NURTURING COMMUNITY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS USING ART AND THE ENVIRONMENT TO CREATE SPACES OF CARE

A Dissertation
by
NICOLE P. FYNN

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APPROVED BY:

Patrick O'Shea
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee

Roma Angel
Member, Dissertation Committee

Christopher Cook
Member, Dissertation Committee

Tracy Goodson-Espy
Director, Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Max C. Poole, Ph.D.
Dean, Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies

Abstract

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Nicole P. Fynn
B.S., Appalachian State University
M.P.H., University of South Carolina
Ed.D., Appalachian State University

Dissertation Committee Chairperson: Patrick O'Shea

This dissertation aims to shift Nel Noddings' ethic of care from theory to practice. Frustration was selected for the emotion and art was chosen for a communication platform for the purposes of this research. Neil Harrington's Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS) survey was used to gauge root causes of frustration intolerance. The focus group, art session, and interview questions were selected to gain qualitative data of adolescent frustration intolerance for the FDS results. Six seventh graders participated in the entire study which included participating in a focus group, one art-making session or interview, a 24-hour observation, and a 7-day follow-up journaling experience. A research journal was also completed for reflection and to help form the subjective I statement. There were three findings presented in the research. First, the study indicated that FDS results can align and help explain adolescent behavior. Secondly, art and other environmental

conditions provided social and emotional affordances to adolescents. Third, community organizations can inform how schools can integrate social and emotional skills into educational culture. Based on the data analysis, the first recommendation of this study is that school- community relationships and purposes be more integrated. The second recommendation is that the FDS survey should be implemented in middle school advisory programs.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Fynn, for being the inspiration to begin this doctoral journey and my anchor along the way.

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Chapter 1: Context and Background

This dissertation is premised on several theories and constructs that are important for working with youth. The overarching purpose of this research is to examine individual behavior for the improvement of the health of organizations, students, and educators. Behavior is complex, so this dissertation attempts to address behavior change through various access points. There is no prescribed sequence of how to go about changing behavior as it is individual. Therefore, this approach is iterative and unique to the adolescent population that participated in the study. The characteristics of this population can result in them requiring more care (Ruggiero, 2005). Therefore, this dissertation uses an ethic of care as a theoretical framework because care is relevant and necessary in everyone's life, particularly in the lives of adolescents (Redford, 2015).

Due to the iterative nature of this endeavor, it was difficult to locate "starting" questions, as several seemed equally important. It proved difficult to enter into this research project via the traditional way of developing questions and then conducting research. The research had to occur before a research question could be determined. The findings and questions occurred organically, as they matched the researcher's background as a health educator.

This dissertation embraced the complications of systems and behavior. All the concepts interconnected: no one concept can be discussed in isolation of the others. It was not until the work was completed that the research questions surfaced: What role does art play in the representation of adolescent frustration? What are the elements of a caring space for the expression of adolescent frustrations?

Dissertation Chapters

Chapter one addresses context for caring as well as background information for problems regarding youth health and frustration. Chapter two discusses caring as it relates to environmental and theoretical constructs that inform this research. Chapter three addresses seven data sources that are used in this case study as well as information about the research setting and study limitations. Chapter four presents the analysis of the research data and summary. Chapter five discusses lessons learned and future recommendations as a result of this research.

Problem Statement

The problems this dissertation seeks to address are multi-faceted. Problems exist in student behavior as a result of their life experiences in and out of school, their health, and relationships with adults, and their behavior occurs both in and out of school. Schools, communities, parents, and children are all responsible for identifying solutions for problems that impact school performance: dropping out of school, disengagement, a lack of caring in relationships, and the overall quality of life for youth whether they are in or out of school. Behaviors cannot be addressed in a silo: they have to be approached in steps. The initial step toward affecting one's behavior is to assess any patterns of behavior in tandem with environmental influences that can influence the behavior one wants changed (Bandura, 2001).

Another issue is how problems with youth, whether academic, social, mental, or physical, are being approached. It would behoove school administrators, community organizations, health educators, and other stakeholders to work more cohesively in order to diagnose problems and decide upon remedies to those problems in ways that are sustainable (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). It is important to spend adequate time diagnosing problems so that they are not

recurring, as dictated by adaptive leadership.

Diagnosing problems. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) report, "People feel pressure to solve problems quickly, to move to action" (p. 7). Because of time constraints, stress, overload, frustration, or busyness in their own lives, school and community educators/leaders can be in a rush to "fix" problems. Thus, it is essential to maximize the time spent in identifying problems by assessing appropriate data measures, recognizing various strategies for intervention, and gathering as much information as necessary (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). It is critical to sit with any frustrating problems to determine the best course of action. According to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), "The single most important skill and most undervalued capacity for exercising adaptive leadership is diagnosis" (p. 7). This dissertation presents an example of what the adaptive process of diagnosis can look like.

Key Terms

Adaptive Leadership. According to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), "adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive" (p. 14).

Emotional Intelligence (EI). According to Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) "EI is an intelligence that operates on, and with, emotional information. Emotional information concerns the meaning of emotions, emotional patterns and sequences, the appraisals of relationships they reflect" (p. 209). Emotional intelligence must be considered when looking at caring relationships.

Ethic of Care Theory. Premised on caring, which entails considering another person's frame of reference (Noddings, 1984). Caring is a process that entails purposeful use of engrossment, motivational displacement, and reciprocity (Noddings, 1984).

Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS). "Designed to measure intolerance of frustration as a multidimensional construct. Frustration intolerance was best described by four factors: Discomfort intolerance, entitlement, emotional intolerance and achievement frustration" (Filippello, Harrington, Buzzai, Sorrenti, & Costa, 2014, p. 258). Frustration is linked to caring as it can often times be difficult to show caring for others when experiencing frustration.

Health Promotion. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health promotion is "the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. It moves beyond a focus on individual behaviour towards a wide range of social and environmental interventions" (World Health Organization, 2018, para. 1). Caring environments can contribute to the health and wellbeing of youth as there are health promoting outcomes when one experiences being cared for.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL). According to Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd (2013), "Social and emotional competencies influence everything from teacher-student relationships to classroom management to effective instruction to teacher burnout" (p. 62). These competencies involve three areas: emotional processes, social/interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation. These competencies can lead to greater student self-awareness, which is an important piece of emotional intelligence.

Holding Environment. Eberhart and Atkins (2014), define holding environment as "An atmosphere of physical, emotional, and cognitive safety and support, in which personal exploration can occur" (p. 62). In light of the relationship that social cognitive theory reveals about the interconnectedness of the environment on individual behavior, holding environments are important to consider when learning how to create a community of caring (Noddings, 1984).

It is important to mention that education philosopher, Dr. Maxine Greene advocated for "public space" which offers a parallel idea to holding environment" (Guyotte, 2018). As Andrew Gaines (2016) states, public space "does not refer to any physical location but rather the embodiment of a radically inclusive democracy 'where persons appear before one another as who they really are'" (p. 24). While this term may be interchangeable with "holding environment," the holding environment implies safety; therefore, "holding environment" will be used rather than "public space" in this research.

The Language of Care

Caring is an implicit action that can be embedded in the communication process, making it an alternative to verbal communication. Caring is perceived differently by individuals (Ruggiero, 2005) as it can account for a wide range of behaviors. French philosopher Sandra Laugier (2015) wrote, "Care is everywhere, and it is such a pervasive part of the human form of life that it is never seen for what it is: a range of activities by which we organize our world so that we can live in it as well as possible" (p. 226).

It is the action of caring that transforms Noddings' (1984) ethic of care from theory to practice, as it takes intentionality further: to receptivity, recognition, and action (Burke, Nolan, & Rheingold, 2012). This dissertation uses the constructs of holding environment and art as mechanisms to apply care and promote social and emotional health among adolescents. Frustration will be the emotion assessed in the dissertation, as emotion is part of social and emotional health. This uncomfortable and perhaps negative emotion can influence the caring relationship among youth and teachers, which is part of the environment. People may find it difficult to show caring to others, or receive care when they experience frustration, and this can interrupt the cycle (language) of caring, since individuals may behave differently when

experiencing this emotion than they typically would.

In her paper on the ethic of care, Laugier (2015) wrote, "Language affects us, allows us to affect others, and constantly transforms our meanings" (p. 227). The ethic of care operates on the premise of language, not only what is written, but also what is perceived or felt. Exploring emotions has relevance to our interactions with others and the environment, so it is important to integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) activities into daily regimens for all stakeholders, including children themselves (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). For the purpose of this dissertation, art will be used as the SEL activity.

Caring and relationships. It is in being with others that individuals can learn who they are (Pace Marshall, 2006)—it is in community that they figure out how to live with others different than themselves. An ethic of care does have implications for youth relationships in many facets of their life. According to Noddings (1988), "An ethic of care is a form of relational ethics [and] relational ethics remains tightly tied to experience" (p. 139). Thus, this research examines and accounts for youth in relationships with others. Since people learn about themselves in relationships, it is important to consider human beings in various situations, particularly because relationships can be denoted "by love or hate, anger or sorrow, or may reveal mixed affects" (p. 140).

Integrating an ethic of care by partnering with community organizations is one strategy that has potential to maximize student learning as both can work toward merging relevancy with students' formal learning (Epstein, 2011). Emotions are one subject that is relevant to youth no matter what environment they encounter.

The Messiness of Emotion

Sutton and Wheatley's (2003) mixed methods study, using surveys and teacher

interviews, evaluated student perceptions of teacher emotion and emotional regulation. They point out that "emotions, although sometimes thought of as a guide to our true selves, are often thought of as out of control, destructive, primitive, and childish, rather than thoughtful, civilized, and adult" (p. 328). An ethic of care can be established by modeling desired behavior, opening space for dialogue, and allowing students to practice working through emotion (Noddings, 1988).

Yoder (2005) conducted a qualitative study that examined emotions and organizational climate. Her qualitative study used interpretive research. Emotions can be uncomfortable, and according to Yoder (2005), "Emotions are considered a soft area and have often been thought of as a detriment" (p. 1). The findings represented in these studies highlight the importance of emotion in behavior. Societal norms, parental upbringings, family dynamics, and teachers can influence how children manage their emotions and, thus, their behavior. Researchers Chaplin and Aldao (2013) studied gender differences and emotional expression in their meta-analytic study. They report that "sayings such as 'boys don't cry' reflect cultural beliefs and expectations whereas boys are strong and calm, showing anger if necessary" (p. 735). These studies infer that there are compounding factors that influence emotions, which can influence the environment.

Health and lifestyle choices. Bandura (2001) states that "human health is heavily influenced by lifestyle habits and environmental conditions" (p. 11). Negative feelings and emotions, if not addressed effectively, can spawn their own set of problems, such as bullying. These problems can influence the environment as well as student social and emotional health (Bandura, 2001). Mismanaged emotion can lead to developing unhealthy habits such as substance abuse and premature sexual behavior, particularly when combined with similar unhealthy media messages (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011).

Youth mental health. As previously mentioned, modeling, dialoguing, and practicing dealing with emotions can help students learn how to manage uncomfortable emotion in a caring way (Noddings, 1988). Consider what the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA (2015) reports: "A large number of students are unhappy and emotionally upset. A large number of youngsters have trouble behaving in classrooms; only a small percent have attention deficit or conduct disorder" (p. 1). This statement indicates that misbehavior could be misdiagnosed or undetected if not attended to appropriately. Caring can help detect root causes for misbehavior (Noddings, 1984). Riese, et al. (2016) report in their focus group study on youth violence that "violence was described as commonplace in the daily lives of focus group participants" (2016, p. 19). This finding is unfortunate but has to be addressed from a preventative perspective as violent acts can isolate students and affect mental health. These researchers also note that "constant fear of victimization limited social interaction for many youth, fostering isolation in an effort to avoid conflict" (p. 19). Youth do not openly discuss violence, as acknowledged in Riese, et al. (2016) research. These researchers conducted structured focus groups to determine barriers to youth discussion of violence during primary care visits. This team reports that "youth violence is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among adolescents" (p. 18).

This sobering statement is a call to action for communities at large. Weare and Nind's (2011) literature review on school mental health reveals that "childhood and adolescence provide key opportunities to develop the foundations for mental health and prevent mental problems" (p. i29). These facts also contribute to why I chose adolescents as my population for this dissertation.

Adolescents. Adolescents were chosen for this research effort because adolescence provides a critical "opportunity to develop the foundations for mental health and prevent mental health problems" (Weare & Nind, 2011, p. 29). Furthermore, "Adolescence is a time characterized by a strong desire for independence combined with an increased need for social support from peers" (Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007, p. 265). Apart from this basic understanding of adolescence and recognizing that identity formation is a challenge during this phase of life (Brown, El-Toukhy, & Ortiz, 2014, p. 91), it is important to recognize that "adolescents live in media-saturated worlds" (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011, p. 95). The value of media in youth lives gives the education world competition to maintain student attention (Prensky, 2006). Examples that may be relevant to youth include engaging in social media, talking on cell phones, dating, dressing up, going to dances, and playing sports. Relationships are threaded in each of these parts of culture. Therefore, caring is also relevant.

The relevancy of emotional intelligence and care. According to the U.S. Department of Education, "Boys are more likely than girls to be suspended from school, and are also more likely to be bullied/harassed on the basis of their sex" (Sanchez, 2015, para 6). According to Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) "EI is an intelligence that operates on, and with, emotional information. Emotional information concerns the meaning of emotions, emotional patterns and sequences, the appraisals of relationships they reflect" (p. 209). Emotional intelligence interrelates with social and emotional learning (SEL) because both play a role in relationships and social skill building (Jones, Bouffard, & Weisbourd, 2013).

Nel Noddings (2012) supports the notion of spending time with youth as a way to establish and deepen the caring relationship. Discussing relevant topics to youth lives can be an entry point to show caring and promote social and emotional health. Social and emotional

learning skills can be learned in relationship with others through connection. Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2014) support the notion that care is conveyed when youth feel connected and a sense of belonging.

