism for working-class students to achieve future success.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine working-class graduates' perceptions of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training. At the onset of the study, four research questions were specified:

1. How do working-class graduates perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training as having an influence on their life choices and future success?

2. How have *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training affected their decision making skills?

3. How do the working-class graduates score on the grit scale?

4. How do teachers believe *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training benefited the working-class students?

Twelve working-class graduates were interviewed. Many of these graduates had issues or challenges which exacerbated their label of working-class students. Graduate 6 stated, "I was really unhappy with the person that I was." Graduate 10 stated, "I dealt with a lot of things in high school that would really weigh me down and bring me down." Hurst (2012) describes the working-class student in detail. The following are a few of the characteristics she mentioned: not a major behavioral issue, do not have parents or mentors that know how to help them after high school, and without an actual plan on how to succeed in life and college. So not only do these graduates have to deal with struggles of being a working-class graduate; they also have to deal with their own mental and personal struggles. It was evident by the participants' willingness to be interviewed that these characteristics were real and they wanted others to be informed about their struggles.

Some of the graduates shared environmental issues or challenges they faced. Several of the graduates discussed absentee parents and the negative ramifications of their parents' divorce. The year before Graduate 11 took *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course his father had died. Graduate 7 discussed frequent moves and the use of drugs by his parents. Graduate 6 lived with the effects of her sister's mental illness and the results of her repetitive hospitalizations. She describes feeling like an afterthought to her parents. Another graduate describes her suicidal thoughts:

> I was not the kid that did too well because I just really lacked self-esteem and I didn't try because I thought there was no point. I was lacking with some self-esteem issues and I kind of... I don't wanna say gave up. I didn't wanna be alive because I hated my life. (Graduate 1).

These working-class graduates were open to sharing their struggles.

The graduates also communicated feelings that could occur for the working-class in mainstream society. The feelings of slight paranoia, unhappiness, or unmotivated because of hopelessness. Graduate 10 stated, "I was going through really difficult times, and I was very down, very sort of unmotivated and didn't think that I was gonna overcome what I was going through." Some other graduates expressed:

> But at this point in time… I'm just trying to make it by right now… I really just live day by day and schedule by schedule. I've always had the mindset that everybody's out to get me. And not necessarily in like a violent way or anything like that. But I've always had the mindset that somebody's out to get me. And that it's me against the world. (Graduate 7).

> School was always good. I mean I was a good student. I didn't really like school, but I didn't really like being at home either. So it was kind of one of those situations where I was just going to be unhappy, so I might as well fake a smile, and I always faked a smile very well. (Graduate 9).

The working-class graduates shared some of the same struggles that face many adults.

This chapter presents four key findings which help to answer the four research questions. In addition, there was one secondary finding which was not anticipated, but provide valuable insight into the significance of the study. While interviewing the graduates, it was discovered that many of them referred to *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course as the Keystone class. This was the title given to the training course by Zimmer High School. Keystone, Keystone class, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course, 7 Habits, 7 Habits course, and 7 Habits training course were all names used by the graduates. These titles should be understood synonymously. These findings were obtained from 12 in-depth, semi-structured graduate interviews and five in-depth, semi-structured teacher interviews.

Finding 1

The overall finding of this research study is that the participants perceived that *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training positively impacted the graduates' lives. All (12 of 12 [100%]) of working-class graduates indicated that *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training had a positive influence on their life choices and future success. The degree of the impact was different for each graduate. The impact ranged from potentially preventing suicide to providing the skills necessary to conquer daily challenges. Graduate 1 stated, "I didn't wanna be alive because I hated my life. But being in that class, he [teacher] showed us that everyone's going through what you're going through, maybe differently, but someone else is feeling the same way." Whereas, Graduate 6 describes something as simple how she plans for her weekend. Another graduate sums up a common message shared by many of the graduates:

> That class had a huge impact on me and changed the way that I think, but when I sit down and think about it I don't really think that deeply about why do I decide things based… Why do I think the way that I do, why do I make a decision the way that I do, was it because of that class? That class, in particular, was a big driver in keeping me on a path to reaching where I wanted to reach. I mean it really helped me sit down and kind of think about who I am as a person or who I was and who I feel like I could be in the

future. And it changed the way that I think because I mean the things that we did, the things that we talked about in there, made me realize that I can keep going. I can do what I set out to do. I can reach those goals, and I feel like that wasn't a mindset that I had always had. (Graduate 10).

As with these three samples, all of the graduates expressed a positive influence on their life choices and future success.

While the impacts were extremely diverse, two common themes were evident: the development of interpersonal skills and the development of intrapersonal skills. Interpersonal skills are defined as skills being, relating to, or involving relations or interactions with others. Intrapersonal skills are defined as skills occurring within one's mind or self.

Interpersonal Skills

All (12 of 12 [100%]) of the graduates indicated they gained interpersonal skills from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course. Graduate 5 summed up interpersonal skills learning:

> I learned a lot of people skills, just being able to work with people and cooperate, even if you may not like that person, or you may not agree with everything that they say, but being able to respect and try to understand other people's perspectives and values. (Graduate 5).

There were five categories that developed from the interviews: social awareness, relationship development, teamwork, communication skills, and empathy (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Category Frequency for Interpersonal Skills

	Social Awareness	Relationship Development	Teamwork	Communication Skills	Empathy	Total Interpersonal Skills
Graduate 1	x	x			x	x
Graduate 2	x	x	x	x	x	x
Graduate 3	x	x	x			x
Graduate 4	x	x	x		x	x
Graduate 5	x	x			x	x
Graduate 6	x	x	x	x	x	x
Graduate 7	x		x	x		x
Graduate 8	x				x	x
Graduate 9	x					x
Graduate 10	x	x	x	x		x
Graduate 11	x	x		x		x
Graduate 12	x	x	x	x		x
	12/12	9/12	7/12	6/12	6/12	12/12

Social Awareness. All (12 of 12 [100%]) of the graduates shared that they became more aware of others or developed more social awareness. Social awareness is the ability to understand and respond to the perspective of others. Graduate 5 stated, "One of the things that changed me, the way I view the world and my concept of people around me." Graduate 3 continues:

> You just get a different perspective on the whole world around you. It's really cool because people have been through a whole lot of different things than you have been. And so they say something like, oh, wow, I've never really looked at that way. It just opens your eyes. (Graduate 3).

The teachers of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course worked to create a classroom environment where all students felt emotionally safe. They also strived to create trust inside the classroom – trust between students and the teacher. When this environment was provided, the students were able to share their thoughts and feelings without the fear of ridicule or intimidation. Two graduates describe their feelings:

> You need to get to know people before you judge. Or decide that that's a closed door, but that class has brought so many different perspectives from different people around you

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and brought those people in, and you just learn what they've been through and their experiences and after that class. (Graduate 2)

Through some activities that really opened your eyes to other students and where they came from, to understand maybe how they interact or a certain nature of that. That you would see not only myself but other people, start opening up and talking about different things and maybe why they feel this way about a certain thing or something like that. And so it really opened my eyes to not be so judgmental, because in high school… you would see students and have class with students that you really didn't know, but in a class like this, it was required that you learn to work together so, and so really being open-minded going into different activities and things really was big when working in that class. (Graduate 4).

Several other graduates described one of the 7 Habits – Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood. They explained that you have to understand where people are coming from to truly understand them. Graduate 8 describes some of the ways she became more socially aware, "I kind of decided to be friends with some of the people I thought I would never have been friends with because it kind of opened your eyes to different people's situations and we all molded together." When students, and now graduates, have social awareness they can help create a home, a school, a workplace, or a community where other people are valued, respected, and appreciated.

Relationship Development. The majority (9 of 12 [75%]) of the graduates stated their relationships, old and new, improved. The graduates explained that not only did the training course help them develop relationships with the classmates in their *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course, but it has carried over into their adult life. Graduate 12 explained, "I think I'm more intentional because of that class. I think I'm more intentional with my relationships and friendships with people." The graduates described how the teachers forced the students together. Graduate 1 said, "He [teacher] was like, 'No, you have to sit with new people every day,' and then before you know we're all friends in this class." Graduate 6 shared an activity where the teacher describes a social or ethical topic to the students. Then the students

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have to pick a side of the classroom based on how they believe or feel about this topic. The

graduates stated that this activity allowed them to understand differences in people. Some of the

graduates expounded on how it created paradigm shifts and helped them interact without

judging.

> Okay, all these people that I thought were just you know jocks or people I really wouldn't
> hang out with, they're very different than what I thought. So I think the biggest paradigm
> shift I had in that class was like, "You need to get to know people before you judge. Or
> decide that that's a closed door." (Graduate 2).

