

# JTAR

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# JTAR

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# GENTS CLUB MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

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**Abstract** It is important that educators examine existing school programs to make sure they are fulfilling their established goals. Thus, this summative action research study evaluated the Gents Club to determine its impact on three at-risk students. This study revealed that the lessons taught as well as the mentoring provided by the teachers do help at-risk students to make positive behavioral changes.

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**Keywords:** teacher leadership, teacher action research, mentorship, gents club

## Introduction

We, the second and third authors, are university liaisons and professors working with classroom teachers. This assignment gives us time to spend time in various classrooms talking with many teachers. One teacher, the first author, was excited about some data collection that was being completed and was hoping we would help him share the results through an article. So, even though we were not involved with data collection, we found the story about the Gents Club to be interesting and agreed to step in as mentors and researchers to guide this classroom teacher through the writing process of this action research.

## Literature Review

With the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), there are more and more students being labeled at-risk, as they are not passing the mandated state achievement tests and are in danger of dropping out of school and not completing their education (Worley, 2013). Each year, school districts are teaching more students who are labeled at-risk students for a variety of reasons: low achievement, retention in grade level, behavior problems, poor attendance, and poor attitudes. Therefore it is imperative that schools develop programs to better connect with and support those students who are at-risk (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2005). You must show them you care before they will learn (Johnson, 2007; Nodding, 2005).

*Theoretical Perspective.* This summative action research was posited within the caring theory. The caring theory (Nodding, 2005) states that natural caring takes place when one wants to do something positive toward another individual. The Gents Club was created on the premise that caring adults can help students to build better relationships and build a more positive self-image. The faculty advisors and mentors of the Gents Club cared about helping students and hoped that through scaffolding and modeling caring that they could not only build a caring relationship with these students but also encourage them to build more positive relationships with their peers.

*Mentoring.* Throughout the past several years, various interventions have been implemented to help at-risk students (Becker, 2004; Bernard, 2005; Dalaz, 2004; Gordon, Iwanmoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009; Powel, 2002). One of these interventions has been some type of mentoring program.

Mentoring is defined as the structured and trusting relationship that brings two different types of people together. One is a caring individual (the tutor) who offer guidance, support, and encouragement to another individual (the mentee). This pairing of a less experienced person with one who has had life experiences inevitably leads to the willingness to teach, coach, counsel, sponsor, and energize the mentee (Laughlin & Yopp, 2006).

Studies have shown that mentoring programs do help students increase their academic learning (Converse & Lingnugaris-Kraft, 2009; Gordon et al, 2009), increase positive behavior (Mitchell et al, 2002; Jekielek et al, 2002) and build their self-esteem (Mitchell et al, 2002). However the success of these programs depends on the effectiveness and the quality of mentoring that is received (Goldner & Mayseless, 2008). In addition, research suggests increasing interactions between mentors and mentees, increases mentee self-esteem and confidence in their abilities to be successful (Converse & Lingnugaris-Kraft, 2009; Goldner & Mayseless, 2008; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012). Thus, mentoring programs have the potential for making a real difference in students' lives (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2005). In addition to helping at-risk students remain on the right track, "it also provided a way for successful adults to give something back to their communities" (Jekielek et al, 2002, p. 1).

## Methodology

*Purpose of the Study.* The purpose of this formative action research study was to determine if the implementation of the Gents Program led to increased student achievement, decreased discipline referrals and decreased unexcused absences. Three research questions led the study:

1. What impact does the Gents Mentorship Program have on at-risk 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys' academics?
2. What impact does the Gents Mentorship Program have on the amount of disciplinary actions given to at-risk 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys?
3. What impact does the Gents Mentorship Program have on the self-esteem of at-risk 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys?

*Design.* This formative action research study examined a mentoring program called The Gents Club to determine how the Gents Club's happenings impacted the three at-risk boys that were members of the club. The faculty advisor's wanted to discover how the Gents Club activities influenced these at-risk boys in choosing the correct behaviors, as they had a history of disruptive behavior in their classes, failing grades, alternative placements, general apathy towards education, and multiple records of disciplinary actions which caused them to miss valuable instructional time.

"Action research helps educators be more effective at what they care most about – their teaching and the development of their students" (Sagor, 2000, pp. 1). In this case, the action research study allowed the Gents Club faculty advisors to take a reflective stance and examine how the club was impacting three at-risk student's academic, social, and emotional well-being. The study used a pre/post design and used the seven-step action research process (Sagor, 2000).