Social and emotional skills: Needed for community citizenship. Catering to the whole child helps foster youth citizenship which is aligned with Noddings' 21st century skills. Because Noddings (2013b) works in care theory, her 21st century aims are used as an anchor for this research. Her 21st century aims are:

> the ability to communicate effectively; ability to work as a team member; flexibility; preparedness to face changes and challenges; preparedness to identify and solve problems; skill in analysis and conceptualization; capacity and willingness to learn new things; ability to question, challenge, and innovate; willingness and capacity to assume personal responsibility; capacity for self-reflection and self-management. (p. 401)

Schools are not responsible for addressing these items alone; families and communities must also be involved (Epstein, 2011). According to Hinchey (2010), "Humans are both rational and emotional, and reason should not be separated out from the human psyche as the most valuable part, as if it were nutmeat to be extracted from a worthless shell" (p. 67).

In order to achieve these aims, social and emotional learning must be a component of youth education, whether formal or informal. Researchers report that "poor student behavior is a bigger problem in schools with limited focus on SEL" (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013, p. 6). However, the implications of learning how to live in a social world, among other people, can be complex and difficult for youth. According to Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd (2013), "Social and emotional competencies influence everything from teacher-student relationships to classroom management to effective instruction to teacher burnout" (p. 62). Of course, this quote

only speaks toward the formal education aspect of youth lives. However, social and emotional learning permeates all aspects of life (Jones, et al., 2013). Attending to the social and emotional needs of students is integral in developing student health. These competencies involve three areas: *emotional processes, social/interpersonal skills,* and *cognitive regulation.* According to this trio of researchers, *emotional processes* deal with emotional regulation, working with disagreement, and demonstrating empathy. It is essential that youth pay attention to the non-verbal cues, as well as the verbal cues, that they communicate to peers, teachers, and others due to their emotion (Dexter, Lavigne, & Oberg de la Garza, 2016; Mayer, Salovey, &Caruso, 2014; Weare & Nind, 2011). *Social/interpersonal skills* entail social cues like body language and positive interactions. *Cognitive regulation* entails focus and attention in regards to memory and resisting inappropriate impulses (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013, p. 62-63). *Cognitive regulation* comes into play in peer pressure circumstances and during periods of stress. All of these competencies promote health.

Purpose of the Study

This research uses surveys, observation, a focus group, artifacts, and interviews to identify points of frustration intolerance in adolescent lives. A researcher journal was also kept to inform the research process and data analysis. Additionally, the purpose of this research is to gain knowledge about the relationship between youth environments, social and emotional health, art, and an ethic of care. The overarching purpose of this research was to examine environment and individual behavior for the improvement of the health of schools, communities, and youth. More specifically, this research sought to answer the following questions: What role does art play in the representation of adolescent frustration? What are the elements of a caring space for the expression of adolescent frustrations?

Setting

This research took place in a rural, resource-poor area in Western North Carolina at a youth retreat for seven adolescents. A liberal, faith-based organization that operates on the tenets of social justice, peace, and community building hosted a retreat, which was the site of the research. It is important to consider adopting an ethic of care with adolescents as "middle school students experience dramatic changes in body and mind" (Ruggiero, 2005, p. 14). The organization is actively working with adolescents as part of a youth group. Event organizers extended an invitation to the researcher to conduct research during this retreat.

Assumptions

According to Stephanie Pace Marshall (2006), "We need to be in relationship to one another to fully understand who we are" (p. 112). Thereby, integrating relational ethics and moral education is critical. There are a few assumptions worth mentioning.

The first assumption is that art can help with moral education (Eisner, 2008). Art-based options can show caring in that they are without prescription: there is no right way to do them. Art naturally accepts where the artist is—all skills are welcome—and accepts diversity, thus serving the different learning styles that exist among students. It is part of art's inclusive nature (Eisner, 2008). Additionally, art is a way of knowing, of actualizing our experiences, and of creating meaning. Elliot Eisner (2008) states, "Through art we come to feel, very often, what we cannot see directly" (p. 8). It provides a platform for developing the skill of self-awareness, or as Eisner (2008) points out, it is a way to connect with our "interior landscape" (p. 11). Individuals can retrieve useful information from what is inside their bodies. He also reveals, "If the arts are about anything, they are about emotion, and emotion has to do with the ways in which we feel," thus broadening our humanity (p. 11). The emotion in this dissertation is frustration.

Art "fits in" with the ethic of care theory as it is situated within critical theory for the purposes of this research. As Guyotte (2018) explains, aesthetic education permits individuals a space for "confronting and interrogating spaces of social injustice" (p. 71). Art opens opportunities for addressing trauma, pain, and other complexities of the human experience (Eisner, 2008).

A second assumption is that the experience of frustration, and how it is communicated, can help researchers understand more about environmental factors that may influence how youth communicate and handle frustration. Examining the concept of holding environment will be part of this research. After all, youth cannot sustain desired habits of behavior in an environment that does not reinforce those habits (Bandura, 1989).

A third assumption is that community organizations can inform formal educational practices in other aspects of youth lives just as school staff can be resources for communities who work with youth, as well. The more overlap of services that exists between schools and communities, the more fluid learning may be across environments (Epstein, 2011).

Rationale and Significance of the Study

If children feel and remain uncared for as a result of educators neglecting to find ways to engage them, youth can become under-nurtured. Cozolino (2013) claims that "un-nurtured children grow to have thoughts, states of mind, emotions, and immunological functioning that are inconsistent with wellbeing, enthusiasm, or curiosity" (p. 14). Part of nurturing children is to allow them to express feelings of frustration in a safe environment (Hyman, 2012), making holding environment a necessary construct for this work.

This research is aimed at identifying the value of an interdisciplinary, adaptive approach for applying an ethic of care with adolescents. Art is the health promoting activity and frustration

is the emotion used in this research. During this research, youth will complete a survey that is focused on frustration intolerance. Afterward, they will have an opportunity to participate in a focus group about frustration followed by an art-making session to communicate a frustrating experience they encountered.

Summary

The dedication to foster these affective competencies can blaze a trail for how to adopt and sustain an ethic of care in schools because of the focus on social relationships (Noddings, 1984). Relationships occur in and out of school and can inform student behavior and decisions. They are also a part of the environment (Bandura, 2001). Art can be considered an environmental factor, as well as a form of communication. It is used as a mechanism for expressing frustration and promoting social and emotional health. Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd (2013) indicate the importance of attending to the social and emotional learning development of the entire learning environment. Examining environmental factors may inform how youth perceive care through their interactions with adults who work with them (Bandura, 1989; Noddings, 1984).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with an example of one school's effort to promote social and emotional health. An explanation of components of an ethic of care are explained in detail followed by other key concepts. Holding environments and art are discussed as tools that can promote care to youth. Care is also identified as a way to promote social and emotional health.

Caring

The questions this research seeks to answer are, "What role does art play in the representation of adolescent frustration?" and "What are the elements of a caring space for the expression of adolescent frustrations?" According to Noddings (1984), "Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's. Our attention, our mental engrossment" (p. 24) is not directed to ourselves, but to others. Noddings (1984) places emphasis on the difference between two individuals: the one-caring (carer) and the cared-for. Noddings (2013a) indicates the difference between the two roles: "Caring-for describes an encounter or set of encounters characterized by direct attention and response. Caring-about expresses some concern but does not guarantee a response to one who needs care" (p. xiv). In the case of the Robert W. Coleman School, the administrators were in the role of ones-caring and the students were the ones cared-for. The administrators showed caring by giving students space for dialogue and reflection. In response, the students exhibited fewer behavioral problems (Gaines, J., 2016).

Noddings (2013a) defines ethic of care theory as "concerned with how, in general, we should meet and treat one another—with how to establish, maintain, and enhance caring relations" (p. xiv). Furthermore, "Care ethics emphasises [sic] the difference between assumed needs and expressed needs. From this perspective, it is important not to confuse what the cared-for wants with that which we think he should want" (Noddings, 2012, p. 773). For this

dissertation, caring is demonstrated by considering individual motivational factors.

An example of care. Dexter, Lavigne, and Ortega De La Garza (2016) researched predominantly Latin students with Caucasian teachers in their research examining caring considering diverse cultures and languages. These researchers reported that "formal schooling is a site of cultural socialization where children are taught how to see their world and themselves" (p. 155). (Recall the earlier sections regarding the relevance of caring in youth lives and that socialization and education can be organized together in a productive manner through school-community partnerships.) When students at Robert W. Coleman elementary school misbehave, they are given an opportunity to meditate about the situation in a room filled with pillows and decorations. It's a space that invites reflection and calmness. Students are also encouraged to talk through problems and engage in yoga (Gaines, J., 2016, para. 3). While results vary, overall the school has had zero suspensions in over a year (Gaines, J., 2016, para. 16). Since each school across the nation is different, an initiative of this caliber may not work for every school environment. However, this Baltimore school acknowledges that unconventional approaches can prove helpful for students. In this case, administrators gave students room to develop skills needed to handle uncomfortable emotion. While this a commendable intervention, this dissertation encourages a more systematic, organizational approach to applying an ethic of care.

The caring process. Caring is a process that entails purposeful use of engrossment, motivational displacement, and reciprocity. In her book, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984), Noddings states that "caring involves, for the one-caring, a 'feeling with' the other" (p. 30). In the relationship with the cared-for, the one-caring's task is to "see and feel with the other" (Noddings, 1984, p. 30). Noddings (2012) further explains in her more recent article that the carer is attentive, listens, reflects, and responds to the needs of the cared-for (p.

772). Through the one-caring's receptivity, the individual becomes a duality with the cared-for (Noddings, 1984). This duality and type of seeing and feeling describes the intentional use of *engrossment* (Noddings, 1984, p. 30). Engrossment leads to *motivational displacement,* another important concept in the ethic of care. In motivational displacement the one-caring "is present to the other and places her motive power in his service. She does not abandon her own ethical ideal in doing this, but she starts from a position of respect or regard for the projects of the other" (Noddings, 1984, p. 176). Caring is not fulfilled until it is actualized by the cared-for. This can lead to *reciprocity* (responsiveness). According to Noddings (1984)

> Reciprocity is not contractual, it is not characterized by mutuality. The cared-for contributes to the caring relation by receiving the efforts of one-caring, and this receiving may be accomplished by a disclosure of his own subjective experience in direct response to the one-caring or by a happy and vigorous pursuit of his own projects. (p. 150-151)

According to Burke, Nolan, and Rheingold (2012), "Caring is translated into action by one person and received by another. The purpose of the caring relation is to promote growth, prevent harm, and meet the needs of the other" (p. 2). In schools, teachers and administrators are primarily in the role of ones-caring: "Fostering a community of care is essential so that students and participants are enabled to care for one another and, when necessary, for their leaders" (p. 2). What individuals learn by applying caring with close friends (or people they like) can be extended to the wider community. A community of caring can be established in a host of ways, but the underlying principle is that youth in whichever environment they find themselves immersed, will know they are cared for through the deliberate attention of those surrounding them.

Ethic of care. The ethic of care theory was introduced by educator and ethicist Carol Gilligan's 1982 publication, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development.* Gilligan discussed care in the context of power, justice, ethics, and morality. She acknowledged the role of hierarchy and inequality in relationships and focused on an ethics of justice. More specifically, Gilligan (1982) referenced the relationship between parent and child and stated that this relationship gives

> rise to the ethics of justice and care, the ideals of human relationship—the vision that self and other will be treated as of equal worth, that despite differences in power, things will be fair; the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt. (p. 63)

Nel Noddings extended Gilligan's work to educational practices (Bergman, 2004) in her book, *Caring*, published in 1984. Noddings focused on the relationship of the cared-for and one-caring, two roles in the ethic of care, as the theory focuses on relationships between people. The ethic of care is important in that it offers insight into conditions that are conducive to creating a caring environment. Noddings (2013a) points out, "A primary message of *Caring* is that we cannot justify ourselves as carers by claiming we care. If the recipients of our care insist that nobody cares, caring relations do not exist" (p. xxii). Again, caring is only completed if the cared-for perceives they are cared for. When students are frequently sent to the principal's office for disciplinary action, students may not perceive they are cared for. Noddings (2013a) explains that "caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's" (p. 24). In establishing a community of caring, demonstrating care to others who define care differently than we do can be difficult. In essence, *care* is a verb, and it is completed through action. The ethic of care acknowledges that the cared-for and one-caring have different needs.

The Robert W. Coleman School initiative accounted for social and emotional skill development and involved communication skills that led to reciprocity. Tapping into what students need on an emotional level addresses student motives that set conditions for a sustainable caring community (Gaines, J., 2016). The Robert W. Coleman School administrators showed caring through action by implementing change at an environmental level.

Caring and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). To strengthen the argument for using care theory, SCT (Bandura, 1989) is important to consider as it addresses the triadic, reinforcing relationship between individuals, their environment, and their behavior. According to this theory, Bandura (1989) indicates, "Persons are neither autonomous agents nor simply mechanical conveyers of animating environmental influences" (p. 1175). SCT recognizes that a portion of what people know and learn can be attributed to their environment and what they see modeled by others.

Social cognitive theory embraces the reciprocal relationship between youth and their environment or community. For example, if it is expected that youth care about each other, and themselves, it is important that the environment reinforce those expectations (Bandura, 1989). The environment can also set conditions that potentially promote health (Bandura, 1989).

Caring is health-promoting. According to the World Health Organization (2018), "Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. It moves beyond a focus on individual behaviour toward a wide range of social and environmental interventions" (para 1). Gubrium's (2009) community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach connected digital storytelling with health promotion. She states, "Health promotion research that does not take into account the experience, understandings, and agency of those to whom efforts will be directed are likely to be less successful in application

than research that does" (p. 186). Therefore, research projects that attempt to account for individual behavior in terms of frustration and environmental variables may aid in health promotion. Research on holding environments can inform how to create environments that engage students and educators by being a container for healthy self-expression.

A condition for caring: Holding environments (public spaces). Trust, respect, and caring undergird the process to shift from an environment of competition to cooperation, as promoted by the ethic of care (Noddings, 2012). A holding environment is one kind of space that can help people feel safe and accepted as it is premised on cooperation. Hyman (2012) explains, "A holding environment is an environment that fosters and protects the natural maturation and development of the unique individuality of the child" (p. 206). This definition is used in conjunction with the definition provided by expressive artists Eberhart and Atkins (2014). This duo defines a holding environment as, "An atmosphere of physical, emotional, and cognitive safety and support, in which personal exploration can occur" (p. 62). Both definitions supply important elements to this research.