> So, that aspect of it opened my eyes to give everyone a chance. Just because they look a
> certain way or act a certain way, first impression, this or that, that doesn't necessarily
> determine that person and who they are until you really get down and know them. And I
> feel like this class really helped you to learn how to get to know other people and interact
> with people that you may, intentions or not, be beneficial for furthering your career or
> personal situation or whatever, so really the interaction with people I feel has helped a
> lot. (Graduate 4).

The graduates also described how the class simply created opportunities to develop relationships.

Graduate 8 said, "I kind of decided to be friends with some of the people I thought I would never

have been friends with because it kind of opened your eyes and we all molded together."

Graduate 9 said, "It allows you to get to know people that you probably wouldn't otherwise, so I

think that that's really good." Graduate 6 shared:

> I remember we did… something one day where we all just sat in the room and told each
> other our favorite things about each other. And it was really cool because I got to see
> people that I didn't even know, people that would have never talked to each other in that
> class. You know what I'm saying. It brought community. (Graduate 6).

Graduate 10 said, "I have to have help from people, and I have to rely and trust on people

sometimes, and that's okay." The graduates also explained that as their relationships grew so did

their trust in each other. They understood that trust is built on relationships and growing those

relationships.

Teamwork. Over half (7 of 12 [58%]) of the graduates described how *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course instilled the benefit and need for teamwork. Teamwork can be defined as a group of people working together to accomplish a task that would be much more difficult or impossible to complete alone. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course had access to a ropes course, also known as a challenge course. A ropes course is a set of physical obstacles that participants must navigate. Some of the obstacles are low to the ground or on the ground (low ropes course) while others are high off the ground in trees or utility poles (high ropes course). The ropes course provided an opportunity for the students to work together as a team to accomplish tasks. Graduate 3 describes teamwork:

> You can't do everything yourself. You always had to rely on your team members. You learned a lot about yourself and others and how you each other interact with each other to solve a common goal. We always did these things; these ropes courses where you had to trust each other. (Graduate 3).

Graduate 8 explains the impact working through the ropes course as a team, "We cried together. We laughed together. We did all kinds of obstacle courses together. We helped the special needs kids through the obstacle courses. We picked them up in their wheelchairs. It was awesome. It really was." Graduate 2 shares the early process of how a rope course obstacle created a need for teamwork.

> We have a 10 foot and a 12 foot wall. And the goal is to get the entire class over the wall without using ladders, ropes, anything like that. And of course, you have spotters, but you know, you have the entire team, very diverse group of high schoolers, ninth graders at that and you're all together, and you usually do this fairly early in the year. So you don't quite know everybody, and you don't know everybody's differences. But you do have to work together, and you also have to understand, or you have to realize that you're not going to be successful unless you take into account everybody's strengths and weaknesses. (Graduate 2).

Teamwork also allows the students to be part of a team. A team where they were encouraged by their teammates. Graduate 7 exclaimed:

Ropes course, the construction that went on at the ropes course when somebody got half way up and got scared to keep climbing. And everybody's down there telling them, "You can do it! You can do it! Keep on going!" That is very constructive, cuz that's another one of those things that's sitting there telling you, not everybody is against you. (Graduate 7).

The word teamwork also pushed the students to collaborate which means they not only worked together but had to think together. Graduate 5 discusses:

Our teachers didn't really like when we used the word "teamwork"; "collaboration" was a better term for it, but I learned a lot of people skills, just being able to work with people and cooperate, even if you may not like that person, or you may not agree with everything that they say, but being able to respect and try to understand other people's perspectives and values. (Graduate 5).

Graduate 6 shared how she applied the learning from the training course later in her life when she led a group, "I focused more on meshing those people together and bringing community in a team, a diverse group of people…" The realization for the need for teamwork was enhanced by this training course.

Communication Skills. Half (6 of 12 [50%]) of the graduates specified that *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course help them to understand the need for communication and the skills needed to do it more productively. Graduate 11 remarked, "It definitely taught me to be more open and welcoming of others, and to talk to people about things that you weren't certain about." Graduate 10 noted, "It taught me that it's okay to rely on people and its okay to ask for help when you need it and go to people and work together and get help." Graduate 2 concluded, "They have to step back and understand how to approach… maybe the introverted, less competitive kids. And if you're not able to step back and realize that, you're not going to get anywhere." Graduate 7 reported, "Found out that it's better to just be very forward with what you mean instead of beating around it." These four graduates shared how the training course taught them to ask, to be open, to talk, and listen to others – communication skills. Two

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graduates described how the training course taught them skills they are still using in their daily

lives.

> And so I do think of that still today because I see people that, I think that, we probably wouldn't get along or be friends, but just talk to them and interacting and connecting with them, it just made me think differently about others and how I interact with others. (Graduate 12).

> You seek first to understand and if you understood. That's something I go by all the time. Having such big leadership roles in my life, I made it a priority to seek first to understand, to see people eye to eye. (Graduate 6).

It is a complement to the training course that communication skills are improving.

Empathy. Half (6 of 12 [50%]) of the graduates acknowledged that *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course help them realize the need for empathy. Empathy can be defined as the ability to share and understand another person's feelings. Graduate 1 concluded, "Don't judge a book by its cover, everyone, like I said, has a backstory and is going through something too." Graduate 2 shared, "It [training course] helped me broaden my view on a lot of things in life. It gives you empathy indirectly… because it teaches you how to put yourself into other people's shoes." Graduate 8 stated, "… different student situations. I became more empathetic… It kind of molded me into the person I am today. It taught me a lot of things, like perseverance and empathy." Empathy is an emotion, and emotions must be guided to produced positive, worthwhile results. Graduate 5 expounded on empathy and described how it is more than just sympathizing.

> It opened my eyes to what others around me are going through, you know? Maybe some of my classmates were going through family issues; maybe their parents were going through a divorce. Maybe they were going through some type of mental, physical disorder that really weighed them down, and it helped me to be more understanding and try to sympathize with others. Not just sympathize, but also try to reach out to anyone who maybe could use the help, or just needed a friend to listen to. I don't think I would be as aware of those things without Keystone. (Graduate 5).

It was powerful for the graduates to recognize the need for empathy, but more powerful to recognize why they needed empathy.

Intrapersonal Skills

The majority (9 of 12 [75%]) of the graduates indicated they gained intrapersonal skills from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course. The two predominant categories were gleaned from the interviews were self-awareness and self-confidence (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Category Frequency for Intrapersonal Skills

	Self-awareness	Self-confidence	Total Intrapersonal Skills
Graduate 1	x	x	x
Graduate 2			
Graduate 3	x		x
Graduate 4			
Graduate 5			
Graduate 6	x	x	x
Graduate 7	x	x	x
Graduate 8	x		x
Graduate 9		x	x
Graduate 10	x	x	x
Graduate 11		x	x
Graduate 12	x	x	x
	7/12	7/12	9/12

Self-Awareness. Over half (7 of 12 [58%]) of the graduates improved their self-awareness skills. Self-awareness is defined as the knowledge of your own personality or individuality. Becoming more self-aware can be challenging to discover. The teachers of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course developed an activity called the "hot seat." One classmate sits in a chair (the hot seat) surrounded by the remaining classmates. The classmates tell the person in the hot seat what they think about him/her. It must always end with a positive

statement about the classmate siting in the hot seat. Two graduates describe the process of hot

seat activity:

> One person in the classroom sits in this chair, and they cannot say anything. And everyone else is more than welcome to say something about that person in the chair. And you can even say something that's maybe not nice, but you have to end it on a good note. (Graduate 1).

> Basically, you sit down in this chair, and you're the center of attention. Everybody tells you it's straight up to your face. You tell him why he might – they're bluntly honest with you. They'll tell you what some of your qualities are if you don't already know what they are, just tell them to your face some things they may not like about you particularly. But they always end it with something positive to keep you – what they do like about you and what they did. (Graduate 3).

Some of the graduates expressed the positive effects the "hot seat" had on their self-awareness.

They also described how it changed what they thought about themselves.

> It motivated them to change because they saw themselves differently than their

classmates saw them.

> I was so nervous to do it because I was like 'Oh, people are gonna say bad things to me,' like how I viewed myself. And as soon as I sat down in that chair, it was compliment, after compliment, after compliment. I didn't get one awful thing said to me… And he [teacher] was just flabbergasted that I didn't see how everyone could see me. And that was definitely something that I took from that, and I was like, 'When I think that I'm an awful person, or I'm not good, or whatever,' I'm like 'Well, so'… I just need to shut and be happy because everyone else is happy with me too. I think my happiness changed. (Graduate 1).