*Context and Setting.* The school district is comprised of approximately 45 campuses including 6 high schools, 8 middle schools, and over 30 elementary schools that contribute to the total of approximately 37,700 students. It is a Texas Education Agency (TEA) recognized district. The ethnic distribution of the school district can be found in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Ethnicity of the Students*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>District Count and Percentage</b>	<b>Middle School Count and Percentage</b>
<b>African American</b>	9,207 (25%)	242 (30%)
<b>American Indian</b>	279 (.07%)	3 (.4%)

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<b>Asian</b>	831 (2%)	21 (3%)
<b>Hispanic</b>	18,078 (48%)	334 (41%)
<b>Pacific Islander</b>	55 (.01%)	1 (1%)
<b>White</b>	8,398 (22%)	190 (23%)
<b>Two or More Races</b>	805 (2%)	18 (2%)

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The middle school where the study took place had over 800 students. There were 395 students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 414 students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Five hundred and two students were considered economically disadvantaged and 319 students were labeled as being at-risk. There were 40 general education teachers and 8 special education teachers. This middle school was the only school to meet the district's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goal. The ethnic distribution of the students is very similar to the district distribution.

*Participants.* At the time of this study, there were three at-risk 8<sup>th</sup> grade male students who were the participants. The three students had behavioral problems and had been referred numerous times and had received in-school suspension and/or individual time-out. These placements for students that have demonstrated inappropriate behavior in their classes or during transitional times in the hallways or cafeteria do not allow the students to follow their normal schedule of classes, as they have to stay in one confined space for the entire school day, thus causing them to miss valuable instruction time as well as socializing with their peers.

Student A was an African American male who started attending this middle school in his 7<sup>th</sup> grade year. He was involved in a crime that ended in the murder of another person. He was not found guilty of the actual crime, but faced consequences due to the fact that he was associated with the incident and convicted felons. Upon starting middle school, he struggled with making passing grades, sought counseling for dealing with the murder he witnessed, and was constantly in the office or alternative placements for misbehavior. He was very impulsive but aware of his actions.

Student B was a Caucasian male that struggled during his 7<sup>th</sup> grade year. He lived with his father in a low socio-economic neighborhood, and he rarely saw his mother as she was incarcerated. Due to his father's work schedule, he was often left home alone. The student has essentially had to raise himself from a young age. He also qualified for special education services and his behavior fluctuated on a daily basis. In addition, he had a strong dislike towards education and having to attend school.

Student C was a Hispanic male that had an aggressive nature towards his peers and teachers which greatly affected his involvement in extracurricular activities. He continuously received office referrals for talking back to teachers, engaging in arguments with others, and/or fighting.

He spent a lot of time in the hallway for disruptive behavior in the classroom, so he has had to attend credit recovery and failed his state mandated assessments.

*Gents Club.* The Gents Club was designed to provide additional support outside the regular classroom setting. The name Gents originated from shortening the word gentlemen, as the organizer wanted to create interest but at the same time use a student-friendly descriptor. The Gents Club was created to mentor 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys and to help them increase their self-esteem while providing them with information that would help them make positive social, emotional, and academic choices.

*Becoming a Member.* Each academic team leader consulted with their team of teachers to determine five students to recommend for membership into the Gents Club. The academic team was charged with three responsibilities: 1) make sure the list of students had a diversity of students which mirror the ethnic population of the school; 2) select three students that have no disciplinary problems, make good grades and are seen as leaders; and 3) select two at-risk students that may be more challenging cases but are chosen for their potential to benefit from what the organization has to offer. Once the boys agreed to be an active participant in the Gents Club program, each were assigned a male mentor who were also teachers at the middle school.

*The Meetings.* The participants of the Gents Club met once a week for planned activities, help with homework, and one-on-one time with their tutor/mentor. The planned activities, which were designed to help members build basic skills, included a weekly book talk on a building character chapter and a monthly community project

During these meetings, a book study using *The 6 Most Important Decisions You'll Ever Make: A Guide for Teens* written by Sean Covey was completed. Each week, different chapters were assigned to read and the boys and teachers would come together to talk about the chapter ideas. The topics included making good decisions, succeeding in school, making good friends, dealing with peer pressure and bullying, getting along with parents, dating and sex, addictions, and building self-esteem and self-worth. Each topic lesson contained interactive portions where the students could share their own experiences as well as learn from peers' experiences. They also filled out a graphic organizer to help develop their thoughts with the topics and reference throughout the duration of the school year. The meetings followed a specific format and sequence: 1) an engaging short video clip or song (with printed lyrics), 2) an introduction of topic, 3) the completion of the graphic organizer, 4) an open discussion of experiences (with set norms of respecting other member's thoughts and opinions and freedom to share them with no judgment), 5) review/conclusion of topic, & 6) the reading of a quote related to the topic for the members to keep in mind as they encounter such situations both inside and outside of school.