Holding environments must be tolerant enough to withstand conflicting viewpoints and dialogue about important topics such as emotions. Providing a space for art-making may mediate conflicts (Eisner, 2008). As Noddings (2012) indicates, it is essential to allow time to discuss real life circumstances that can create challenges for youth and to determine ways to effectively handle them. It would behoove schools to create safe holding environments in order to cultivate trust and respect as well as build meaningful, caring relationships among stakeholders.

The Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA (2015) indicates that "a caring society tries to provide the best services for individuals; doing so includes taking great care not to misdiagnose others whose 'symptoms' may be similar, but are caused by factors other than

internal pathology" (p. 1). To help support this notion, The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has established the Healthful Living curriculum that encompasses goals for youth mental health, communication, relationships, and other behavioral health-related topics. The officials who came up with these objectives acknowledged that behavioral health plays a role in education, just like the administrators at Robert W. Coleman School did.

Schools as opportunities. Youth spend a significant amount of time in school. However, according to Prensky (2006), schools are falling short aligning educational outcomes with what will help support individual needs. Shields et al. (2013) identify that promoting student health is a missing, but valuable, part of reform in schools. They share, "Student, organizational, and community wellbeing are intricately linked, and thus focusing on any one of these alone will not eliminate achievement gaps and health disparities" (p. 608). Wellbeing cannot be addressed in a silo (Bandura, 1989). It is important to cultivate deep relationships with students to figure out what engages and motivates them to attend school and participate in out-of-school activities.

Nurturing school-community relationships. Figure 1 (adapted from Epstein, 2011) gives insight into sociologist Joyce Epstein's school, community, and family model.

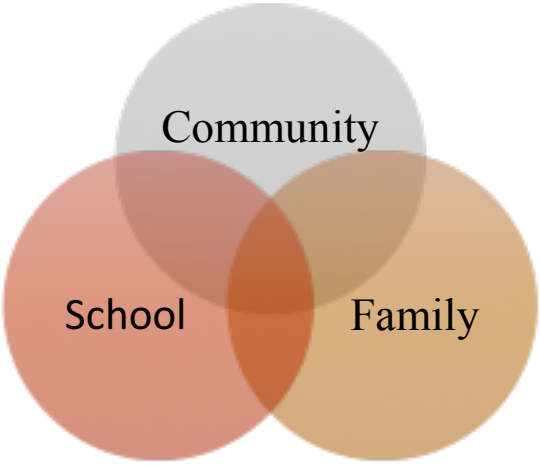

Figure 1: Epstein's School, Community, and Family Model

While this dissertation is not addressing the family component of this model, it promotes the community and school components to enhance youth wellbeing. Epstein (2011) credits Bronfenbrenner (1979) for advising that "socialization and education should be organized so that, over time, the balance of power is given to the developing person" (p. 61). Socialization and education are common denominators between informal and formal learning spaces.

Lin and Bruce (2013) state, "Young people experience disconnects between their educational experiences and both individual and community needs" (p. 335). Community organizations can help youth develop caring attributes in youth by working with school personnel and being more than just mere referral agencies for them. Shields, et al. (2013) suggest that "when multiple partners come together over time, it encourages collective learning and responsibility to more synergistically address critical needs within a community" (p. 615). Community settings seem to be able to adopt a whole child approaches more readily than schools because of time constraints, standardization, and other environmental factors (Noddings, 2013b).

Furthermore, research conducted in the community can inform how to resolve emotional and environmental issues that impact the health and wellbeing of youth during their time in school (Centers for Disease Control, 1997; Robinson, 2011). She states that partnerships should allow for shared responsibility so that turf concerns are dissolved (Epstein, 2011). Furthermore, Epstein (2011) expects that information, ideas, activities, and service among agencies in reference to youth education is communicated. Social and emotional skill development among both organizations can help promote caring across multiple environments in which youth congregate.

Tools for caring: Social and emotional learning skills. According to research, "SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of

supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful" (Bridgeland et al., 2013, p. 16). Robert W. Coleman School administrators adopted an SEL approach with their student dropout initiative. While the meditation-based initiative at Robert W. Coleman School may not work for every institutional climate, the administrators showed they cared for students by making emotional health a priority in their environment. The school offered an example of an integrative approach that positively addressed student mental health. This approach connects to SCT as well as self-determination theory (SDT) as both theories can provide insight on how to engage youth by building a climate of caring. Through the concepts of outcome expectancies and perceived self-efficacy, SCT connects with SDT by addressing motivation.

Engagement and motivation have health implications. Prensky (2006) comments, "More and more our students lack the true prerequisites for learning—engagement and motivation—at least in terms of what we offer them in our schools" (p. 11). Critical theorist, Patricia Hinchey (2010) shares, "Schools insist on uniformity and control as a means of creating conditions in which every student can learn, can achieve his or her potential. And yet, that insistence undermines the frequently professed goal of student empowerment" (p. 27).

Accessing care: student intrinsic motivation. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) define self-determination theory as, "A macro-theory of human motivation, emotion, and development that takes interest in factors that either facilitate or forestall the assimilative and growth-oriented processes in people" (p. 134). The duo report that people like to learn and are naturally curious, (p. 133) and discuss how current educational practices undermine the joy of learning: too often educators introduce external controls, close supervision, monitoring, and evaluations accompanied by rewards or punishments into learning climates to ensure that learning occurs.

Essentially, such practices reflect both external pressures on teachers (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009) and/or the beliefs of instructors that motivation is better shaped through external contingencies of reinforcement than by facilitating students' inherent interests in learning. Under such controlled conditions, however, the feelings of joy, enthusiasm, and interest that once accompanied learning are frequently replaced by experiences of anxiety, boredom, or alienation. This creates the self-fulfilling prophecy so evident in many classrooms, whereby students no longer are interested in what is taught, and teachers must externally control students to 'make' learning occur (p. 134).

Other important concepts in SDT are autonomy, competence, and relatedness which also play a role in motivation. According to Niemeic and Ryan (2009), autonomy and competence are psychological needs which when they are met, maintains intrinsic motivation (p. 135). In regards to education, it is key that teachers feel autonomous in the way they teach. There are also "caring" strategies that can improve autonomy and relatedness in the classroom:

> Strategies for enhancing autonomy include providing choice and meaningful rationales for learning activities, acknowledging students' feelings about those topics, and minimizing pressure and control…Strategies for enhancing relatedness include conveying warmth, caring, and respect for students (Niemeic & Ryan, 2009, p. 140)

Self-determination theory reveals some implications to successfully implementing a system that embraces the use of more intrinsic motivation strategies. According to Bridgeland, Bruce, and Haraharan (2013) "Nearly seven in ten teachers (69 percent) report student lack of interest as at least somewhat of a problem in schools" (p. 6). It seems essential to consider motivational factors to increase student engagement and buffer frustration.

A caring affordance: Art. Creative work, like art, can play a role in developing emotional intelligence that fosters health and builds social and emotional skills (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016). If these components can be integrated into learning environments, youth may feel cared about by adults who spend time with them. Noddings (2013a) acknowledges, "More attention should be given to the study and critical appraisal of lifestyles" (p. 188). Health addresses lifestyle choices and art-making can offer a platform for appraising one's emotions, problems, choices, and other lifestyle factors (Ruggiero, 2005). Elliot Eisner (2008) also recognizes the contributions of art in regards to knowledge. Essentially, art is a way of knowing, and it "can be powerful in getting individuals to experience emotions related to relevant upheavals in their lives" (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016, p. 150).

According to Katz-Buonincontro, Phillips, and Arnold (2015), "Art helps youth find their professional voice, translate inner ideas about themselves, and envision the possibility of change" (p. 1175). Eisner (2008) supports this claim by stating that "the arts address the qualitative nuances of situations. By learning how to read the images the arts make possible, awareness of those nuances is made possible" (p. 10).

One of the functions of art is to give clarity to the ideas and thoughts that oral or written communication may not. Ralph Tyler (2013) explains that "the making of objects in the shop and expression through dancing and music have long been known to produce an opportunity for personal expression and personal release from tension" (p. 61-62). When an individual creates art, they are afforded the chance to learn about who they are. According to Barone and Eisner (2011), "The arts, like the sciences, remake the maker, and the tools that the maker uses have a profound impact on who we become" (p. 5). Essentially, art produces knowledge. The knowledge gained can be transformative (Ruggiero, 2005).

Art-making is a platform for expressing emotion in a non-threatening, less vulnerable way, and it is a strategy for synthesizing thought processes, thus, producing knowledge that can support the health and wellbeing of the artist (Eisner, 2008). Eisner (2008) acknowledges the value of art in education in his discussion of how engagement in art elicits another form of knowing and communicating. To further explain, he points out that "humans have created within the context of culture a variety of forms of representation. These forms give us access to expressive possibilities that would not be possible without their presence" (p. 5). Art provides insight, through emotion and feeling, to what is not always readily visible (Ruggiero, 2005). Ultimately, Eisner explains that arts reveal things about "our own capacities to experience the affective responses to life that the arts evoke. Art helps us connect with personal, subjective emotions, and through such a process, it enables us to discover our own interior landscape, not an unimportant achievement" (p. 11). Art may be able to help bridge the communication gap between adults and youth (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016).

Additionally, the interview and focus group questions, as well as art prompts, will be used to aid in a more intentional reflection of emotions, behavior, and frustration triggers. As Katz-Buonincontro, Phillips, and Arnold (2015) state, "It's important to capture process and product during the arts-based learning process" (p. 1195). During these processes, youth make important decisions about what to include and what to cut out in their own productions. Peppler and Kafai (2007) report

> What takes place during creative production is a critical reflection on what constitutes new media, how it is constructed, and how one would question or use these same design conventions towards different ends. The traditional role of formal media education still remains in media production because it involves stimulating critical reflection on a

> greater variety of media texts and engendering youth to critically write and reformulate those ideas. (p. 5)

Summary

There are several gaps in research identified from the review of the literature. The largest one is using art and frustration intolerance as vehicles to promote social and emotional health and caring. For the purposes of this research, art (drawing, creative writing, etc.) is being used as a venue for communication and a mechanism for appreciating youth processes and developing holding environment.

Ultimately, this research will contribute to the sustainability of an ethic of care by promoting school and community partnerships. In order to address individual behavior, as this research does, environments and multiple approaches must be used as behavior is complex (Bandura, 2001). As Gaines (2016) shares, "Waking people up to new ways of thinking and feeling requires an ethic of care" (p. 27). Since Guyotte (2018) states, "the arts as important sites for cultivating a more relational and ethical means of educating students" (p. 62), it seems important to use art as a vehicle for learning rather than math, science, or other subjects. Furthermore, "It is through aesthetic pedagogy that school and community educators might cultivate a different way of engaging in and with the world, as well as to create opportunities for voice, seeing, and hearing to resound on new frequencies" (Guyotte, 2018 p. 65). Guyotte (2018) also revealed, "The power of the arts to affect also creates possibilities for change in behavior, in thinking- that mobilize bodies toward critical action" (p. 67). In realizing that people can perceive change as threatening (Gaines, 2016), it seemed important in this research to expand opportunities for self-expression allowed by making art.

Art provides an example of aesthetic education. As shared by Gaines (2016), Maxine Greene subscribed to the belief that “aesthetic education would foster and hasten the creation of public space, particularly in U. S. society” (p. 24). The concept of holding environment used in this research corresponds to Greene’s idea of public space making holding environment a primary concept in this research. Art-making is a way to promote social and emotional learning as “Art is more than mere product, but it moves to fulfill the potential of creating social interstices (in-between spaces where differences meet)” (Guyotte, 2018, p. 66).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

One father sternly told his 6-year old son, “If it frustrates you, then you do not need to do it,” because it was him, the adult, who could not cope with the boy’s frustration in trying something new. What is the boy supposed to do with his frustration? Is he not supposed to express it? What alternatives does he have? Will he view something that is frustrating to him as something that is okay not to do? The point of posing these questions is to point out that frustration intolerance impacts behavior, and thus relationships. The language used around, or implied by adult behavior, “conveys to students what they believe about them and what their experiences are for them” (Ruggiero, 2005, p. 35). This example provides context for why it is important to examine the environment. The qualitative portion of this research used a case study to investigate adolescent frustration and environments. The research questions were, “What role does art play in the representation of adolescent frustration? “What are the elements of a caring space for the expression of adolescent frustrations?

The researcher kept a journal to record the processes involved and document changes in the research question or processes. Six data source were used in an effort to add credibility to the research: focus groups, interviews or journal, art-making, a research journal, the Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS; Harrington, 2005c), and observation. The journal included observed student behavior, and records researcher subjectivity and other relevant data. The quantitative portion used Neil Harrington’s FDS to locate categories of frustration intolerance of adolescents. FDS results were tallied by adding up points.

Site

This research took place during a weekend at a youth retreat in the Western part of Watauga County. Seven adolescents attended this retreat. The survey was distributed at the retreat to adolescents. Additionally, the data gleaned from youth surveys may play out in their relationships. An observation was conducted at this site the entire weekend. Youth participated in one 90-minute focus group based on frustration during the retreat. Additionally, the youth had the option of making art after the focus group or participating in an art-making session for further self-expression. At the end of the retreat, youth were asked to participate in an interview one week later or submit a 7-day journal that reveals their experiences with frustration.

Information Needed

In order to move forward and ensure all concepts belonged in this process, roles were assigned to the concepts. It was determined that holding environments, art, student disengagement, frustration, motivation, social and emotional health, and community organizations were all access points to show care in this research process. It was important to figure out how these access points could work in applying an ethic of care. Holding environment, art, and frustration were the concepts primarily applied as methods. It was through experimentation and adaptation that it was discovered how these methods could potentially communicate care to students, enrich relationships, and thereby affect behavior.

Description of Case Study

The case study approach to this research provided a thick description of the how youth experience frustration. As defined by Chadderton and Torrance (2012), “Case study seeks to engage with and report the complexity of social and educational activity, in order to represent the meanings that individual social actors bring to those settings and manufacture in them” (p. 53).