> That really opens your eyes… I remember one of people in mine; I was a little class clown, whatever. They said they couldn't take me seriously, but they knew I was smart, so I was – people don't ever take what you say seriously, because you act just stupid all the time, so that's something that once I heard that, I was just like man, I got to – people think I'm an idiot, so I got up and – it was just I can't be fooling around all the time. (Graduate 3).

> Because I was a very shy person, I think I came across kinda as a snob or someone who was just not a nice person… it hurt because it really got me thinking and that's not how I wanna appear at all. And then towards the end, I did it again and it was like, completely different, and so that's something that another thing I'll always remember is just how I might come across to people is not how I want to come across to people and so it really made me take step back and re-think about how I seem to people. (Graduate 12).

The graduates also described other situations where the teachers helped them become more self-aware. Many times this was through simple class or groups discussions or through one-on-on conversations. Graduate 10 stated, "I mean it really helped me sit down and kind of think about who I am as a person or who I was and who I feel like I could be in the future." This statement is the essence of self-awareness.

Self-Confidence. Over half (7 of 12 [58%]) of the graduates credit *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course with increasing their self-confidence. Self-confidence can be described as believing in one's own powers and abilities. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course used a ropes course, also known as a challenge course, to help build self-confidence.

> One of the biggest things that we did that was a challenge for myself was participating in the ropes course… That initial climbing up the tree or pole or whatever was really nerve-rattling. Kind of relate that to life. You jump into some things, walk into a new job, something like that, you're nervous. You don't know how everyone else is gonna act. You don't know how it's going to be… (Graduate 4).

> We had the ropes course in our Keystone class. And I remember I told myself, I'm going to step out of my comfort zone and I'm going to do every single one. And there were times that I didn't think I could. I was like, man I just was not feeling this, and I pushed myself and because having this opportunity and because of having teachers that encouraged me that continued to push me, I did all of it. And I look back on those things, well if I can do that, then I can do this. Like it taught me more about myself and how if I-it sounds very cheesy, but if I set my mind to something I can do it. (Graduate 6).

> When we had done the two-line bridge, I definitely... I was looking at it, and I'd seen people go across it before me, and I thought: "Holy cow, I can't do that. That's crazy, that's pretty high up there." But he [teacher] got me up there. So, once I got up there, he started encouraging me, and that actually made me realize sometimes stuff that seems impossible, it actually can turn out to be one of the easiest things or one of the funniest things that you do. (Graduate 11).

The ropes course provided an opportunity for the graduates to push themselves and their classmates to do things and overcome things they did not think were possible.

Self-confidence was built when the graduates would experience small victories; one task was built upon the next, that would accumulate over time to show what they could accomplish. Graduate 6 stated, "I saw the things I could do, it gave me a lot of confidence in myself, and like I said it encouraged me too." When encouragement is combined with success, self-confidence flourishes.

> I was very much still learning and who I was, was developing and I think in high school I went through a lot of things that really brought me down and filled me with a lot of self-doubt and I know going to Keystone and learning and experiencing the things that we did and doing what we did really helped show me that I can do this. I can do what I want to do. That class in particular was a big driver in keeping me on a path to reaching where I wanted to reach. I would always think back to that class… and I'm like, 'No you're gonna get through this, you can do this, you can do things, you can be better, you achieve better things…' (Graduate 10).

Working-class graduates needed to develop self-confidence to help overcome their lack of outside support.

Overall Influence

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens training course had an overall positive influence on the working-class graduates. Graduate 1 remarked, "After that I was… I don't wanna die. I was okay with my life. So, yeah it did change my life forever because I feel like I wouldn't be here if I'd never took that class." Several of the graduates described their positive memories of the training course. Graduate 3 praised, "It was really one of my favorite class I ever been." Graduate 6 proclaimed, "I think this class, it was awesome. I had it my freshman year. That was my foundation of the rest of my high school career." Graduate 8 expressed, "Definitely that class, it really, really opened my eyes and changed me. Keystone, that was probably the most memorable part of my high school, that class." A few of the graduates described the influence of the training course. Graduate 1 touted, "I think I took more out from that class and used it in everyday life than I have ever with any other subject I've ever used in high school." Graduate 10

shared, "That class was a big influence in keeping me motivated." Graduate 6 described a

specific incident which was influenced by completing the training course.

> I don't think I really knew what I wanted to do until after I took that class because after I took it and I saw the things I could do, it gave me a lot of confidence in myself and like I said it encouraged me to, after that class I found a trip to Uganda and went to Uganda and decided alright this is what I'm going to do with my life. And because of that class, and it's not like I ever questioned if I can't do it. After that I know that one person can make a difference. (Graduate 6).

Graduate 12 shared how this class made her different as a high school student.

> After that class, I kinda became more outgoing… I remember telling my parents like, I wanted to make my high school years count… So, I kinda, in the classes that I had… I really got to know my classmates in those classes… And the cool thing about it was, is they all took Keystone too, so we were all on the same page and it really just, in every class it was just fun because we were comfortable around one another and we all kinda knew each other in a way, because we had all taken that class. (Graduate 12).

Two of the graduates continued to describe how important they viewed the class, to the point

where they felt every high school student should be required to take *The 7 Habits of Highly*

Effective Teens training course.

> I feel like every school should have to be required to take a course like that. And every organization should… I feel like businesses should do that course. Especially people you're working with, there's no better way to get closer, and to really understand people around you. (Graduate 1).

> Wow, these are how I got through high school. This is how I matured as a person. I think Keystone impacted me more than I could understand at the time. And wish everybody could have that experience… It was much more than what you learn in a class like it was real and it was raw. And it opened a can of worms for me… I think this is a crucial class that should be in every high school. (Graduate 6).

The graduates also explained how the training course created influence in their lives after high

school. Graduate 4 reported, "So, I think just the whole experience of the class has helped me in

my career that I'm in now and where I'm at now." Graduate 8 proclaimed, "But after taking that

class it definitely steered… it steered me in the direction of becoming a teacher today."

Graduate 10 concluded:

It changed my mindset about a lot of things for the better. And I think that's something that I'm always gonna have to have with me and be able to go back on and think about and rely on when I'm going through hard times and things like that. (Graduate 10).

This finding provided data to support the training course as having a positive impact on the graduates' life choices and future success. Even though the impact varied from graduate to graduate, it did have an impact on all graduates.

Finding 2

A second key finding of this research study is *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training had a positive effect on graduates' decision making skills. All (12 of 12 [100%]) of the working-class graduates indicated that The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens training had a positive effect on their decision making skills. Decision making skills can be described in a wide variety of way. It could range from a short term decision, such as determining what will be served for dinner; to a long range decision, such as will I attend college, where will I attend college, or what will I do for a career.

Although the affects the graduates' experienced varied, four common themes prevailed. The themes are 1) weighing pros and cons, 2) prioritizing outcomes, 3) thinking long-term, and 4) real-life applications.

Weighing Pros and Cons

Many of the graduates described their decision making processes. Some stated they just made decision based on how they felt in the moment, while others gave it more thought. Through the training course, a technique that proved to be helpful for the graduates while still in high school and after was weighing the pros and cons before a decision is made. The graduates discussed how the teachers posed scenarios to the class, and then they would write the pros and cons about how they would handle the scenario. The graduates stated when they actually

thought about the pros and cons they made better informed decisions. Two graduates epitomized

weighing pros and cons.

> You have to weigh the cons also, but being able to like, put yourself in that mindset of, "Okay, this is not good. But here are the good things. Let's build off of that." It can pretty much apply to any situation, whether it be you know, personal struggles, or physical life struggles, or dealing with other people. It seems to help me to calm myself down and clear my head, and it ultimately helps me make a better decision. (Graduate 2).

> So when it comes time to make a decision, whether a small or a life changing decision or whatever it may be, I literally look more at pros and cons and look at both sides of the picture to see what will really be best in the long way, and I feel like the class really helped me to kind of learn to not just go with what I think or my instinct, but really sit down and analyze the situation, look at all my options, and really determine which one would be the best for that situation. (Graduate 4).

Weighing pros and cons was a skill that was developed from the training course and is still used

by the graduates today.

Prioritizing Outcomes

When decisions are being made there can be multiple outcomes. Sometimes there is not

a clear right or wrong answer, or even a best answer. After weighing the pros and cons, the

potential outcomes must be prioritized. Graduate 6, shared, "I think the [class], it taught me how

to prioritized if that makes sense." When graduates are able to be forward-thinking and prioritize

potential outcomes it allows them to make better planned decisions and have confidence in those

decisions.