In addition, to the book study, the Gents took part in community involvement activities, which included various leadership opportunities, meet and greet with local businessman and/or community leaders, an etiquette dinner, and a campus tour to a local college. These activities

allowed the gents to meet a variety of positive male role models who tried to help them see the value of a good education and to let them know that they were the future of the community.

## Results and Discussion

The purpose of this pre/post formative action research study was to determine if the implementation of the Gents Program led to increased student academic achievement, decreased discipline referrals and increased self-esteem. The study lasted only 6-weeks but various data was collected to answer the research questions. To examine the academic achievement of the participants (RQ#1), student's grades were collected. To examine the behavior incidents of these participants (RQ#2), student's released discipline data reports from the assistant principal were collected. Finally, to examine participant's self-esteem (RQ#3), a self-esteem survey was given. The research questions drove the sequence of data collected, examined and reported.

*Research Question #1 - Academic Achievement.* The progress reports were used for the pretest and the final six-week grades were used for the posttest scores to answer question #1, What impact does the Gents Mentorship Program have on at-risk 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys' academics? As seen in Table 2, Student C content grades showed he had the most growth and he had knowledge growth in all four content area subjects with the most growth in English. This is not surprising, as he had the lowest pretest scores of the three students. His English grade changed from an F to a C, his math scores changed from an F to a C, his science scores changed from a D to a C and his social studies remained the same earning a B.

*Table 2: Academic Performance*

	Student A		Student B		Student C	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
<b>English</b>	64	72 (+8)	40	54 (+14)	16	76 (+60)
<b>Math</b>	49	60 (+11)	70	73 (+3)	35	70 (+35)
<b>Science</b>	63	55 (-8)	75	70 (-5)	61	70 (+9)
<b>Social Studies</b>	54	61 (+7)	82	85 (+3)	77	78 (+1)
<b>Total Growth</b>	230	248 (+18)	267	282 (+15)	189	294 (+105)



Student A had growth in his scores from his pretest to his posttest scores for three out of the four content area subjects but lost ground in science. He brought up his English grade from a D to a C, his math grade from an F to a D and his social studies grades from an F to a D. However, his science grades went down, as it moved from a D to and F.

Student B had growth in his scores from his pretest to his posttest for three out of the four content area subjects but he also lost ground in science. In addition, even though he had growth, his growth was the least of the three students. His math grade remained a C and his social studies grade, even though it went up a little, remained a B.

*Research Question #2 – Behavior.* The released discipline data reports from the assistant principal were used to answer question #2, What effect does the Gents Mentorship Program have on 8<sup>th</sup> grade at-risk boys disciplinary action. A simple tally was used to show the number of times the students received disciplinary actions. In addition to the disciplinary infractions received, the number of days students lost instruction due to being given in-school suspension (ISS) are noted (see Table 3).

*Table 3: Discipline Action Data*

	Student A		Student B		Student C	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
<b>Dress Code Violations</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Disrespect/Verbal Abuse</b>	0	2	0	0	1	0
	Lost 1+5 Days				Lost 5 Days	
<b>Disruptive Activity</b>	0	0	1	1	0	0
			Lost 3+12 Days			
<b>Inappropriate Behavior</b>	1	0	1	0	0	0
	Lost 1 Day		Lost 1 Day			

<b>Insubordination</b>	0	0	0	2	2	0
			Lost 2+3 Days		Lost 4+2 Days	
<b>Total Growth</b>	1	2	2	3	3	0
	Lost 7 Days		Lost 21 Days		Lost 11 Days	

As seen in Table 3, there were five items that were tracked for disciplinary action infractions by the assistant principal. They included 1) violation of the dress code, which was not a problem for the boys; 2) showing disrespect which had various infractions by Student A and Student C; 3) having disruptive activity was only given to Student B; 4) having inappropriate behavior (i.e. profanity, using personal devices during instruction, vandalizing school property) was received by Student A and Student B; and 5) insubordination was received by Student B and Student C.