Since frustration manifests itself in relationships, it seemed fitting to research this complex emotion in this manner.

One of the strengths of a case study is that it operates with the premise that there is more going on than what is easily observable (Chadderton & Torrance, 2012), therefore providing depth. Premised on social constructivism, case study recognized that a "birds' eye view of social reality does not exist" (McGraw-Hill Education, 2016, p. 78). However, due to its scope, the low number of participants, and boundary-less nature, case study does not allow for generalizability (Chadderton & Torrance, 2012). It is not the intention of this research to elicit generalizable data as each organization has its own unique characteristics that would help them adopt a more tailored strategy for addressing frustration that best fits their organization. However, this case study approach provided insight about how adolescents experience frustration and discuss causal relationships among frustration and environmental conditions.

Data Collection Plan and Methods

Informed Consent. Informed consent was acquired at the beginning of the retreat for the frustration discomfort survey, observation, interview/journaling, focus group session, and artwork analysis.

Data source #1: Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS). The FDS (Appendix A) was used to measure frustration and obtain quantitative data from participants. This scale was developed by Neil Harrington in 2005. According to Filippello, Harrington, Buzzai, Sorrenti, and Costa (2014) this scale "has good evidence of reliability [with a] Cronbach's a = .94 for the full scale" (p. 261). Participants were given this 28-question survey to identify where their frustration intolerance lies. The survey gauges the strength of an individual's beliefs on a 5-point Likert

scale. The four dimensions of frustration intolerance: discomfort intolerance, entitlement, emotional intolerance, and achievement are addressed in the questions (Harrington, 2005a, p. 3). Questions 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25 pertain to discomfort intolerance. Questions 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26 relate to entitlement. Questions 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27 pertain to emotional intolerance. Questions 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28 relate to achievement. Each of the dimensions is described below:

> The emotional intolerance sub-scale reflected the belief that emotional distress is intolerable and must be quickly relieved or avoided (e.g., ‘‘I cannot bear disturbing feelings’’). The entitlement sub-scale reflected the belief that desires must be met and that other people should indulge and not frustrate these desires, including demands for fairness (e.g., ‘‘I cannot tolerate being taken for granted’’) and immediate gratification (e.g., ‘‘I cannot stand having to wait for things I would like now’’). The discomfort intolerance scale reflected the belief that life should be easy, comfortable, and free of hassles, effort, and inconvenience (e.g., ‘‘I cannot stand having to persist at unpleasant tasks’’). Finally, the achievement sub-scale aimed to assess the intolerance of achievement goals being frustrated (e.g., ‘‘I cannot bear to move on from work I am not fully satisfied with’’). (Harrington, 2005b, p. 876)

Whether frustration intolerance is located in any one of these dimensions, it can seem overwhelming to care for self or others in a healthy, caring way.

Data source #2: Artistic artifacts. In addition to the survey, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and researcher and participant artifacts were used to for triangulation.

Participants had the option of choosing a question from the interview or focus group session as a prompt to create their art. Considering the various modes of communication (Mavers & Kress, 2011), participants were asked to produce a piece of art (drawing, poem, etc.) of their choice to supplement information as well as be a mode of communication and help participants formulate new information about their experiences (Ruggiero, 2005). According to Mavers and Kress (2011), "Language alone can no longer give us full access to the meanings of most contemporary messages, which are now constituted in several modes" (p. 166). The youth had an option to engage in art-making to more fully describe their environment in regards to frustration. Glesne (2011) defines artifacts as the "material objects that, for your work, represent the culture of people and setting you are studying" (p. 88). She references artifacts as valuable tools that can "tell stories the insider can 'read'" (Glesne, 2011, p. 88). Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) credits Jennifer Drake's work in that "expressive drawing and be used to promote positive emotional regulation in children" (p. 149). Artifacts are an important piece of this research as they enlivened what is seen and heard "by supporting, expanding, and challenging portrayals and perceptions" (p. 89).

Data source #3: Student journals. In conjunction with youth art, a writing experience was also offered to participants. In the name of creating self-awareness, youth were asked to journal about their frustrating experiences over a seven-day time frame. According to James Pennebaker and Smyth (2016), "If we are aware of the conflicts influencing our bodies, we can act to overcome those conflicts" (p. 9). Frustrating experiences can be conflictual events that can inform behavior. Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) further point out Vygotsky's value of language on youth social and emotional health indicating that the youth could work out their own

problems through the use of language. Pennebaker and Smyth also note that writing is a mode of self-expression (2016, p. 148).

Data source #4: Semi-structured interviews. Interview questions were designed to capture information about variables that may influence frustration or help with frustration intolerance. Ruggiero (2005) revealed that factors such as dialogue, room to express feelings, being recognized, and having content based on student interests played a part in creating a caring environment. The interview questions (Appendix B) were constructed based from the FDS in order to acquire more in-depth analysis of variables that contribute to frustration intolerance. Interviews were conducted in a private, comfortable location at a time that is appropriate for researcher and participant "feel like talking" (Glesne, 2011, p. 113). They will be scheduled at a convenient time for participants and the researcher.

Data source #5: Focus groups. Youth participated in a 90-minute focus group after completing the survey. Lunch was served during the focus group. The FDS questions informed the questions that were asked in the focus group session (Appendix A). Answers to these questions were analyzed for relevance to the FDS survey, observation notes, and focus group results as well as any other relevant data.

Data source #6: Observation of behavior and environment. The observation about the learning/social environment occurred during an adolescent retreat premised on the "Our Whole Lives" (OWL) curriculum that took place in the community. Structured observations (Jones & Somekh, 2011) were conducted as part of this research to supplement survey and interview data. Information about the duration of the observation was discussed prior to conducting the observation with event planners and participants. Dialogue, expression of feelings, being

recognized, and a relationship of content to student interests (Ruggiero's variables used to form interview questions) as well as student-student and student-teacher interactions were examined during observation. These are all environmental variables. Data from the observation contributed to the case study in which a description of events or happening relevant to the environment were given (Corbin & Holt, 2011).

Data source #7: Researcher journal. To capture a rich description of all data sources, a field journal was used to keep records (Glesne, 2011) before, during, and after the retreat into interviews and analysis. It provided details about research processes, accounted for researcher behavior, tamed researcher subjectivity, and recorded other relevant data during the entire research process. This journal included activities and important information related to frustration, and also held content for researcher ideas, emotions, subjectivity, thoughts, and reflections (Glesne, 2011). Memos and diagrams (Corbin & Holt, 2011) were also included in the research journal.

Environment

Because the environment influences individual behavior, as addressed in Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT), the environment was the predetermined theme of this research. In preparing youth for social life, environments should employ conditions of social life and engage youth in social life (Ruggiero, 2005). Environments will be examined through artistic artifacts, interviews, observation, and focus groups. Focus group and interview questions were premised upon the FDS survey questions. Participants choose to discuss, draw, and/or write about their environment. This information was analyzed to determine environmental factors that may or may not play a role in youth frustration as well as identify how youth might communicate frustrating experiences aesthetically.

The idea of caring may sound simple. However, when frustration sets in, the dynamics of care can be interrupted because frustration may be too difficult to tolerate which can make it challenging to show or acknowledge caring. For example, if students were labeled with behavioral problems, such as being hyperactive or depressed, the labels can possibly offer comfort to those who assign the label but the labels "can be misleading or destructive at worst" (Hyman, 2012, p. 209). Labeling may short- circuit the caring relationship. Hyman (2012) states that "if children feel criticized or conditionally accepted in the community they may internalize an attitude that contributes to self-criticism, limited self-worth, doubt and feelings of alienation" (p. 211). In support of these points, "Students individual differences and abilities go unnoticed when they have been categorized" (Ruggiero, 2005, p. 35). How children are treated is a component of the environment.

Caring is emotional labor (Noddings, 1984) and when an individual experiences frustration intolerance, the emotional work required can be stifled. For instance, caring may not be recognized by the intended cared-for and "it is only when caring is acknowledged that it is complete" (Ruggiero, 2005, p. 25). In an effort to maintain a caring relationship in the throes of frustration, it is critical to not only locate youth frustration, inquire and observe how they handle it, but also consider how it plays out in the environment.

Rationale for Methods

Community setting. The reason this research was conducted in a community setting rather than a school setting is that the community environment offers a flexible time frame, and can access more than one school (or segment of the population). Another reason it is appropriate to conduct research in this manner is that both schools and communities have a potential in providing space/education for healthy youth development (Centers for Disease Control, 1997;

Epstein, 2011). Furthermore, it would be difficult to expect accurate data of youth emotion in the same hierarchal structure that school provides (Robinson, 2011). The community setting and retreat were designed according to a different hierarchal structure premised on social justice (Hinchey, 2010).

Building skills for adversities. During adolescence, as one navigates the world in relation to oneself, inner struggles can come into existence (Ruggiero, 2005). While it is known that youth experience adversity in their lives, such as divorce and bullying, it may remain unknown to adults how the frustrating/uncomfortable experiences may translate into behavior (Ruggiero, 2005). Ginwright (2011) states that long-term exposure to violence and social marginalization threatens aspects of civic life and community wellbeing. Over time, these forms of oppression can rupture the psycho-social fabric that forms communities of care and that fosters collective and individual wellbeing and purpose (para. 3). Schools and community organizations can both be resources to alleviate adversity in youth lives.

Due to the nature of these experiences, emotions are an integral component of this research as they inform individual decisions and behavior (Gino, 2015). Giving individuals the opportunity to express their emotions can be a venue for learning how to show care to them (Ruggiero, 2005). An environment that affords youth such opportunities may engage and motivate them because they can gain competencies for emotional expression (Ruggiero, 2005) which may help them navigate adversities. One step in creating such an environment is incorporating social and emotional skills into the learning space. The frustration discomfort scale was selected as an instrument in this research because it gave space for youth to pay attention to uncomfortable experiences.

Triangulation. Glesne (2011) explains, "Use of multiple data-collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives" (p. 49) defines triangulation or crystallization. To ensure credibility and validity to this mixed method study, six sources of data were integrated: the FDS, semi-structured interviews or journals, observation, participant artifacts, the focus group session, and the researcher journal.

Selection and Trustworthiness

Participant selection. Five 7th grade students were primary participants in this study. This sample is purposeful as the youth were participants in an "Our Whole Body" (OWL) retreat where they learned about health communication. They have interacted with each other during previous OWL sessions, so they formed some relationships with each other and the event organizers. The retreat started on a Saturday at 4 p. m. and ended the next day, Sunday at 4 p. m. OWL organizers allotted 2.5 hours of face-to-face interaction between the researcher and participants. The researcher was an active observer throughout the entire retreat. The activity schedule is expressed in the following table.

Table 1:

Event Schedule

Time	Event	Who does it
4 p. m. – 5 p. m.	Check in	Youth/parents/ obtain informed consent
5 p. m. – 7 p. m.	Sexuality collage activity; Dinner	Everyone makes dinner together
7 p. m. – 9 p. m.	Sherriff visit- internet safety	Event organizers
9 p. m. – 11 p. m.	Relaxation, movie, ready for bed	Event organizers
12 a. m.	Bed time	Everyone
Sunday, 9 a. m. -10 a. m.	Breakfast	Everyone
10- 11 a. m.	Getting ready for the day	Everyone
11 a. m. – 11:30 a. m.	Frustration discomfort scale survey distribution	Everyone
11:30 a. m. - 12:15 p. m.	Focus group session/lunch	Youth only

12:15- 1:30 p. m.	Art-making session	Youth only
1:30- 2 p. m.	Communication games	Everyone
2 p. m. – 3:30 p. m.	Weekend recap and activities	Everyone
4 p. m.	Time to go home One week follow up interviews scheduled/journals handed out	Everyone

There are some limitations to this research. Limitations include threats to internal and external validity due to sampling selection and size. Selection bias is an external threat to validity as participants were not randomly selected for the purposes of this study; no set criteria were established for inclusion. The sample size was small. These two factors make this study not generalizable to the larger population. In addition, the participants were not previously identified as being frustrated. All adolescents experience frustration, so it did not seem necessary to have only identifiably frustrated youth participate in the study.

While it would have added richer data to this research, the participants were not asked about their artwork after completion. Participants simply selected a question from the focus group that they wanted to make art about in terms of frustration, and that is what they did.

Adult input and youth learned responses were also limitations to this study. Additionally, parents did not participate in this research. In knowing the event organizers, the researcher did not ask input from these adults either. A separate set of questions was not composed for adult information, as the focus was primarily on youth. In terms of the focus group, youth were not asked questions regarding school, just about frustration. Additionally, the researcher did not account for learned responses such as, “School is stressful but will benefit me in the long run.” In the researcher’s experience, some children do not want to be probed further, which is why they

give responses they think adults want to hear. For instance, a few participants might not have wanted to share much information in their journal because it was shared with their parents.

In having a notion about the social justice-premised retreat, I realized that I would observe caring. Thus, I only viewed this one system. Richer data would have also been provided if a few of the youth had been "shadowed" across different environments rather than just one. Doing so may have allowed for comparison across learning spaces. Furthermore, because the event was offered on the weekend, other extracurricular activities competed with the retreat so five participated in the majority of the research and one participated in just the observation.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

The research sought to answer the following questions, “What role does art play in the representation of adolescent frustration?” “What are the elements of a caring space for the expression of adolescent frustrations?”

There are two reasons why I selected art for this research endeavor. The first reason is that art is an affordance that provides emotional information and offers a non-threatening space to communicate difficult emotions. In this case, youth created art based on a focus group they chose. It was observed that the opportunity to make art afforded youth time for decompression and social processing. The second reason art was selected was because it is a reachable solution for communicating thought, and organizing emotions. Affording youth those opportunities shows caring. As the researcher, art is a way of providing that affordance to inform the way I approach working with youth. Art was chosen because I noticed youth frequently being punished for their outward expression of emotion and disciplinary action did not seem to consider the emotional reason behind youth behavior. Thus, a disconnect was present in the way discipline was handled either by adults for solving the problem at hand so it would not continue. Art was a way that I saw that could potentially bridge that gap. Art can drive the caring relationship and the caring relationship can drive behavior change. I wanted to explore that notion further in this research.