> The decision making aspect of not having a right or wrong answer but having natural consequences with each decision, that can teach high school students a lot. I mean, not every consequence is good or bad, but there's a consequence for everything that we do. (Graduate 2).

> Decide more to open my eyes, and not always just look at it as, "This is what I'm going to do. There's no changing my mind." It definitely let me look at all the options before I decided to make a decision. (Graduate 11).

It was powerful for the graduates to understand that sometimes there is not a clear choice, and prioritizing outcomes can help to provide the best solution.

Thinking Long-Term

After graduates discussed weighing the pros and cons and prioritizing outcomes, a few of them discussed the importance of thinking long-term. They described the difficulties a high school student has in thinking long term. For most high school students, they live for the moment and are driven by emotions and feelings.

> Once you do something in that class I learned that you got to think of the outcome. You just can't do something, just do something just without no outcome out. It made you actually sit down think about something if I do this, how is this going to affect somebody else; how is this going to affect me. (Graduate 3).

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens training course helped students to transition in to thinking long-term, not for just the immediate gratification of the moment.

Real-Life Applications

The final theme of decision making skills is to take what has been taught and apply it to real-life applications. Graduate 2 remarked, "Situations and things like that that took part of the class that really made you work together and come up with a decision together for a particular task or activity." The goal of the teachers was to teach the skills of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and then work with students to apply the habits to real-life applications.

> I would say it would be how we can put those principles into real life applications for kids. Through activities, through discussion, through their life experiences. It's a processing of the program; it's the processing of *The 7 Habits*. It's the putting it into context for them. That would be, without question, that's how they'd learn. If you allow them to talk. Was the person proactive or reactive? Was the person beginning with the end in mind? Did the person think about what their responsibilities were, or did they react at a certain time? I think it would be definitely being able to process each and every event that takes place in their lives. (Teacher 2).

Teachers of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course are uniquely posed to impact

high school students. They are able to provide them with unique training which is not normally

taught in a general education class or setting.

Finding 3

All twelve working-class graduates completed Angela Duckworth's ten-question Grit

Scale survey anonymously. The median grit score for working-class graduates was 3.9. The

results are displayed below in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Grit Scores for Graduate Participants

Grit Score	Scored higher than about __% of American adults in a recent study
2.50	10%
3.30	30%
3.40	40%
3.50	40%
3.70	50%
3.80	50%
4.00	70%
4.09	70%
4.09	70%
4.09	70%
4.30	80%
4.30	80%
Mean Score 3.76	**Mean Score 55%**
Median Score 3.9	**Median Score 60%**

The third key finding of this research study is working-class graduates scored slightly

above the Angela Duckworth's Grit Scale's median score. Duckworth's Grit Scale ranges from

zero to five with 2.5 serving as the median score. The median score for the graduates was 3.9.

The top score was 4.3 and the lowest score was 2.50. The mean score was 3.76. The Grit Scale

results also displayed a percentage; the percentage represented how each graduate scored

compared to American adults. For example, the median score for graduates was higher than about 60% of American adults in a recent study (Duckworth, 2017). The top score of 4.3 is equivalent to 80%, while the bottom score of 2.50 is equivalent to 10%. It could be stated, the top scoring graduate scored higher than about 80% of American adults, and the bottom scoring graduate scored higher than about 10% of American adults in Duckworth's 2017 study. The mean score for graduates was 55%. With such a wide range of scores, it is difficult to determine if working-class graduates are "grittier" than nonworking-class graduates. What can be determined is all working-class graduates that were interviewed and took the Grit Scale survey scored a minimum of 10% higher than other American adults.

Finding 4

The fourth key finding of this research study is the teachers believed *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training benefited the working-class students. All (5 of 5 [100%]) of the teachers believed The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens training benefited the working-class students. The benefits were numerous, but four common themes emerged from the interviews with the teachers. The themes are 1) increased self-responsibility, 2) increased awareness and respect for others, 3) increased goal planning skills, and 4) improved relationships.

Increased Self-Responsibility

The majority (4 of 5 [80%]) of the teachers shared there was increased self-responsibility by the students. Self-responsibility is knowing the appropriate way to conduct oneself in particular situations. The teachers concluded that the students understood each person is responsible for themselves and their future. Teacher 2 explained, "It just teaches them how to be a person. How to be responsible, how to take care of yourself… It's made them more responsible. They're responsible for their jobs, as well as their happiness." Teacher 3 clarified,

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"Being able to understand that you are in control of your own life, and nobody can make you do anything in this life." Teacher 1 continued, "… they get to decide their futures, that they're responsible for themselves." A few of the teachers gave specific examples of how they taught or explained self-responsibility.

> They know responsibility and they understand that they're in charge and that they're the boss and, when I reinforce that enough, I think that's one of the ones they kind of key in on and when we talk about listen to other people, we do with like Habit Five, be the first to understand and be understood. (Teacher 1).

> It's something that we talked about every single day in ninth-grade. 'This is a habit, you're doing this habit, this is a habit.' We talk about the ill effects of bad habits, and people have bad habits that continue to do those, and then you have to be proactive, to constantly think about how to change into your mindset. (Teacher 2).

Teachers 1 and 2 believed that changing bad habits into positive habits is a path to increased self-responsibility.

In the end, the teacher worked to instill in the students the belief that they are responsible for themselves. Teacher 1 disclosed, "So, I feel like a lot of them are clicked into the fact that they can, what kind of future they do have, that they've got to take that ownership of it." The teachers also taught the students to look outward and care ~~outwardly~~ about others, but also to remain committed to caring for themselves. Teacher 2 expressed, "They understand they can't please everyone; that's why it's a think win-win." Teacher 2 followed this with:

> Their parents can't offer them more, so they have to get it on their own. The 7 Habits actually teaches students … to take responsibility for their own lives, instead of allowing it just to happen. We would talk about that; you don't let life happen, you have to make things happen. (Teacher 2).

Teacher 1 continued to explain how some of the students have good lives while others are not so good.

> I think it's important if your life is bad, I think you need to see and you need to hear from people who have a good life so you know what exists outside of your world and, the ones that have a really good life, I like for them to hear that bad things exist and crappy things

exist in the world and they need to appreciate what they have and continue striving for that … (Teacher 1).

Teacher 4 concluded by sharing, "Lead themselves and if they can lead themselves then hopefully they'll be able to lead others." He wanted the students to understand that before they could lead or help anyone else they must first be responsible for themselves – self-responsibility.

Increased Awareness and Respect for Others

The majority (4 of 5 [80%]) of the teachers stated there was increased awareness and respect for others. Awareness is simply the knowledge of what is happening around us, and respect for others is an appreciation and care for the differences in others. Teacher 2 expounds, "It just teaches them how to … take care of … others." The teachers described how the students in the class grew together and bonded. Teacher 3 explained more about what happened inside the class, "That protecting factor of that relationship between those two kids that probably wouldn't have been there at a normal time because they wouldn't have interacted without a class like this is powerful." The teachers continued to share how this is unique for a class of ninth-grade students to develop awareness and respect for others, but not unique in a 7 Habits training course.

> We're fortunate enough to be able to go outside and the ropes course and they have a lot of stuff down there when we do that. But, one thing maybe is maybe like a trust factor at first. I get ninth graders we have two different middle schools so they come together for ninth-grade and we have a bunch of kids that don't know each other. (Teacher 4)
> It gave them social skills, gave them the ability to interact with their peers successfully. Gave them the ability to empathize with people. To realize that everybody has a story. We didn't tolerate any kind of bullying, or put downs or anything like that. By the time things were over we had a cohesive group of kids, and they cheer each other on. It's just that team. By the time … I got done with our kids we had a cohesive group. It was great… (Teacher 5).

> The teachers went on to elaborate how they created the increased awareness and respect for others with the curriculum and the activities of the training class. The curriculum is built to get the student outside of their comfort zone… We're challenging them not only

to think about themselves, but to get to know other students at a deeper level than just sitting and being a classmate or working on a project together. (Teacher 3).

A lot of the activities that we do and a lot of those situations we put them in makes them interact with people and really stop and think about what their assumptions about other people that they don't know… that they wait for her [teacher] to make her own personality known instead of assuming what kind of person she is and stopping to listen to other people and to appreciate the other people around them. (Teacher 1).

Teacher 5 explained, "Just the team building activities and interacting with each other and their peers. The hands on activities where they had to interact, had to communicate, and communicate effectively." The most impactful evidence of the increased awareness and respect for others was stated by Graduate 8.