Over all, Student A and Student B increased their misbehavior from pre to post, as student A had one pre-infraction but had two post-infractions while Student B had two pre-infractions and had three post-infractions. Student C had the best results as he moved from three pre-infractions before joining the Gents Club to zero infractions at the end of the six-week study.

Due to the infractions that occurred, the students lost various instructional days. Student A lost the least learning time as he had only 7 days of ISS. However, Student C lost learning as he was in ISS for 11 days while Student B lost 21 instructional days.

*Research Question #3 - Self-Esteem.* The researcher created a 4-statement Likert-scale self-esteem survey which was used to answer question #3, What effect does the Gents Mentorship Program have on 8<sup>th</sup> grade at-risk boys self-esteem. The survey was given to all 30 Gents Club members, as it was important to know how the Gents Club impacted all its members. This also allowed for comparison of the whole group scores to the three at-risk students in the study. As seen in Table 4, Student B had growth on all 4 questions while Student A and Student B had growth on 3 self-esteem survey questions. This was an improvement, as the majority of their scores for the pretest were below the whole group scores but by the posttest, the at-risk students scored above the average of the whole group scores.

Table 4: Pre/Post Self-Esteem Results

	All Gents Club Members N=30		At-risk Student A		At-risk Student B		At-risk Student C	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
<b>Q1</b>	3	3.6	2(b)	4(A)	3	4(A)	3	4(A)

<b>Q2</b>	3.5	3.9	3(B)	4(A)	4(A)	4(A)	2(B)	4(A)
<b>Q3</b>	3.2	3.4	3(B)	3(B)	2(B)	3(B)	3(B)	3(B)
<b>Q4</b>	3.4	3.9	2(B)	4(A)	2(B)	4(A)	4(A)	4(A)

\*B=Below group average; A=Above group average

### Limitations

Even though the results were encouraging we must first acknowledge the limitations. One, the sample size, which consisted of only three at-risk students, is small. Second, the study only lasted six weeks. Third, we are assuming that the changes were due to becoming members of the Gents Club and the students attending all the tutoring sessions that were offered, as this was the only factor that changed consistently for all three gents. And because Gents Club members were both academically achieving students as well as at-risk students, the at-risk students extended their “outer circle” of friends to ones they mostly likely would not have associated with without being in the Gents Club. This was evident at the final meeting when the members were asked how many new people they met from being a part of the group. Some members shared the direct correlation to new friendships being formed because of their participation in the Gents Club altogether. Four, the action research study took place in one school within an urban setting. These limitations do not allow for generalizability across campuses or other school settings or to other mentoring programs.

### Conclusion

This study reinforced the importance of creating mentoring programs (Mitchell et al, 2002; Gordon et al, 2009), as the activities within the Gents Club program did have positive impact on these three at-risk adolescents academics and self-esteem. Student C passed all four core courses and Student A and Student B were able to demonstrate an increase from their progress report scores even though their names appeared on the failure list at the end of the six weeks grading period. This was encouraging as the data was only collected for a six-week period.

Behavior on the other hand, did not prove to have the same correlation. Student C was the only one that decreased the amount of disciplinary actions, as he moved from 3 infractions to 0, which is ironic as he was the one with the most infractions at the beginning of the study. For him, the Gents Club Mentorship Program helped address the appropriate ways he needed to treat adults and peers in the school setting. However, Student B and Student C did not improve, as they received more infraction on the post data scores than they had on the pre data scores.

It is believed that the boy's interactions with academically successful students as well as adult mentors made this program unique. This helped the boys extend their circle of friends, which is an important aspect that we don't often think about but expanding ones' social networking helps one to learn new information and hear different perspectives (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2006); helps adolescents to learn more about themselves as they learn how to navigate through this wider circle of unfamiliar friends (Giordano, 1995); and helps one to create more original ideas to help make a difference in people's lives (Sturt, 2014).

*Plan-of-Action.* In just a few short weeks, these students all expressed that they were glad to be members of the Gents Club and that they had met some good people, both other students and adults who pushed them to be better. Thus, at this stage, student's behaviors and actions will continue to be monitored and lessons will be more focused on helping the boys get their behavior under control, as it was felt that it would take longer than six-weeks to help students break habits that they had formed over numerous years.

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