For the purposes of this research, art, environment, and frustration were main components for applying an ethic of care. There is a cyclical relationship that exists between these constructs. Art was one of them as it is accessible any time for anybody. The environment allowed for identifying common denominators that might generate more nurturing school-community partnerships. Frustration is ubiquitous and an uncomfortable emotion that can hinder

caring relationships. This chapter addresses researcher subjectivity, describes participants, gives an overview of data sources, and answers the research questions.

Researcher Journal: Subjective I Statement

In order to conduct research in this manner, it was necessary to keep a researcher journal as a space for reflection and diagnosis as the nature of this work was complex. It was after much processing, writing, and artmaking that I could articulate my own subjectivity. I entered into this research as a disheartened parent, continuously trying to navigate working with schools in a collaborative manner. In merely asking questions to identify strategies to ameliorate my child's relentless resistance to go to school, as well as seeking ways that schools/teachers could develop him socially and emotionally, I have been met with enormous resistance.

My experiences have been an undercurrent in this research process because it has been overwhelming to be an advocate for my child. Many parents are powerful resources for children, not just as volunteers during the school day, but as advocates for their child's success out of school. From my perspective as a health educator, when youth are struggling academically, it makes sense to involve as many resources as possible to help promote success and wellbeing simultaneously. Resources such as community organizations, parents, and counselors can all be part of a proactive process that can offer additional caring support for youth.

While it has been draining to maintain a positive opinion of schools due to my experiences, I am not against public education. However, I do think it would make life easier for students, families, teachers, and communities if students were provided with more inclusive and collaborative learning spaces. It was my intention to delve into this research to determine what could help build and sustain more positive relationships among schools, youth, parents, and communities, to create a win-win-win-win situation for these particular stakeholders. Social and

emotional learning, frustration, art, health, and environment are overlapping factors that exist between school and community. It was my goal to focus on these overlapping qualities between these two entities to determine how to apply an ethic of care so that care and learning are more fluid in youth lives (Epstein, 2011). That is what this dissertation is about.

Participants

A total of five seventh graders were analyzed in this research. Four of the five completed all the research phases from survey completion to follow-up journaling. One of the youth did not submit a journal so she participated in a follow-up interview. Additionally, one girl—"Olaf Obama"— participated in just the observation. All children were thirteen years old, Caucasian, and in seventh grade. Two were female and three were male. Three schools were represented. Since this study did not deal with a large sample size, differences regarding socio-economic status were not observed. Some participants revealed more about themselves than others, however, the information gathered about each participant is shared below.

Frin: A seventh-grade female who has an older sibling close in age. Frin as an intelligent girl who strives to do well at school. During the observation, she was eager to raise her hand to help write group norms. She was a dominant voice in the discussion whenever the group convened to talk about anything. Frin seemed to enjoy activities where she could think, but she also enjoyed being active.

Hamlet: A seventh-grade male. I am unsure if he has siblings. Hamlet's work indicates that he is an intelligent, funny, witty boy who also was an idea person.

Care Package: Everyone in the group exclaimed, "Care Package!" minutes after she walked into the room after I asked her to choose an alias for the research. So, she agreed to take the name as her alias. Care Package arrived four hours late and was welcomed by other

participants. Care Package is a seventh-grade girl who could be described as a procrastinator. One of the event leaders described her as someone "who follows the beat of her own drum," and that is how she was perceived by me, as well. She is the third child of six children. She was one of the main participants in the focus group and took the longest time to complete her art piece. She did not complete a journal but was available for a follow-up interview.

Joe and Person: Joe arrived Sunday morning with his identical twin brother Person. Joe and Person were both quiet and had an older sister. They had two moms and loved playing basketball; both parents work at the university level and the entire family dresses nicely. After working with low-income students for so long, it was evident that they belonged to a higher socioeconomic status. They did not have much to say for the most part. Joe simply agreed with what was being said by others during the focus group rather than coming up with his own comments. Person was a little more talkative but did not share much more than his brother during the course of their time at the retreat.

Research Overview: Youth and Parent Session

To alleviate any possible anxiety and satisfy youth curiosity about participating in research, I talked to them about the research process, explained what it was for, and gave them a chance to answer questions. Afterward, they went to the church to play games and talk about the importance of communication. A parent meeting was held describing what happened with research, giving them a chance to ask questions, and asking the parents for their participation. The other adult educators were there for support.

Research Question #1: What are the Elements of a Caring Space for the Expression of Adolescent Frustrations?

Holding environment. A holding environment looks different as children age. As discussed in the previous chapters, Hyman (2012) reported notions of holding environment began with the mother-child relationship. However, as youth age, the holding environment is extended (Reinstein, 2006) to include other areas of life like the classroom and community environments. During the course of the retreat, it was obvious youth felt "held" in some way: It was evident because youth seemed to feel cared for by the affordances offered by the retreat and the research process.

Affordances and elements of care. The notion of affordances has roots in ecological psychology and has been applied to digital media and technology (Abeele, Schouten, & Antheunis, 2017). Abeele, Schouten, and Antheunis (2017) cite Gibson (1979) when they define an affordance as "the actionable properties of the environment that arise when an actor perceives it" (p. 876). I am applying this concept to this research endeavor. Using "elements of care" interchangeably with "affordances" because of the similarity seemed appropriate.

The retreat experience in addition to the art-making session offered perceived social affordances (Abeele, Schouten, & Anetheunis, 2017) as these environmental factors offered an opportunity for youth to build personal and social relationships, which can be intrinsically motivating. In terms of motivation, social interaction is critical as it is a major "developmental need in adolescence" (Clark & Uzzell, 2005).

All of the elements: giving attention to emotion, explicitly shared responsibility among youth and adults, ritual, presenting choices, flexible expectations, respect, varied activities, and flexibility of agenda, offered youth affordances during the retreat. An additional affordance, or

element of caring, was provided by the research process: art. A total of nine affordances were recognized during this research process as elements necessary to create a caring space. These elements are listed in the next section.

Data source: Observation. Observation supplied the answer to this question most, followed by the art-making session. Just as schools establish rituals, such as how children enter the classroom, so did this community organization. The importance of ritual was observed at participant arrival and the opening session and how they entered the space. Participants were dropped off by parents. Most parents stayed and talked about plans with event organizers or visited with other parents. The first child arrived, and one event organizer asked her to see if a certain board game would work for the group to play. She was the only one there for about 30 minutes. Parental informal discussions centered around past and present educational experiences, and they seemed to be very educated. Parents seemed like-minded with each other, and adolescents also seemed to be well acquainted.

Giving Attention to Emotion. The educator that led the opening session laid out real mouse traps on the table in the gathering space and provided no instructions (encouraged autonomy). Right away, the youth were interested and engaged. They played with them, anxiously, and the event organizer joined them. The educator made room for this opportunity to address emotion briefly. She asked them to state how scared they were on a scale of 1-10. The group all realized there was adrenaline when playing with the mouse traps. The event organizer stated that we all get that scary feeling and brought up relationships and our need to be in control. After the group experimented with the mouse traps, she showed them how a trap could go off by touching it a certain way without making a loud snapping sound. The kids were

impressed. The FDS and focus group data sources also supplied youth space to attend to their emotion by giving time to focus on frustration and frustrating experiences.

Data source: Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS). Frustration was an access point for caring during this research process. Five participants took the 28-question FDS: three boys and two girls. Three schools were represented, and all participants were white. The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The survey measured/categorized frustration intolerance in 4 dimensions. According to Wilde (2012), "Frustration intolerance can be thought of as the inability or unwillingness to persist in an activity due to the unpleasant feelings associated with the task" (p. 3).

Frustration Intolerance Dimensions. As described in chapter three, there are four dimensions: emotional intolerance, entitlement, discomfort intolerance, and achievement. The emotional intolerance sub-scale reflected the belief that emotional distress is intolerable and must be quickly relieved or avoided (e.g., ''I cannot bear disturbing feelings''). The entitlement sub-scale reflected the belief that desires must be met and that other people should indulge and not frustrate these desires, including demands for fairness (e.g., ''I cannot tolerate being taken for granted'') and immediate gratification (e.g., ''I cannot stand having to wait for things I would like now''). The discomfort intolerance scale reflected the belief that life should be easy, comfortable, and free of hassles, effort, and inconvenience (e.g., ''I cannot stand having to persist at unpleasant tasks''). Finally, the achievement sub-scale aimed to assess the intolerance of achievement goals being frustrated (e.g., ''I cannot bear to move on from work I am not fully satisfied with'') (Harrington, 2005b, p. 876). The focus group also reserved space to attend to youth emotion through dialogue.

Data source: Focus group. The focus group session was longer than expected. The session lasted 90 minutes. To accommodate, we took a food break and had some sidebar conversation in the middle of the group session. It was not the first time four of the participants interacted with me. As expected, some youth participated more than others. Those who participated more tried to pressure the couple of others who did not make many contributions. I knew some of them from my work with summer and after-school programs, so I do not feel that trust was a primary issue. The participants did share quite a bit of information; however, the girls shared the most. More detail is provided later in this chapter about the focus group.

Frin: She was the only one in the focus group who said they liked school. Frin's highest score on the FDS was achievement. During the focus group at the retreat, she shared, "I am excited when an extra class I like is cancelled," "My expectations are too high," "I have to plan to know what I am doing," "I set unreasonable goals for myself," "I get mad when I don't get a goal in school," and "I feel I have to impress people." While her comment about appreciating when an extra class is canceled can imply that she does not like school, it may also be a testament to how overly busy or stressed out Frin can be due to her academic expectations. Furthermore, the comments she makes can be related to external factors she cannot control. These comments are examples of the pressure, stress, and perhaps over-commitment that might exist in her life and explain why achievement is her top-ranked category for frustration.

Hamlet: This boy shared comments that seemed passive aggressive which makes sense when compared with his FDS results. For question 12 he responded, "When a person moved schools that disagreed with me I was happy because I didn't like him." For question 9, Hamlet shared, "I purposely don't go fast so it angers them." Other responses entailed "shoulding all over myself," (meaning regret and worry as in "I should have done this…" or "I should have

done that…") which the whole group concurred with as they all expressed experiencing worry. Hamlet's response to question 6 was "taking extra classes," and the answer to question 4 was "avoid problems for a while/blow off steam (isolate myself in a room and read)."

Care Package: This girl is frustrated by public speaking and when adults take credit for her ideas. She realizes several instances where she "should all over" herself, echoing what the other group participants shared, as well. Care Package shared feelings of paranoia and worry. One response she gave indicated experiences of physical violence. When asking the group about "experiences where you or someone you know felt out of control or like they were losing their mind? What happened?" Care Package replied that the person "Punched me." This instance occurred at school.

When asked, "How do you handle people or circumstances that you think might make you angry?" Care Package responded that she "gets mean and bossy, and takes charge." It is as if she is protective of letting herself get angry by being someone others don't like or "beating someone else to the punch." She also shared, in agreement with the other participants, that "School is stressful but will benefit me in the long run."

Joe: During the focus group, all Joe wanted to share was that he agreed with the other participants who shared they "Should all over myself" and that "School is stressful but it will benefit me in the long run." Even though he shared minimal information, I observed that Joe was withdrawn as he seemed guarded to give responses as if not wanting to confront any discomfort during the focus group. I wondered if he did not share responses about frustration to protect himself from feeling discomfort or in an attempt to contain his emotions. Almost immediately, I thought about emotional suppression and was concerned about his tolerance/acceptance of frustration.

Person: Person participated more in the focus group than his twin brother but did not share a significant amount. He did indicate that his frustration was from not getting expectations met when he shared, “I expect to be treated fairly among siblings” (entitlement). However, there were other circumstances that frustrated Person, such as when someone else gets credit for his idea (entitlement) and spending time thinking about times in the past when he got mad and realized he could not change the circumstances. Along with the rest of the group, Person concurs with the stress of school but realizes the long-term benefits. He responds, “Not make it a problem” is how he handles being around others that make him angry. Person did not share his strategies or go into specifics of how he handles stress or how he argues, so his responses are rather topical and do not give an indication about how he copes with frustration. Grubbs and Exline (2016) state that anger and disappointment are connected to frustration; furthermore, they state, entitlement is linked to aggression and anger. Eight elements were observed to create a caring space.

Explicit Shared Responsibility and Ritual. Not unlike school settings, this community setting also used rituals to provide structure. The group conducted their usual ritual of lighting candles and talking about setting goals. They each talked about their New Year’s goal, and so did the event organizer. There seemed to be open sharing. The youth seemed relaxed. Youth were welcome to fidget with things and move about during activity as it was evident the organizers realized kids didn’t always need to sit still in order to listen (trust building). New Year’s wishes were shared: “I hope I am not badly sick” and “I hope for relaxation and to be happy because last year was intense because of the presidential election” were a couple of wishes. Afterward, group leaders asked the group what they wanted the next 24 hours to be like, to which they responded, “fun,” “not a waste of time,” and “not boring.” Students were asked for input and given a shared

responsibility for the retreat's outcomes which were additional elements of creating a caring space.

Group norm writing began, and the process was interesting to watch. Three girls dominated the discussion and were eager to write them up. The other participants were happy to let them take charge. Here are the group norms:

1. No pressure to talk
2. Challenge by choice (ready to listen and learn)
3. Affirm, consider, talk about, and offer opinions about ideas
4. Try to learn with an open mind
5. Empower each other
6. Have a Positive Mental Attitude (PMA)
7. Include and support each other
8. Feel free to state your opinion

Presenting Choices. During the group norm activity, Olaf Obama did not understand what "challenge by choice" meant. The group leader explained that "challenge by choice" was where anyone could say "pass" or "I don't have anything to say" during the course of the retreat. Olaf Obama exclaimed, "Oh wow, that's an option?!" According to Harrison and Hasan (2013), "Students sometimes struggle with autonomy having grown accustomed to teacher-centered pedagogies that allow them more anonymity and passivity" (p. 70). This example also supports Harrison and Hasan's (2013) research: "Choices and activities both inside and outside the classroom present options for how we frame learning and inquiry" (p. 71).