I think how some activities were set up; it required you to … if you wanted to be successful at a particular activity, you didn't have a choice. There wasn't a way to sit there and ignore someone or ignore half the group when it required the entire group effort. I can't remember the name of the activity, but there was three platforms, and you had to move your group from platform to platform, and you only had certain boards that you could use, and no one could touch the ground, and this and that. Well, if someone's messing up and you keep getting mad at them, they're gonna get mad, and there's no way the group's going to work together. So learning that way has really been beneficial because it required you to be successful in that class, and everyone wanted to be successful in that class, because you were participating in activities and tasks and things that most kids in high school thought were fun, but then when you sat down and start going through why you were doing it, things like that, you really saw the real life application of how it could help you grow as a person. (Graduate 8).

Not only did the teachers witness the students' increased awareness and respect for others, the graduates also understood and acknowledged they were becoming more aware.

Increased Goal Planning Skills

The majority (4 of 5 [80%]) of the teachers emphasized there were increased goal planning skills developed by the students. During the training course the students learned the importance of goals setting and how to create goals. The teachers required the students to create short-term and long-term goals. The goals were to be realistic and attainable goals. Teacher 2 described, "The 7 Habits actually teaches students to set those goals, those smart goals…" Smart

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goals mean specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Teacher 2 explained,

"Goals have to be very specific. Going to college is different than graduating college. And that's

what we would talk about. So they learned how to be a little bit more specific about their goals."

Learning to set and adjust smart goals is a skill of great benefit to any student or graduate.

The students were not allowed to set lofty, unattainable goals, but were required to detail

out the steps it would take to achieve a goal. They were required to reflect and evaluate their

goals to determine if they were smart goals. The teachers stated the students began by learning

to set small, daily goals. Teacher 4 describes teaching short-term goals setting.

> We'll put up a goal and we'll show, you know, little steps to achieve a long term goal.
> Then we'll set daily goals and, you know, maybe just one step to achieve that daily goal.
> So I think when kids get a grasp of that and then they apply it to themselves they have a
> really good understanding of how to use this for themselves… (Teacher 4).

The teachers shared that students must be taught that goals frequently need to altered or

modified. The students then began to learn to expand short-term goals into longer goals.

Finally, they learned to set long-term, life goals using the skills taught in *The 7 Habits of Highly

Effective Teens* training course. Teacher 2 shared, "They're more focused; a lot of them have set

goals in ninth-grade that they're fulfilling in adulthood. It's something that we talked about every

single day in ninth-grade."

> Another teacher describes the goal setting process with the following statements:
> Being able to set those goals and have them constantly changing are a part of it. Once
> you understand how that works, you'll see how success will follow it. Being able to
> constantly reach for goals that are attainable rather than ones that are unattainable and
> just dreamlike. To say, 'I want to make a million dollars.' Well, that's great, but how are
> you going to do that? 'I want to go to college.' How are you going to get to college? 'I
> want to make good grades.' Well, how are you going to do that? 'You've got to wake up
> in the morning. You've got to get yourself ready.' You've got to not only go to school,
> but you've got to listen. Not even just listen. You've got to make sure you're hearing that
> teacher. You're locked in on every word that's coming out of their mouth because
> hopefully your brain is telling them it is coming out of their mouth, it's important, so you
> may want to listen to it and take as much in as you can. Absorb it. Having goals of

understanding what you want to do, what you want to learn will always take you further than what you actually learn. (Teacher 3).

The ability to set long-term, life goals in ninth-grade has the potential to change the life trajectory of these working-class students.

The teachers were asked if they felt like the working-class students were setting goals for their future. The response by Teacher 4 summed up the answer.

As a majority, no I don't. But, you know, being a ninth-grade class I don't think they've understood how to really set the goals for later on in life. But, in the classroom we harp on it daily. You know, you gotta set goals even if it's just small goals throughout the day to accomplish things, you know, for later on. (Teacher 4).

The teachers were also asked if they believed the students were more realistic about their future goals and were working to create more obtainable goals after going through the training course. The response by Teacher 4 concluded:

Yes, absolutely because we do activities that will, you know, we'll put up a goal and we'll show, you know, little steps to achieve a long term goal. Then we'll set daily goals and, you know, maybe just one step to achieve that daily goal. So I think when kids get a grasp of that and then they apply it to themselves they have a really good understanding of how to use this for them. (Teacher 4).

When the students began the training course many of the teachers did not believe the students understood how to set goals or why goal-setting was important. As the training course went on and at its conclusion, these same teachers witnessed the change in these working-class students. They saw their ability to process the training and apply it to their own lives by setting short and long term goals.

Improved Relationships

Over half (3 of 5 [60%]) of the teachers shared that they witnessed improved relationships between the students. They stated the students had the opportunity to learn about peers which they likely would not have encountered outside of the training course.

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To get more personal because if they can set that up and create stronger relationships, then those will carry over outside our classroom to where you may have kids who would never talk to each other in a hallway. Now they're sitting at lunch together and they're able to hang out and have real conversations. (Teacher 3).

By learning about their peers, the students developed an understanding of them as individuals which then cultivated a relationship.

Throughout *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course the teachers worked to cultivate relationships between classmates. The teachers also stated frequently these relationships continue outside of the training course. Teacher 3 describes his perspective of the development of these relationships:

It's amazing to be able to see the difference once you start to see those relationships build between people who you know outside of that class in a normal setting. They probably wouldn't talk to each other just because their cliques are completely different. Then once you see that classroom start to fail, and you really create an environment for success and trust and using those seven habits and they start to buy into what you're saying, it really comes down to the teacher. They have to create that relationship with those kids to be comfortable to open up because if you don't create that relationship with them, they're not going to open up to you. In turn, they're not going to open up of course to their classmates. (Teacher 3).

The ability to improve relationships is another skill the training course teaches which is beneficial to everyone.

Finding 5

One secondary finding was not anticipated, but provided valuable insight into the significance of the study. Some (4 of 12 [25%]) of the graduates indicated the teachers of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course made an impact on their lives. It was evident after conducting the interviews, the graduates credited some of the success of the course to the teacher of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course. Graduate 7 stated the content of the course was not much benefit to him at the time. He shared that he was regretful of his lack of participation in the training course. However, while in the class he developed a relationship

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with the teacher. Graduate 7 credits his 7 Habits teacher with changing his mentality on life. He

proclaimed, "A lot of what I gained from the class did not stem from the class, it stemmed from

the instructor."

> I think if I didn't have him in high school, I would have just ... to be honest, this is really
> deep and messed up, but people like him are the reason why people like me that have the
> low self-esteem made it and didn't end up … ending their life because of things like
> that… I was fortunate to have someone like that, and I hope that most kids had if not him
> someone like him. (Graduate 1).

Graduate 1 credits her life to her relationship with Teacher 2. He truly made an impact in her

life.

Two graduates described their teacher. Graduate 9 remarked, "He really poured into his

students more than a typical teacher. He really wanted things to click with us, so I think that it

did." Graduate 1 explained, "His classroom really changed my perspective on life in general,

and that's why I just have so much respect for him." It is important to recognize the impact the

teacher has on the training course. Graduate 9 verified, "He's one of the best people I've ever

met in my life. I mean, he really is." Graduate 1 ended by saying, "That is just one of the most

respected men in my life personally, because of just the things he showed us, and said to us, and

taught us." Graduate 7 described the impact his teacher had on him.

> He has helped me more times than he ever should have. And why he helped me more
> than he should have, I can't explain to you. But what he's done for me in that class and
> outside of that class has changed my mind on how I look at people. And he kinda made
> me realize that not everybody's out to get me and that some people… and just because
> you think you're worthless doesn't mean that people see you the same way. (Graduate 7).

Graduate 11 faced a difficult situation the year before he took *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective*

Teens training course. He describes the impact of the teacher.

> I think that it was great to have him there, because the year following that I had lost my
> dad, and I was really looking for a male role model. He was definitely there, and he was
> definitely the best candidate for it. He gave me great lots of advice, and he told me to
> take more risks. I'm sure glad he did. (Graduate 11).

For some of the graduates, the relationship with the teacher proved to provide the most impact in their lives.

Summary

There were five findings discovered by the research. The sections of this chapter were organized occurring to findings that answered each of the four research questions. The fifth and final finding was unexpected. The finding sections used large quantities of quotes from graduates or teachers to help solidify the findings. Using quotes helps to bring the findings alive and convince the readers of the magnitude of rich data that was provided by the interviews.

The first and second research questions were both answered with a 100% affirmative response by all 12 graduates. These findings indicated that the training course had a positive influence and positive effect on the working-class graduates. The third finding was inconclusive because the working-class graduates' scores on the grit scale varied widely. The forth finding indicated that all five teachers believed the training course benefited working class-students. Teacher 1 adds some insight to the benefit.

> I feel like for a lot of the, just the working-class regular kids, it's one of the first times that they get noticed for something and so they tend to listen to me more because they feel like I value them more. I guess, and they're the ones that will stop back by to say hi to me or they'll come back and tell me that … they're taking these classes, that they're doing these things. (Teacher 1).

Teacher 3 shares how it benefited students and the school.

> It truly does change the culture of the schools' future… It sets them up to have relationships that they'll have for the next three years at least. They may be with a buddy that starts to talk about somebody else, but they had them in that keystone class and say, 'Hey, I know him. He is a good dude. Leave him alone.' It snowballs into that effect where that culture of the school really grew after that and became a lot closer. Truly in my opinion, you can see it evolve throughout the years because the kids care because they know more about them. (Teacher 3).

The fifth finding was discovered because four of the graduates specifically expressed how the teacher made an impact in their lives.

Chapter four provides answers to the research questions in the form of findings. In chapter five, these findings are interpreted and discussed. There are also recommendations that will be provided. These recommendations include changes in future research approaches, important components to a successful training program, and changes to improve the training program. The chapter will end with research conclusions.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine working-class graduates' perceptions of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training. This chapter will interpret and discuss the findings from chapter four. The findings helped to answer the four original research questions:

1. How do working-class graduates perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training as having an influence on their life choices and future success?

2. How have *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training affected their decision making skills?

3. How do the working-class graduates score on the grit scale?

4. How do teachers believe *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training benefited the working-class students?

In addition to just answering the research questions, other findings were also discovered. These additional findings were analyzed and will be discussed. Following the discussion, recommendations will be made, and conclusions will be drawn.

Overview

Creswell (2009) describes qualitative research as a means to explore and understand a particular topic. Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe the study of lived experiences and how those experiences are understood as phenomenology. This phenomenological, qualitative research study sought to explain the impact of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course on the working-class graduate. Creswell (2013) concluded that the findings would provide meaning to the phenomenon.

The research design started with a literature review, followed by a site selection. Zimmer High School served as the setting for this research study. Every ninth grader is enrolled in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course at Zimmer. Working-class graduates were identified from this population; as well as, current and former teachers of the training course. Three sampling strategies were used to locate participants. They were criterion sampling (for both graduates and teachers), homogenous sampling, and network sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The last two sampling strategies were solely for graduates. There were 12 working-class graduates and five current and former teachers that were identified.

The data was collected from semi-structured interviews of the working-class graduates and teachers of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course. According to Creswell (2009), semi-structured interviews are useful when the participants cannot be directly observed and when they can provide historical data. After the interviews were completed, a survey was completed by each graduate. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The researcher then reads the transcripts multiple times to become immersed in the data. Several coding cycles followed to derive codes, categories, and finally themes. Codes allow the researcher to develop categories. Categories are groups of codes that have similarities or connections. Categories helped to reduce the data and make sense of it. This continual reduction and interpretation created themes. The themes helped to answer the research questions, which created the essence of the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013).

Interpretation

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) described the process of interpretation as taking findings and weaving them into a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. The interpretations will begin by synthesizing each of the findings which answer the four research questions. Then

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additional findings will be explored. The first and fourth findings will be discussed together, followed by the other findings.

Findings 1 and 4

The graduate interviews provided data that created two themes – interpersonal skills and intrapersonal skills. Interpersonal skills were formed from five categories – social awareness, relationship development, teamwork, communication skills, and empathy. Intrapersonal skills were formed from two categories – self-awareness and self-confidence. These two themes and seven categories provided information to form Finding 1. The teacher interviews provided the data that created four themes – increased awareness and respect for others, increased self-responsibility, increased goal planning skills, and improved relationships. These four themes provided the information to form Finding 4. In this discussion, the researcher compared graduate categories and teacher themes. The reason categories were not used with the teacher data was because the codes were reduced straight to themes.

Finding 1 stated all (12 of 12 [100%]) of the working-class graduates indicated *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training had a positive influence on their life choices and future success, which is consistent to the findings in Davis et al. (2014) study regarding SEL skills predicting positive life choices.   Finding 4 stated all (5 of 5 [100%]) of the teachers believed *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training benefited the working-class students. From the literature review, Buchanan et al. (2009) also believe the SEL intervention positively benefited their students. When these two findings are examined together, all of the participants felt *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training benefited the graduates in some capacity.

There were seven categories that were mentioned by over fifty percent of the participants. The graduate categories were: social awareness, relationship development, self-confidence, self-

awareness, and teamwork. The four teacher themes were: increased awareness and respect for

others, increased self-responsibility, increased goal planning skills, and improved relationships.

Table 5.1

Comparison of the Most Frequent Graduate Categories and Teacher Themes

	Graduates		Teachers	
Awareness	12/12	100%	4/5	80%
Relationships	9/12	75%	3/5	60%
Self-Responsibility	2/12	17%	4/5	80%
Goal Planning	2/12	17%	4/5	80%
Self-Confidence	7/12	58%	2/5	40%
Self-Awareness	7/12	58%	2/5	40%
Teamwork	7/12	58%	0/5	0%

Increased social awareness from the graduate's perspective, and increased awareness and

respect for others from the teacher's perspective were the top category/theme for each group of

participants. These two were analyzed and displayed in the table as awareness. Every graduate

felt the training course increased their social awareness. Social awareness is the ability to

understand and respond to the perspective of others. This definition perfectly describes the

theme that was developed from the teacher data. Four out of five teachers discussed that the

students displayed an increased awareness and respect for others.

The next highest corresponding category/theme involved relationships. The category for

graduates was relationship development and the theme for teachers was improved relationships.

Nine out of twelve graduates (seventy-five percent) believed the training course assisted in

developing relationships. Three out of five teachers (sixty percent) stated the training course

improved relationships for the students. Awareness and relationships showed the strongest

correlations between the graduates and the teachers, which is also consistent with Ryan &

Cooper (2000) findings on the benefits of character education training programs.

The next two themes were derived from the teacher data, and they are increased self-responsibility and increased goal planning skills. Four out of five (eighty percent) teachers stated they saw an increase of these two qualities in the graduates. Yet, only two of the graduates discussed increased self-responsibly. These two graduates explained that they must take responsibility for themselves. They have to make their own choices and they cannot blame others for their mistakes. In addition, only two graduates mentioned goal-planning. The graduates discussed the importance of establishing goals at a young age, and how setting goals at a young age helped guide their future. They also felt they would not have meet their goals if they were not set at a young age. The graduates shared how they thought negatively about themselves, and how they never thought they would reach their goals. They credit the training course with giving them skills necessary to meet their goals.

The final three categories mentioned most often by graduates were self-confidence, self-awareness, and teamwork. Seven out of twelve graduates (fifty-eight percent) discussed these three categories. Self-confidence was discussed by two of the teachers. The teachers wanted the students to develop self-confidence so they could excel outside of school. They also push the students in different directions to increase their confidence. Self-awareness was also discussed by two teachers. The teachers tried to help the graduates discover their purpose and strengths. The most interesting aspect was the fact that none of the teachers discussed teamwork, while seven out of twelve graduates did.

So what does this mean? Both the graduates and most of the teachers felt the training course increased the students' capacity in regards to awareness and relationships. Most of the teachers also believed the training course increased the students' self-responsibility and goal planning, but only two graduates shared this concept. The majority of the graduates believed the

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training course helped to improve their self-confidence, self-awareness, and teamwork; but only two teachers discussed increased self-confidence and self-awareness as benefits. Teamwork was seen as a benefit by the graduates, but not mentioned by the teachers. It appears the teachers were not thinking about developing teamwork in a classroom, but simply trying to teach the skills to the students; whereas, the graduates internalized the class and the teachings, and saw the skills as a capacity-builder for teamwork. The graduates discussed how the classroom grew together to form a pseudo-team inside of the school. From the teachers' perspective, teamwork was an unintended result that was recognized by over half of the graduates. The graduates had the opportunity to be part of a team in the classroom even though that was not an intended benefit of the training course.