Flexible Expectations. Another time the appreciative qualities of the environment were examined was during the collaborative collage activity where youth were asked to cut out magazine pictures for poster boards pertaining to different sexual topics. During this activity, Hamlet read the majority of the time, and when he found something he wanted to share, he shared it. The group leader left the room to check on dinner, and when she returned the other participants ratted on Hamlet reporting to her, "He just read Scientific American." The group leader responded, "That's fine," but she challenged him to share what he was reading and what was fascinating about it. He did. The group leader remained calm and was responsive instead of reactive when she learned Hamlet did not do what she instructed as she thought he should or wanted him to. Hamlet chose to read a magazine during the activity. It was clear that flexibility in expectations on the part of adult organizers contributed to creating a space for caring.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Additionally, the adults prioritized the kids wanting to have fun; they showed the kids they listened and respected what they wanted the retreat to be different from the previous retreat. Listening to conversations between the organizers and youth, the previous retreat was described as more rigid in design. This retreat seemed to focus more on connection with others while being an educational experience. The goal of this retreat obviously influenced the cultural norms: Decision making was shared; adults had their agenda but were adaptable enough to adjust to include the youth's agenda. Throughout the course of the retreat, it was clear that sharing responsibility was a priority for group leaders so that they could show youth respect for their own choices, whether they followed the instructions during activities or not.

Varied Activities. The kids seemed engaged. Supper was at 6:10 p.m. and a parent prepared it. The group ate tacos with chicken, beans, rice, sour cream, tomatoes, onions, salsa, and tortilla chips. There were supper instructions provided, and the youth helped themselves.

After they ate, a local sheriff came by to discuss internet safety with them. It was an engaging talk that consisted of hands-on learning and sharing statistics. After the hour-long discussion, the group changed into their night clothes and wanted to play "Frackle baseball" in the church. About 9:30 p. m., they wanted to watch a movie. It took a while to get the movie operating, but it finally was up and running. Two moms came to spend the night, and one took control of bedtime. The group shut off the movie at midnight.

The Flexibility of the Agenda. The educator responsible for Sunday's opening session realized that a conversation about internet violence was too intense for an opening session. He diverted from the scheduled agenda after being attuned to participant needs. So, the group opened up the morning by playing a board game called *Scattergories* in which they had to select a letter to use for the game. The group used that letter to come up with answers to prompts such as, "Name a kind of dessert" or "Something sold on the internet." They shared answers and received points for original answers, and all seemed to enjoy their time. Afterward, they went into heavier dialogue. It was observed that this particular educator valued youth engagement over sticking to a set agenda.

Art. Provided by the research process, art proved to be another element that contributed to creating a caring space. It was not observed that youth were frustrated prior to making art, but the atmosphere felt heavy after the focus group discussion. After they finished their art pieces, the climate seemed to be lighter. Art also created a caring environment by allowing another way for self-expression or communication (Eisner, 2008). Results from the art-making session will be addressed more in answering the second research question in the following section.

Research Question #2: What Role Does Art Play in the Representation of Adolescent Frustrations?

The FDS results, as well as data from the art-making session, will primarily be used to answer this question. Data gleaned from the journaling and secondary interview will supplement this data, as well. An analysis of the FDS data will preface this section followed by data from the art-making session. Journal and interview data will be used if necessary.

Data source: FDS. The four dimensions of frustration intolerance: discomfort intolerance, entitlement, emotional intolerance, and achievement are addressed in the questions (Harrington, 2005a, p. 3). Each was scored on a 35-point scale, according to their Likert responses (see Appendix A). Questions 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25 pertain to discomfort intolerance. Questions 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26 relate to entitlement. Questions 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27 pertain to emotional intolerance. Questions 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28 relate to achievement.

Frin's results: Points on the FDS were tallied using the FDS scale created by Harrington. Assigned questions were assigned particular points. These points were added up to determine scores. According to the FDS, Frin's highest score fell in the achievement category with 28 points. Emotional intolerance was a close second (26 points) followed by entitlement (24 points) and then discomfort intolerance (19 points).

Hamlet's results: Hamlet scored highest in emotional intolerance (26 points) in regards to the FDS. Entitlement (22 points) was his second-highest score, followed by discomfort intolerance (20 points) and then achievement (19 points).

Care Package's results: Care Package's highest score on the FDS fell into the emotional intolerance (20 points) subscale. The second highest rank was entitlement (14 points) followed by achievement (13 points) and then discomfort intolerance (12 points).

Joe's results: Joe's highest sub-scale was achievement (24 points) followed by entitlement (22 points); third was emotional intolerance (20 points) and then discomfort intolerance (19 points).

Person's results: Entitlement (22 points) was Person's highest sub-scale rank. Achievement (21 points) was a close second, with emotional intolerance (18 points) being third, and discomfort intolerance (17 points) being one point behind. According to Grubbs and Exline (2016), "Entitlement is associated with a greater propensity to perceive slights again the self" (p. 1211). Harrington (2005b) discovered, "Entitlement is a predictor of anger" (p. 4).

The following table contains results from all participants across sub-categories:

Table 2:

FDS Results, expressed in points

Dimensions	Frin	Hamlet	Care Pkg.	Joe	Person
Achievement	28	19	13	24	21
Emotional Intolerance	26	26	20	20	18
Entitlement	24	22	14	22	22
Discomfort Intolerance	19	20	12	19	17

It is noteworthy that even though all four dimensions touched youth lives, three ranked the highest among this small group: entitlement, emotional intolerance, and achievement. Frustration seemed to manifest differently, being birthed from anger, rage, or disappointment among the group. Whether girl or boy, it is apparent that frustration is part of youth lives, as it is for everyone. It is also evident that an assortment of instances or triggers can lead to frustration; furthermore, frustration can be suppressed, ignored, expressed in physical violence to others, or harm to one's self (Harrington, 2005a). In Hamlet's case, it was dealt with by suppression. When signing the consent/assent form, Hamlet asked his mom if he could write his frustrating

experiences in a journal and then burn it. I wondered what Hamlet had to say that he did not want others to know by asking to burn his journal. Additionally, I thought this comment illustrated his emotional intolerance as well since burning things is a way to alleviate unpleasant emotions.

Data source: Art. Near the end of the focus group session, it was evident we all were ready for a break. I displayed the art supplies available and asked participants to choose which supplies they wanted. Each participant selected a focus group question to use as a prompt for their art. Almost immediately, they asked about what restrictions/guidelines there were. I instructed them to make whatever they felt they needed to make. Participants welcomed the chance to do some drawing. One student expressed how much they loved to draw. They left the room and sat at a dining room table so they could spread out. There was some dialogue going on while they were creating their own art, but it seemed to be helpful to process ideas together. The participants spent 30 minutes on making art.

Art was interpreted using my expressive arts knowledge and engaging in open dialogue with the director of assessment in the Writing Across the Curriculum department at Appalachian State University, Sherry Alusow Hart. Mrs. Hart received the NTT Faculty Award for Excellence in General Education Teaching (Writing Across Curriculum, 2018).

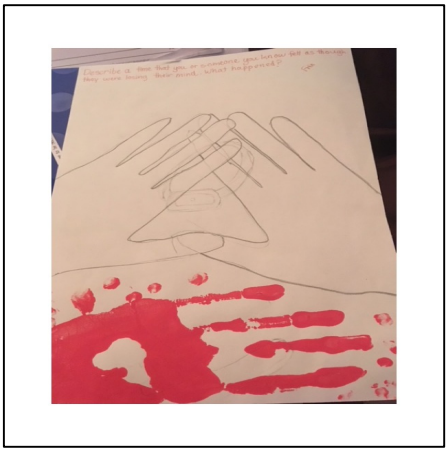

Figure 2: Frin's Artwork

Frin selected the question, “Describe a time that you or someone you know felt as though they were losing their mind. What happened?” for her session. Her picture was drawn on white paper, with neat, straight edges. She used pencil primarily. Frin’s picture consisted of three hands: two were traced and one was created by putting red paint on her hand and pressing it on the paper. The pencil-drawn hands were covering a faint image of a piece of some sort of jewelry. The painted hand was located under the pencil-drawn hands but was not touching the pencil hands. There was a significant piece of white space on untitled artwork.

At first glance, it looked like she messed up because the jewelry piece appeared to be erased so it was faint on the page. However, Frin could have decided to get another piece of paper to start over but decided to work with what she had. I arrived at my own title for her work: “Covering the Burn.” I associated the red hand with anger/frustration and could feel the sting of hurt/pain from it. The red hand seemed untouchable—like it was hard to deal with since the pencil-drawn hands were not touching. The red hand was horizontally positioned at the bottom of the paper, and the pencil-drawn hands were located mid-page. The jewelry may have indicated the fragility or delicateness of the situation. As mentioned earlier, Frin was not asked about her artwork because it was not part of the methodology.

Figure 3: Hamlet's Artwork

The first question Hamlet asked when given instructions for the art-making was, “Can it be abstract?” Hamlet chose paint for the medium in designing his art piece. Some orange blots were on the periphery of the torn-out page. He was the only one who selected a piece of paper that had rough edges. The majority of the white paper was filled with black paint with hints of blue and green. At first, I thought Hamlet wanted to cover up any frustration. However, I remembered his comment during the art-making session. He pointed at his picture and told his friend that “that’s how it feels.” I felt like the dark colors were trying to extinguish the discomfort quickly. For me, it provided evidence that Hamlet’s emotional distress needed to be avoided quickly, as Harrington (2005b) revealed.

I felt strongly that the painting was more visceral. The colors Hamlet chose were contrasting with one another, so I determined that he did not want to deal with the discomfort of frustration. His creation was not neatly designed. I titled his piece, “The Scattered Blanket,” as I felt he used the darker colors to cover up the intensity of feeling.

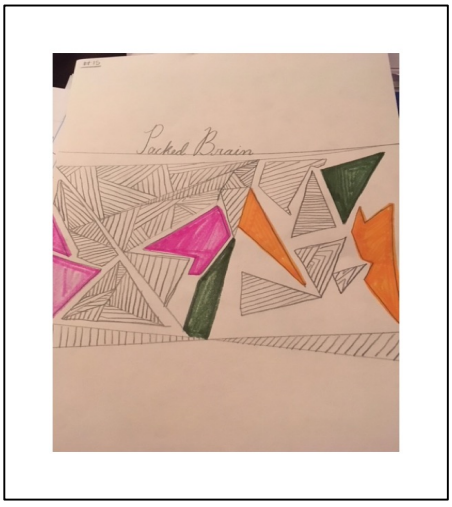

Figure 4: Care Package's Artwork

She expressed how much she enjoyed drawing but was hung up on how perfect her artwork looked. Her art piece was a response to the question, “What tasks, if any, are too

difficult for you? How do you handle doing them?" While examining her art piece, it seemed evident the way she dealt with difficult tasks was to compartmentalize and organize them. Given that her highest sub-scale ranking on the FDS was "emotional intolerance," the design she chose for her art piece made sense. Six pieces were colored in: two were pink, two were yellow, and two were green. Spending more time with this art piece, I was compelled to title it, "Almost closing" or "Flashing sign" because it reminded me of the flickering neon lights of establishments when the bulbs needed replacing or it's almost closing time. Other than those select areas of color, Care Package's art was made with pencil-made neat lines.

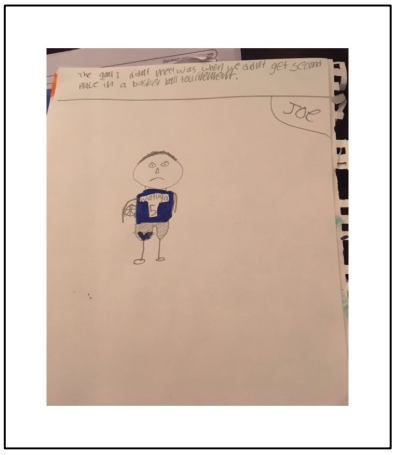

Figure 5: Joe's Artwork

For his art piece, Joe chose to answer the question pertaining to a goal he did not meet. He drew a picture with pencil and marker that was about a time his basketball team did not get second place in a basketball tournament, as indicated in his caption. The boy drawn in the picture has an oversized head, a frown, stick legs, and arms. It seemed that Joe wanted to play it safe as if a measure of self-preservation.

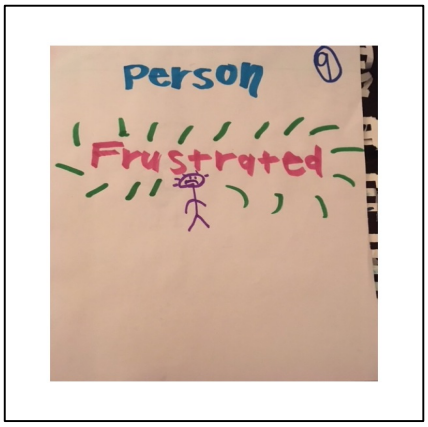

Figure 6: Person's Artwork

Person created art that depicted his emotions when he did not feel like doing something when asked. His art included language and a simple stick figure. Person kept giving "frustration" for his responses, as if mechanical, and pointing out the obvious or assuming he knew what I wanted to hear. This sort of response indicated compliance, not engagement. Person would not give away much about his feelings. Looking at the piece further, I figured that he may just have wanted to do the bare minimum and wanted to protect himself or cover up emotions. Joe's responses on the FDS placed his answers in the achievement sub-scale. Entitlement, however, was a close second. I was curious how he handled the disappointment over the course of that day he lost the basketball tournament. I thought to myself, "Did his team place third or did they not place at all"? "Why wasn't he disappointed they did not get first place"?

Summary of FDS and Art Findings. Generally speaking, after receiving the FDS results, art pieces further expressed how youth handled frustration. Hamlet's artwork, for instance, seemed to be a sheet of black covering up heated emotion. This makes sense considering his highest ranking on the FDS was emotional intolerance. His focus group discussion about a boy he disliked who had to move schools also indicated Hamlet had difficulty experiencing negative

emotion. The FDS provided a root cause of frustration and the art and discussion seemed to be indicators of that root cause.

The FDS provided space to discuss emotion, and the art was a non-threatening way of communicating or coping with frustration in a creative way. Used in conjunction, the FDS and art supplied a deeper knowledge about youth which may potentially help navigate relationships with them as well as develop emotional intelligence (SEL) skills.

Data sources: Youth journal and interview analyses. The journaling and follow up interview provided an opportunity for youth to practice self-awareness (SEL skill). However, I remain uncertain that youth gained such awareness as I did not follow up with them about any aspect of research processes. Youth experience stress in their life and having an outlet to communicate it can be healing (Eisner, 2008; Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016; Redford, 2015). The following information from their journal/interview entries can give community and school educators a glimpse of what their sources of stress/frustration. Stressful experiences youth have outside of school can impact their experience in school and vice versa (Bandura, 1989; Epstein, 2011).

Frin: Frin's journal revealed a great deal of experience with her sister, who will be referred to as Sarah (per Frin's instructions). Her second journal entry was particularly interesting. She indicated in the journal, "Sarah had a snow day and I did not. This morning, I was really tired and was mad that I couldn't stay home and sleep. I was mad at my whole family the whole morning." She also wrote that the "situation was out of my hands" and that "after she went to school and felt better" (perhaps because she gained distance). Frin acknowledged in this journal entry that she "would try to get more sleep the night before so she wouldn't be so

grouchy." I found this entry to be interesting because in the throes of anger it can be difficult to realize how much we are in control of and how easy it is to reach for external blaming or relief. Frin also indicated an instance of "rage" in her third entry explaining, that "I wanted to break her CD or smash the CD player if it got to [sic] loud." This statement referred to her sister's CD player when her sister chose to play music when Frin was trying to do homework. Frin did reflect in writing by stating, "I'd wish I would have given the music a chance before my outburst because it wasn't that distracting."

Frin's fifth journal entry revealed her taking accountability for causing frustration on someone else: "I teased Sarah about something on the night of a really big test. She yelled, "Yeah, let's point out all of my mistakes on the night of a really stressful test." After recording the event in her journal, Frin wrote, "I wished she had thought about how stressed she [her sister] was before teasing her." She also wrote that "I wasn't mad at her, but I'm still mad at myself." It appeared that the journal prompt "What would you do differently?" gave an opportunity for Frin to be reflective and accountable for her role in the frustrating situations she journaled about. From Frin's writings, I noticed the varying levels of frustration as well as the busy-ness of her life as she typically spent her time attempting to do homework or negotiating relationships. I applaud her for the self-awareness and integrity she seemed to have gained by giving attention to and "sitting with" her frustration.

Hamlet: Hamlet didn't share much during the course of his journaling experience. One frustrating experience was about ear pain that he could not control; he said he handled it by ignoring it. The only entry he shared was an experience with trying to learn grammar in his ELA (English Language Arts) class. He indicated, "English is a bad language for grammar"; however, I am not sure how to interpret his statement. I wondered how he could have ignored his ear pain

if it was so bad it could not heal with medicine. Part of me realized that he may have tolerated frustration but left out instances because he may have been afraid that his mom would see them as she was the one who shared his journal with me.

Care Package: Care Package did not complete a journal. She told me she was a procrastinator and it was difficult for her to remember to write down her experiences. While her perception of herself matched mine and that of one of the event organizers, what is important to note is that emotional intolerance and procrastination are related (Harrington, 2005b). I offered her an option to make an art journal about her frustration, but she did not submit a journal. As an alternative, I conducted an interview as per the methodological structure for this research.

Interview. Her mother dropped Care Package off at a local coffee shop so we could talk. The follow-up interview did not last long as Care Package is not a person of many words. Upon further discussion about frustration, Care Package shared an episode with me where she was mad because her brother ate her food she left in the fridge. She also shared she is frustrated with public speaking, which can make many people nervous. Care Package expressed that she found joy and comfort in being around her dogs. She also indicated being frustrated with a Spanish teaching app called, "Delingo." Apparently, the instructions were not explicit for her so she quit after a week.

Care Package did seem to give up easily on most things, except art. She was fascinated with drawing and driven to draw to perfection. I recalled how long it took her to draw her picture of organized lines and how focused she was; not caring how long it took her to complete the task. However, she did have frustration when it came to art as she seemed to constantly compare herself to another student's art. Therefore, she felt she was an inadequate artist to a degree. The frustration for Care Package, it seemed, was rooted in envy and jealousy. It is relatively easy, in

human experience, to compare ourselves to others. I appreciated her sharing her source of both frustration and passion with me. Her experience of art relates to what I attempt to emphasize in this research: that motivation can buffer frustration. Care Package is motivated to make art and she continues in the face of frustration because, in making art, she is genuinely engaged.

Joe and Person: Joe did not have much to reveal in his journal entries. He either reported that he wasn't frustrated or that he was frustrated due to his performance in snowboarding or basketball. It is evident Joe experiences frustration when his performance in athletics impacts his achievement. Person's journal was more about being frustrated around not getting what he wanted. He shared experiences of not feeling like he was being treated fairly, being disappointed (frustrated) when his friend could not go to the game with him, or due to not being able to hammer a nail into the wall. I wondered if he felt things should be easy for him. The only event he expanded on was the one where he felt he should have the same phone privileges as his older sister. Person shared he was really mad and argued about it with his parents.

Chapter 5: Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Paying attention to emotion is a form of self-care (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Youth may be able to recognize their behavior patterns that contribute to relationship problems or other difficulties in life. Whether youth realized this or not, the focus group, art-making, journaling experience, and FDS were not just assignments for research, but they created intentional "pauses" so that youth could have a chance to build self-awareness, another component of social and emotional learning (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004).

The reason why Nel Nodding's ethic of care approach was selected for this research because it is situated within the paradigm of critical theory. In alignment with social justice, care theory focuses on attending to the individual in regard to ensuring that care is a more intentional part of relationships among and with youth. Chapter five is organized by addressing lessons learned using an acrostic of "Frustration." Each letter in the word conveys a research lesson/finding and brings in the voices of the participants.

F = Freaked Out

Emotion can overwhelm us, and not attending to it can make it difficult to show care to others appropriately. Frustration can be difficult to tolerate, let alone recognize. Frin expressed her cyclical nature of weaving in and out of worry as, "Ah, I am really freaked out now." Art can be a medium to work through emotion, such as frustration. Rather than being asked a series of questions, they may need space to artistically write or draw to diffuse emotion. During this process, my eyes were opened to a new literacy: art. Critical theorist Patricia Hinchey (2010) states, "We need to be informed by science but also by art" (p. 53). It the heat of emotion, it can be difficult to talk about and work out logically. During the course of this research, the accessibility of art expanded communication opportunities as well as introduced a new literacy

(Chappell & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2013). Art gave me a space to be objective during and after the research process. As Maya Angelou (2014) shares, "Without the presence and energy of art in our lives, we are capable of engaging in heartless activities without remorse" (p. 50).

Recommendation: Include art in youth education. According to Chappell and Cahnmann-Taylor (2013), "Youth have and will continue to respond to the circumstances of their lives through creative production with or without school support" (p. 247). Many tools, like art and emotion, are required if teachers, adults, or youth are to have a complete, "informed vision" (Hinchey, 2010, p. 67) of behavior and problems associated with those behaviors. Art can be part of school discipline as it can shed light on root causes of behavior, and make it easier to buffer difficult conversations (Eisner, 2008; Guyotte, 2017).

As observed during the OWL retreat, making art available as an outlet for emotion (like frustration), and giving youth voice in their learning environments are two specific ways to show care to students while appreciating their social and emotional needs. As indicated earlier in this chapter, art can be a mode of safe expression as youth may not be able to articulate or effectively express themselves verbally (Eisner, 2008). Furthermore, art can be a source of knowledge for youth and adults. During this research, it was observed that the youth did not feel put on the spot to come up with answers (as they may when they are asked questions by teachers about their behavior). Additionally, youth seemed to appreciate being able to take some time to draw, as it was a social affordance. To support this idea, art provides insight, through emotion and feeling, to what is not always readily visible (Ruggiero, 2005).

Accessing art can be a strategy that helps students realize a nonviolent solution to resolving conflict as it gives space for youth to work through emotion. Essentially, "Art can be powerful in getting individuals to experience emotions related to relevant upheavals in their

lives" (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016, p. 150). Giving youth a voice in their learning environment (whether be it through providing homework choices or helping come up with rules) can model ways youth can create and maintain healthy relationships.

While care can be modeled through language, and we frequently express care through verbal communication, Sandra Laugier (2017) points out that "the notion of care is best expressed not in the form of a theory, but as an activity: care as action (taking care, caring for) and as attention, concern (caring about)" (p. 224). Art is the activity, an action of caring, in this dissertation. This research supports that the language and action of care can aid in "redefining literacies" (Chappell & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2013, p. 256), which if adopted, can offer a more inclusive, health-promoting educational system. Holding environment and health-promoting environmental factors can help the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction implement and evaluate affective objectives they set out to develop.

R = Reluctance

Participant reluctance was exhibited as a hesitation to take action at the moment they felt frustration. Instead, they chose to harbor frustration inside through passive-aggressive behavior. Hamlet was the epitome of a passive aggressive person, internalizing frustration and expressing it through "quieter", perhaps undetectable behavior. For instance, in the focus group, Hamlet said when people want him to do things in a hurry, "I take my time so that they get angry". It seems as though Hamlet figured out passive aggressiveness was safer than verbally expressing his feelings.

Joe also indicated reluctance as he did not choose to argue during frustrating moments. Although it is difficult to determine how Joe experienced frustration as he shared very little in the focus group. However, in viewing his journal, he only reported two days of feeling frustrated.

Those moments related to falling off a snowboard and that he did not think he played well in his basketball game. Joe seemed more willing to shake things off. I wondered if he had friends if he just learned to tolerate frustrating moments, or referred to frustration just in terms of making mistakes. More time was needed to figure out how Joe really worked through or experienced this emotion.

U = Unreasonable Expectations

Frin was the exemplar for unreasonable internal expectations. During the focus group, she talked about goals and the stress of not meeting them, and shared, "I feel I have to impress people." These unreasonable expectations can come from not only the individual themselves but also from parents and teachers. I speculated in my research journal if this was a condition of being in the competitive culture of schools (Noddings, 1984).

Silent, frustrated learners who do not act out externally can very well be disengaged, however. Four out of the five participants in the focus group indicated that they "do not like school but know it would benefit them in the long run"; two of the five participants seemed to be doing extremely well by either taking extra classes and/or being praised for their school work. These participants seemed to mimic what Connor and Pope (2013) label as "robo-students" (p. 1429). Robo-students appear engaged when doing their work but seldom enjoy or find meaning in the work they put effort into doing (Connor & Pope, 2013).

S = "Shoulding All Over Myself"

All five participants in the focus group discussed making mistakes, and the desire to erase those mistakes. They described engaging in the past thinking such as, "I should have done that, I should have done this" and thus, the phrase, "Shoulding all over myself" was unanimously coined as the process they engaged in by the group as a whole. Worry, anxiety, and living in the

past were experienced in relationship to school and how they handled stress. Some of the comments the group has roots in the school environment and included the difficulty of taking extra classes (Hamlet), violence of others such as getting punched by a classmate (Care Package), fear of public speaking (Frin and Care Package), hardships in school group projects (Frin), and missing a goal in school (Frin).

In terms of stress, participants seemed to get caught up in thinking about the stress which is frustrating in and of itself. More is discussed how students got "stuck in their brain" in the next section.

T = Thinking Torment

Frustrating experiences either gets nested in participant's brains or is inflicted by the cycle of thinking about the stressful instance repeatedly. Acknowledging when an individual is frustrated is one thing but applying coping strategies that are effective is another. From the focus group, alone, there were several comments that related to this cycling in and out of stress and reliving the stressful moment in their head: "Worrying getting into fear" (Care Package); "I have ways to take care of things but never figured out how to use them" (Frin); "thinking about the past of times you got mad that you know you can't change (Person); "thinking about something too deeply" (Care Package); "Ah, I am really freaked out now" (Frin).

Recognizing one is frustrated is important, but it is also vital to know how to cope and apply effective coping strategies to move past the frustrating feelings. In this research process, art was one way I hoped students would cope with the heaviness of discussing frustration that came with the focus group, as there is value in not talking about stressors (Redford, 2015).

R = Relationships

Relationships happen in and out of school (Epstein, 2011). Frustration occurs in our relationship with others through hard situations such as disagreements, differences of opinion, and diverse backgrounds. If time was earmarked for spending time with discomfort, Frin can figure out who she is through her relationship with her sister, and Hamlet can do the same thing in the way he responds to people he does not like. Our identity is shaped by our relationship with others (Pace Marshall, 2005). For me, as a researcher, in just spending one day with these brilliant youth, I have learned what to expect from them so I am able to work with them better in the future.

Now that this research is complete, I know that Hamlet may not readily reveal his true feelings about people or instances if they are uncomfortable for him. I understand that Joe and Person will give me the bare minimal responses to what is asked of them. I realize that Frin feels pressure and is hard on herself if she does not rank high in her academics, which can compound the internal pressure she may already feel from external sources. I understand that Care Package will try to organize emotional chaos by making art.

A = Achievement

Achievement is a dimension of frustration intolerance and Frin's highest ranking dimension. During the focus group, she admitted, "I set unreasonable goals for myself; I get mad if I don't get a goal in school." I wondered if the competitive environment of schools or other external expectations influenced her to put additional pressure on herself as she is often influenced by school performance (robo-student). Furthermore, I wondered if she was truly engaged in what she was doing, or is merely trying to comply with what was expected of her. Compliance can look like engagement (Dewitt, 2016; Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl,1995). For

example, Daniel Pink (2009) reports that "good grades become a reward for compliance-but don't have much to do with learning. Meanwhile, students whose grades don't measure up often see themselves as failures and give up trying to learn" (p. 187-188). Hamlet may be another example of a robo-student, as well, since he is enrolled in extra classes. Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, and Neumark-Sztainer (2007) report, "Schools are a forum in which adolescent have the opportunity to achieve both academically and socially" (p. 269).