Finding 2

All twelve of the working-class graduates indicated that the training course had a positive impact on their decision making skills, which is consistent with Forneris, Danish, & Scott (2007) finding from their research with another SEL training program. There were four themes that developed from the data. They are weighing pros and cons, prioritizing outcomes, thinking long-term, and real-life applications. Not every graduate discussed each of these four themes, but they all positivity attributed at least one of the themes as a skill that was gained from the training course. Many of the graduates discussed the process of weighing pros and cons, and how actually writing down the pros and cons were beneficial. Many times teenagers make decisions based on their emotions and do not think about the consequences of those decisions. The training course helped the students think though the decision making process by using more than just emotions. When the pros and cons are weighed many times outcomes develop. The class help the graduate take these possible outcomes and prioritize them.

Several of the graduates discussed how the training class helped them think long-term. Thinking long-term could be summarized as trying to make good choices today so the future will be positively impacted. When the graduates weighed the pros and cons, prioritized the outcomes, and thought long-term – they could apply their skills to real-life applications. The teachers saw how the training course impacted the students, but the most powerful takeaway is when the graduates began to understand for themselves how the training course impacted their lives in high school as students and even more as high school graduates.

Finding 3

Grit is defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth, 2016). Grit involves working diligently toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over the years despite failure and periods of difficulty (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Duckworth (2016) repetitively discovered an individual's level of grit is the most important factor in determining success. Because of the pervious description of the working-class graduate, it was assumed that the working-class graduate would score high on the Grit Scale. So it came as a great surprise that the working-class graduates did not score as anticipated on the Grit Scale. The average results of the graduates were higher than about fifty-five percent of American adults in Duckworth's 2017 study. Half of the graduates scored as the researcher would assume. They scored higher than seventy to eight percent of American adults, yet the remaining half scored as low as ten percent of American adults. With this wide range of scores, the evidence is inconclusive between the working-class graduate and Grit Scores.

Finding 5

Research is initiated by questions. In the case of this qualitative research, data is collected in an attempt to answer research questions. The data collected in this study provided

the findings which answered the four research questions, but the fascinating part of the research was discovering things that were not questioned or even considered. This is the case for the importance of the teachers of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course. Four of the graduates proclaimed the importance of the teacher, to the point where some felt the relationship with the teacher was more valuable than the actual class. The graduates praised the support, honesty, and care the teachers provided. They felt this was not the same type relationships that regular teacher had with students, but something more intimate – something real. This is consistent with the findings of Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Stedje, 2010; and United States Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2008; the teacher has a significant impact on the success of the training program.

Finding 5 provides additional insight for the planning and preparation of the training course. Care must be given when selecting teachers for this course. The wrong teacher could be detrimental to the training course, while the correct teacher could make the training course flourish. It is imperative to choose wisely.

Other Benefits

The training course provided other perceived benefits that did not rise to the magnitude of a theme or even a category, but still deserve discussion. Some of the graduates described how short-term decision making was important, but also equally important was long-term decision making. They discussed how accomplishing small things gave confidence to accomplish big things. Just as short-term goals led to long-term goals, and successful short-term decision making leads to successful long-term decision making.

A few of the graduates discussed how the training course helped them navigate high school. It also helped them realize their potential after high school. Hurst (2012) shared that

typically, working-class students graduate from high school without a specific plan on how to achieve their goals in education and careers. Yet, this research shows they learned it is important to be a risk-taker, as long as the risks are calculated and the possible outcomes are evaluated. This provides evidence that the training course has merit in improving graduates.

Another benefit that was mentioned by a few of the graduates were the instructional methods used to teach the concepts. There were multiple hands-on activities, real-life applications, and a rope course. The ropes course helped to solidify many of the concepts. The graduates felt the class was successful because they did not spend the majority of their time sitting and going through a book, but they were actually doing activities where they had to work together. They were learning the lessons through the applications and activities, not from a book or a lecture. This concurs with the research of Berkowitz and Bier (2005) which stated a variety of delivery methods is an important component of successfully implemented character education program.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications are determinations that can be gleaned from research data, but it may or may not be explicability stated. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) describe recommendations as – the researcher learning certain things to be true and then the researcher recommends action. There are three areas of implication and recommendation. These are implications for practice, implications for future research, and implications for policy.

Implications for Practice

As other school leaders examine this research there are several areas that should be considered. It was evident from the research that *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course had a benefit on students. Working-class are described as the middle-of-the-road, average

students. They are students that are often times overlooked because they are considered just average. They do not receive accolades because of their abilities, and they do not received support because of their deficiencies. As Hurst (2012) summarized in her research many of the working-class students have not been previously provided the opportunities to explore a variety of possibilities for their future or mentors present to assist them in planning for their futures. This training course provides many of the working-class graduates an opportunity to come out of their shell. It gave them the opportunity to explore themselves and to discover who they are. It also allowed them develop skills and abilities they were not aware they possessed. It provided a safe place for them to learn, demonstrate, and enhance the skills they did possess.

There was perceived benefit *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course had on the entire school. A few of the graduates and teachers shared how the training course changed the culture and climate of the school, which is consistent with Collinwood (2010) results at Joseph Welsh Elementary. The graduates develop relationships and care for their fellow classmates that had not occurred before they took *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course. It is rare to find a program that helps the individual student that also helps improve the entire school.

Anyone that picks up a newspaper or turns on the news can see that our society has issues; deep-seeded, core behavior issues. Why these issues are present could be debated, but the fact is they are present everywhere, including our schools. As school leaders, what can be done to change the direction of this course and the outcome? *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course is a starting point. If a school is not using *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course, what are they doing to improve students socially and emotionally? Also what are schools doing to change the culture inside of the schools? The training course provides a

way to help students succeed and make a difference in their lives and in the lives of others. It is paramount that schools invest in the students of today, because they will be the leaders of tomorrow.

The largest insight or impact to current practice should be the recognition of the importance of the classroom teacher, not just the curriculum. John Hattie (2017) stated that the teacher had one of the largest impacts on student learning. A great curriculum, is great, but it cannot be a substitution for a great teacher.

Many of the graduates and teachers felt additional training on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* was needed for the students. Some of them felt the class should have been an entire year course or the habits should have been shared at a younger age. Some also felt the 7 Habits should have been incorporated into all of their classes. This is similar to what Stedje (2010) shared about how effectively implemented programs incorporate the principle's into all aspects of the students' curriculum. Most felt there should have been another class before they graduated to help them better prepare for life after high school.

The teachers also felt some of the students in ninth-grade might not be mature enough to completely understand, internalize, and profit from the training course. It is clear that the graduates and the teachers would like for the students to receive more training than just a semester course in ninth-grade. They believed in the impact the training created in their lives.

Implications for Future Research

After completing the research study, it was apparent there were opportunities to continue researching *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. There were three primary areas of future research. The first area would be adjustments in the research design. If this study was to be replicated, careful consideration should be given to the following items: graduation dates of

participants and current place in life (college, career, etc.) of the participants. Richer data could be provided if the participants graduated high school in the same year. In this research study, there was a range of graduation dates. This range put the participants in different places in life. Some of the graduates were just starting college, others had completed college and were in their career, and others were working and trying to determine their path for the rest of their lives.

The second area is a continuation of the first areas. It would be powerful to create a longitudinal study of the working-class graduates that had participated in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course. This would require a large time investment and more research participants. The study in its simplest form would require graduates to be interviewed when they were one year removed from high school, five years from high school, ten years from high school, and twenty years from high school. This longitudinal study could truly determine the impact of the training course over the lifespan of these graduates.

The final area of research also so has policy implications. According to Brimi (2009), it is widely believed and understood that students should learn soft-skills, be taught character education, and be trained in social-emotional learning. Should these areas be required for students in public schools? This would require more research to determine if these create a benefit to the student and to the school.

Implications for Policy

Districts across the state and states across the country are required by state and federal law to have a defined curriculum. Many states have certain course offerings that must be made available to students. The vast majority of the course offerings are solely academic in nature. Should state or federal law require a training course of this nature to be included in the required

course offerings? If required, would money be allocated to pay for this additional course? The implication of such a small policy change could create waves to the current educational system.

Conclusions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine working-class graduates' perceptions of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training. It was also to answer the research questions of this study. Which are:

1. How do working-class graduates perceive *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training as having an influence on their life choices and future success?

2. How have *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training affected their decision making skills?

3. How do the working-class graduates score on the grit scale?

4. How do teachers believe *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training benefited the working-class students?

These research questions were answered through qualitative research. These answers were derived from the data which was used to create the essence of the phenomenon – the perceptions of working-class graduates about *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training.

The data was collected from twelve interviews with graduates and five interviews with teachers for a total of seventeen interviews. Categories and themes were developed. There were two graduate themes (derived from 7 categories, which were derived from numerous codes) and four teacher themes (derived from numerous codes).

This research study proved to be significant for the following reasons. The study supported the belief that these twelve working-class graduates perceived a benefit from the training course. The study also provided data which corroborated the graduates' perceptions

with the teachers' beliefs. The data did not support the notion that working class graduates

would score higher on the Grit Scale than typical Americans. In the end, this study provided

insight on how *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training course improved the social and

emotions skills of the working-class graduate.

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APPENDIX A

Benefits of *7 Habits* Training on Future Success – Graduate Interview

Date: _____

Preliminary Script: "This is Andy Ashley. Today's date is _____ . It is _____ o'clock, and I am here with student #___ *(interviewee), a graduate of Zimmer High School. We will be discussing his/her perception of the effects of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens Training on students."*

1. Tell me about yourself. Tell me about home, family, friends, activities, school, etc._____

_____

_____

   a. How long did you go to school at Zimmer? _____

   b. How long ago did you graduate from Zimmer? _____

   c. What is your current role in life now that you have graduated from high school? _____

      _____

   d. Did you feel you had other options available? _____

2. Describe yourself as a student or your role as a student. _____

_____

_____

3. Describe your future plans. Where do you see yourself in five years, ten years, and twenty years? _____

_____

4. Do you plan for the future? If so, how do you plan? If not, why do you not plan? _____

_____

_____

5. Is there value in planning for the future? If so, what is this value? _____

_____

_____

6. Did your high school experiences effect your planning for the future? _____

_____

    a. Can you think of any specific experiences that aided in changing your decisions? _____

    _____

    b. If so, did you cover that in the *7 Habits* curriculum? _____

    _____

7. Did participating in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* make you think differently; if so,

how? _____

_____

8. Did the training change your daily and long-term decision-making skills; if so, how? _____

_____

_____

9. Did your future plans change after taking *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* class? _____

_____

_____

10. Did *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* affect your life; if so, how? _____

_____

_____

11. Do you think the principles in the course create a change in your future? _____

_____

_____

12. What can be changed to make *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training program more

beneficial? _____

_____

_____

13. Is there anything I have not asked that you think would better help me understand your

thoughts and feeling about your future? _____

_____

_____

Benefits of *7 Habits* Training on Future Success – Teacher Interview

Date: _____

Preliminary Script: "This is Andy Ashley. Today's date is _____ . It is _____ o'clock,

and I am here with teacher #___ (interviewee), a teacher at Zimmer High school. We will be

discussing his/her perception of the effects of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens training on

working-class students. Working-class students can be defined as students who are not in

advanced classes, special education, athletics, not involved in school, etc.; just in regular

classes."

1.   a. How long have you been with this school system? _____

       b. How long have you been in this position?_____

       c. How long have you been in education?_____

       d. Tell me about how you view your job as a teacher in relation to the students' success?

       _____

       _____

       _____

2. Have you participated in teaching a life skills training program before the *7 Habits*? If so,

what training program? _____

_____

3. Do you feel the average working-class student (i.e. not in advanced classes, special education,

athletics, not involved in school, etc.; just in regular classes) is setting goals for his/her future?

_____

a. If so, how is our school adequately helping him/her set these goals?_____

_____

b. How are his/her family adequately helping him/her set these goals? _____

_____

4. There is research to support that many teenagers leave high school and do not feel they are

successful in life once they reach their mid-twenties. Why do you think this is? _____

_____

5. Do you believe the education system could do things differently to better prepare these

students for life? If so, what could they do? _____

_____

_____

6. Based on your experience teaching *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, do you believe the

students understand the concepts of the program? If so, how do you know this?_____

_____

_____

7. If not, why do you think they are not able understand the concepts? _____

_____

_____

8. Based on your interactions with these students, can you summarize the effects the training has

upon the students (particularly isolating the working-class students)? _____

_____

_____

9. Do you believe the students are more realistic about their future goals and are working to create more obtainable goals for themselves after participating in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training? If yes, please state why and if not, please state why not. _____

_____

_____

10. What can be changed to make *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* training program more beneficial for the students? _____

_____

_____

11. What aspects of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* program are currently beneficial for the students' success in the future? _____

_____

_____

12. If you could wave a magic wand and suddenly be able to do one thing to aid in the success of the working-class students' future, what would it be? _____

_____

_____

13. Is there anything I have not asked that you think would better help me understand our impact on the working-class students' future success?_____

_____

_____

Research Consent Form – Individual

University of Arkansas

Educational Leadership

PART 1: Research Description

Principal Researcher: Andrew (Andy) K. Ashley

Research Title: *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* program

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores the perspectives of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* program. Your participation in this study requires an interview during which you will be asked questions about your opinions and attitudes relative to your experience with this program. The duration of the interview will be approximately 30-90 minutes. With your permission, the interview will be recorded and transcribed, with the purpose of capturing and maintaining an accurate record of the discussion. Your name will not be used. On all transcripts and data collected, you will be referred to only by a pseudonym.

This study will be conducted by the researcher, Andy Ashley, a doctoral candidate at the University of Arkansas. The interview will be undertaken at a time and location that is mutually suitable.

Risks and Benefits

This research will contribute to understanding the program's experience and to potentially benefit future high school students. Participation in this study carries little, if any, risk. There is no financial remuneration for your participation in this study.

Data Storage to Protect Confidentiality

Under no circumstances will you be identified by name in the course of this research study, or in any publication thereof. Every effort will be made to ensure that all information provided by you will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. All data will be coded and securely stored and will be used for professional purposes only.

How the Results Will Be Used

This research study is to be submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas. The results of this study will be published as a dissertation. In addition, information may be used for educational purposes in professional presentation(s) and/or educational publication(s).

PART 2: Participant's Rights

- I have read and discussed the research description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purpose and procedures regarding this study.

- My participation in this research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status, or other entitlements.

- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his professional discretion.

- Any information derived from the research that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed, except as specifically required by law.

- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the researcher, Andy Ashley, who will answer my questions. The researcher's phone number is (501) 328-7592. I may also contact the chair of the researcher's committee, Dr. Ed Bengtson, at (479) 575-5092.

- If at any time I have comments or concerns regarding the conduct of the research, or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board. The phone number for the IRB is (479) 575-2208. Alternately, I can write to the IRB at IRB, Attn: Compliance Officer, 109 MLKG Building, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701.

- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.

- Audio-taping is part of this research. Only the principal researcher and the members of the research team will have access to written and taped material. Please check one:

  (_____) I consent to be audio-taped.

  (_____) I do NOT consent to be audio-taped.

- I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age in order to participate in this research study.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: (please print) _____

Investigator's Verification of Explanation

I, Andy Ashley, certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to _____. He/she has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions, and he/she provided the affirmative agreement (i.e., assent) to participate in this research.

Investigator's signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Demographic Data - Graduates

	Year Graduated	Grades Student Attended Zimmer School District	Current role	College Attendance	Specific Goals
Student #1	2013	K – 12th	Waitress	1.5 years	No
Student #2	2016	K – 12th	College student	3rd year	Yes
Student #3	2014	K – 12th	Unemployed	Bachelors	No
Student #4	2010	K – 12th	Teacher	Bachelors	Yes
Student #5	2018	1st – 12th	College student	1st year	Yes
Student #6	2018	8th – 12th	College student	1st year	Yes
Student #7	2018	3rd – 12th	Employee/father	No	Yes
Student #8	2010	K – 12th	Teacher	Bachelors	No
Student #9	2014	K – 12th	Waitress	Bachelors	No
Student #10	2015	K – 12th	College student	4th year	Yes
Student #11	2018	2nd – 10th	Soldier	No	Yes
Student #12	2013	9th – 12th	Teacher	Bachelors	Yes

APPENDIX E

Demographic Data- Teacher

	Male/ Female	Years Teaching 7 Habits	Currently Teaching 7 Habits	Years in education
Teacher #1	Female	6	Yes	14
Teacher #2	Male	10	No	24
Teacher #3	Male	8	Yes*	9
Teacher #4	Male	3	Yes	6
Teacher #5	Male	Unknown	No	25

*Teacher #3 also initiated training course at another school

APPENDIX F

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

To: Ed Bengtson
            PEAH 108

From: Douglas James Adams, Chair
            IRB Committee

Date: 03/01/2018

Action: **Expedited Approval**

Action Date: 03/01/2018

Protocol #: 1711085423

Study Title: The working-class graduates' perceptions of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens influencing their future success and life choices.

Expiration Date: 02/18/2019

Last Approval Date:

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Andrew Kenneth Ashley, Investigator