T = Treatment

I am uncertain there is a moment in an adolescent's life in which they do not feel that life isn't fair and they are entitled to things just based on who they are, what they deal with or the grades they get. However, having this feeling of maltreatment can breed entitlement, another dimension of frustration intolerance. Entitlement can lead to anger, and in Person's case, he doesn't seem to be treated fairly. He expressed in his journal that "he didn't get to use the phone for a normal time but his sister did". Person also shared that he feels frustrated when people steal his idea: "Someone tells something I said and gets the credit." Even if it is a lopsided perspective, this view can potentially fuel Person's sense of entitlement and his anger.

Recommendation: Integrate community and school environments. Rather than being a referral service or a source for school volunteers, community environments can offer schools, and children, more value. The purpose of examining frustration intolerance in a community environment during a retreat for seventh graders was to determine what could be learned about youth outside of the constraints of school. According to Lin and Bruce (2013), "Young people experience disconnects between their educational experiences and both individual and community needs" (p. 335).

This research environment supported some of Noddings (2013b) 21st century aims shared in chapter one by showing youth how to communicate effectively, work as a team, be flexible, and encourage accountability (p. 401). Therefore, community organizations can help foster positive behavior in youth and be a place where youth feel safe, heard, and valued through the participatory activities they offer to youth. Mand (2012) reports, "Underlying the use of participatory activities is a commitment to access voices and to create a space where these voices can be heard" (p. 151).

Strait, Schmidt, and Maier (2017) explain, "Emotional support" refers to the degree to which students feel respected and trusted (p. 133). The environment of the retreat demonstrated some emotional support for youth in that youth voices were heard, accepted, and respected (empowerment). Adding to emotional support, I observed staff were reflective during the course of the retreat because they seemed mindful that the retreat was about what the children needed rather than just merely complete their own agenda. They paid attention to moments when youth were tired or if activities were getting too serious that they were adaptable enough to adjust the agenda.

The community environment shared some parallel components and goals with school environments such as the presence of caring adults, building ritual, parent involvement, group activities, and youth engagement. Shields et al. (2013) find, "Student, organizational, and community well-being are intricately linked, and thus, focusing on any one of these alone will not eliminate achievement gaps and health disparities". Therefore, social and emotional health deserves to be a priority in schools. Health is not only concerned with physical health but also the overall wellbeing of individuals. According to Greenberg et al., 2017), "That means not only preventing diseases, disorders, injuries, problem behaviors, but also nurturing positive outcomes

that improve quality of life" (p. 14). This community setting seemed to be able to adopt whole-child approaches more readily because of flexibility, educator adaptability, and incorporating engaging activities (Noddings, 2013). Therefore, this community youth program did seem to add social and emotional value to youth lives as it was designed to bring youth together to talk about tender, private issues such as sex. Nel Noddings (2012) advocates, "We need to spend time talking about the moral problems we all face——the temptation to cheat, to feel envy, fear, anger——and ways to manage them" (p. 777). Presenting youth with opportunities to talk about sex, in a safe space, can help prevent youth from making unhealthy decisions in regard to their relationships as far as making sound moral choices (Noddings, 1984). Additionally, entering into these delicate conversations can be an entry point for caring.

Weare and Nind (2011) reported 64% of positive youth development initiatives incorporated multi-system approaches (p. 62). One possible model to use is Epstein's (2011) community-school-family model, conveyed in chapter two. This research recommends focusing on community-school facets. Pace Marshall (2006) indicates that "most students view school learning as unrelated and irrelevant to their lives. Because we do not ask them to learn within their communities, they learn apart from them" (p. 112). Thus, the overarching recommendation is for community and school educators to overlap the relationship that exists between them.

In order to be effective, educators should view community and school environments as connected rather than separate. Therefore, just as communities would be expected to support schools, schools would be expected to support community efforts. Epstein (2010) supports this claim by stating that how children are viewed is also encouraged; "If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development" (para 1).

Students are either out of school are in school, and all youth need to succeed in life and school. Therefore, it is encouraged that community and school stakeholders make an intentional choice to view each other as a partner so that a "caring community forms around students and begins its work" (Epstein, 2010, para 2). This requires emotional labor. Emotional labor is defined by Hochschild (1983) as labor that "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (p. 7) and is part of working and developing youth. All adults need to view disciplinary, behavioral, and developmental problems as opportunities to promote moral education and achieve growth can be beneficial for community and school educators (Noddings, 1988).

I = Intolerance of Emotion

This is the third dimension of frustration intolerance represented in this group of five students. And emotional intolerance can lead to avoidance. When situations get uncomfortable it is easy to want to avoid the problem ("fight or flight responses are activated"); (Cozolino, 2013). Hamlet avoids discomfort as he reported in the focus group. I am not sure how long he avoids the problems, and time limits may vary for him dependent upon the situation. Some of the avoidance behaviors like drugs, alcohol, and smoking come with their own set of problems (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011).

Epstein (2010) notes that students are the "main actors" in all facets of their life. It is therefore critical to community-school partnerships incorporate activities that motivate and engage youth to create their own success. Additionally, each child's unique individuality needs to be embraced and actualized across settings (Epstein, 2010). One way to establish community-school-youth connectedness is consideration for emotion.

Recommendation: Use the FDS as a tool. Whether in a community, school, or home setting, it is important to address emotion. Attending to emotion, as this research did, can convey caring to youth, and is equally as important as math and reading skills (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). In the documentary, *Paper Tigers*, it was observed and verbally expressed that education is important but falls second to skills such as advocating for oneself and other social and emotional skills (Redford, 2015). FDS subscales can help explain patterns of behavior.

In just this small sample size, three of the four dimensions of frustration intolerance were portrayed as highest ranking in the FDS results: emotional intolerance, achievement, and entitlement. A couple of examples of youth behavior during the retreat strengthened what was found in frustration intolerance rankings; once the frustration intolerance categories were determined, it was easy to see how they played out in youth behavior. For instance, Hamlet attempted to share an idea in the group norms session and was ignored by other youth. Instead of making an ordeal out of it or raising his voice, he repeated himself once. He may have been managing not being heard well or choosing his battles, but he may also have chosen to refuse to let himself get uncomfortable as he does not have a high tolerance for emotional discomfort as indicated by his FDS score.

Frustration intolerance plays a role in a child's decision to punch a peer, not submit homework, or have resistance going to school. If students are punished without understanding

how they enter into circumstances or cope with them, educators and other adults who work with youth will miss an opportunity to build and maintain a caring relationship with them.

While participants were relatively "well-behaved," they still experienced frustration and appeared adept in controlling this emotion. In the case of social and emotional learning (SEL), self-control is a facet of social and emotional health, and there is a link between self-control and being aware of emotion (McKown, 2017). Frustration can occur across environments and it is unknown if and when the experience of frustration may overwhelm and interrupt student lives. This research promotes using the frustration discomfort scale as a social and emotional tool as part of a trauma-informed practice. Because frustration is part of social emotional learning and trauma is a component of wellbeing that can affect education (Redford, 2015), the ACES survey can also provide a tool for helping youth succeed in school.

Recommendation: Consideration for ACES. One of the greatest public health studies was a mega-study which examined adverse experiences in childhood. The study was conducted by Dr. Vincent Felitti and Dr. Robert Anda (Stevens, 2012). The outcomes of this study were appalling. First, these researchers discovered that ACES had an impact on health, graduation, academic performance, and violence (CDC, 2016). Second, the study determined that the presence of ACES in childhood was common. Third, a scoring system was developed to determine how many ACES are/were present in an individual's life (See Appendix F). Stevens (2012) indicated a link between adult mental illness as well as chronic disease and childhood trauma. According to the CDC (2016), "The wide-ranging health and social consequences of ACES underscore the importance of preventing them before they happen" (para 3). Figure 7 below demonstrates ACES effect on health and wellbeing through the course of life.

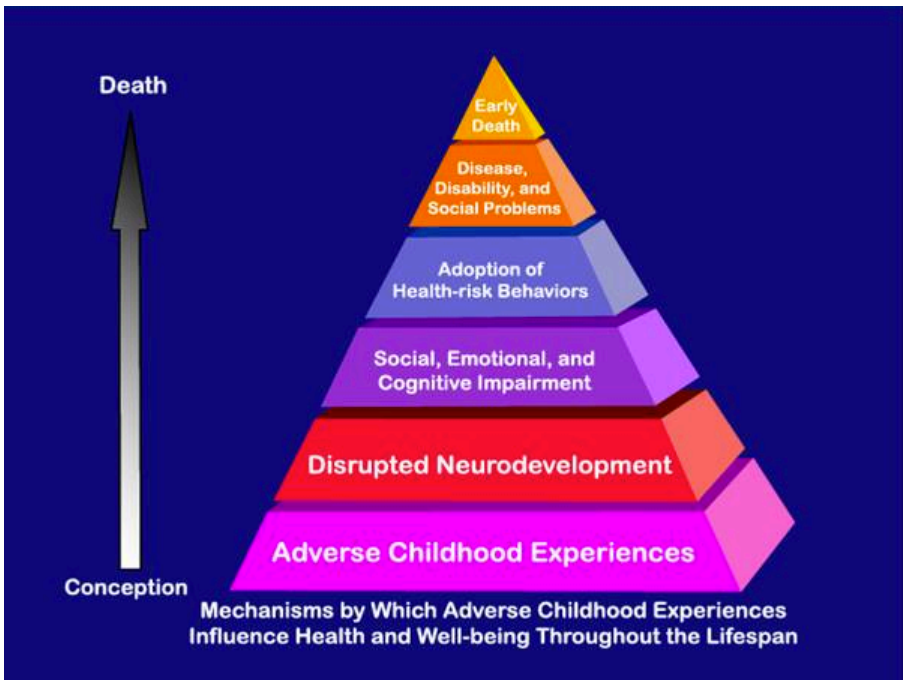

Figure 7: Steven's Model of Lifetime Experiences (Stevens, 2012)

O = Outwardly Expressed

Care Package stated that she gets "mean and bossy; I take charge" when she is frustrated. Care Package shared that she was punched at school by someone who was angry. Violence and disruptions in class can be outward expressions of frustration and, in my experience, are the ones that get most adult attention as students are suspended or grounded, etc.

According to Avery County school superintendent Dr. David Burleson's dissertation (2014), "Research and state dropout records have primarily been filled with statements made by students at the time of their dropping out indicating feelings of anger, alienation, or instability" (p. 1). Taking preventative measures to address violence at school is an essential duty of school staff because of the serious consequences that can spawn from mistreating others (Ribakova, Valeeva, & Merker, 2016). Children impacted by experiencing mental or physical acts of violence are succumbed by feelings of fear, depression, hatred, apathy, anger, and horror (Ribakova, Valeeva, & Merker, 2016). These negative emotions can lead to the continuation of

violence if youth do not learn how to manage them. Additionally, "vocal" students who outwardly express their discomfort, dislike, or disengagement at school can result in them attending in-school suspension (ISS), dropping out of school due to isolation, and being punished for reacting as "normally" in response to adverse circumstances in which educators may be unaware.

Recommendation: Include strategies for caring discipline measures through trauma-informed practices. When children do not display behavior that is expected of them it is all too easy to suspend them. Instead, community and school educators must determine the root causes of behavior and strive to increase student perceived self-worth in order for behavior to change (Redford, 2015). A report from the Wallace Foundation revealed that "discipline policies and the practices that support them are important structures for managing student behavior" (Greenberg et al., 2017, p. 22). While it is unfortunate, organizations that work with youth "emphasize treatment over prevention" (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017, p. 18), meaning that adult educators (such as those in schools, communities, as well as parents) miss opportunities to build and promote student social and emotional health. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), discuss the important work of reflection as "getting on the balcony" (p. 7). The gist of reflection is to gain distance from circumstances, such as those that anger or frustrate us so that the truth of what is occurring in our lives can present itself. This is exactly why I kept a researcher journal. I wrote, I jotted notes, I hoped to identify the nutmeat of this work by taking time away from the work.

As discussed in the rationale for conducting this study, any student can experience trauma in their life and it can remain unexamined by adults. As defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (National Association of State Mental Health Program

Directors, 2018), trauma is an effect of adverse events that can negatively influence all facets of child health (para. 9). Various events can contribute to trauma in a child's life such as bullying, separation, accidents, and witnessing violence. Some reactions to trauma that youth may display at school encompass trouble focusing or concentrating, feeling very angry, and seeking constant attention. Of course there may be other contributing factors that can cause these behaviors, however, one caring approach is to learn about trauma and trauma-informed approaches. If there are recurring episodes of the same behavior (s), educators can perhaps be more likely to identify more caring approaches to addressing the undesired behavior.

Traumatic experiences can have lasting effects on children if not handled appropriately. (Stevens, 2012). Children who do not learn social and emotional skills or ways to cope with their behavior can impact their health by making poor decisions like smoking, doing drugs, or engaging in premature sexual relations (National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, 2018) Trauma-informed approaches can promote social and emotional learning. In terms of enhancing teacher emotional intelligence in dealing with student behavior, it is critical to consider trauma. Of course, developing social and emotional skills can also help teachers identify "quiet" disengaged, or frustrated, learners.

N = Inwardly Expressed

Low self-esteem is an inward feeling that can be expressed as procrastination. Other inward expressions can be observed in not completing work, unfocused during the day, confusion, and withdrawal (Joe). These behaviors may indicate a deficit in learning (Cozolino, 2013). In Hamlet's explanation of the experience with a boy, it was hard to believe one instance with this boy that Hamlet did not like caused Hamlet to want him to change schools. After reflecting on listening to what Hamlet described in this experience with the other boy, I

wondered, “Was there more experiences with this boy than he shared that caused his emotion to swell inside of him to this degree?” This is an area that anyone he tells about this feeling might want to explore. Care Package’s lack of follow through with the artistic journal indicated procrastination, which linked well to her top FDS ranking: emotional intolerance. According to Harrington (2005b), “Self-esteem correlated significantly with emotional intolerance” (p. 879).

Rubin (2017) states, “What makes people successful in life is not only what they know and how skillfully they use their knowledge but also how they behave and engage in the world” (p. 18). This makes social and emotional education relevant. Dubin (2015-2016) states, “Research also shows that social and emotional learning improves student behavior and reduces the use of suspensions, which keeps students in school and learning” (p. 18).

Recommendation: Take a public health approach to middle school advisory programs. To Shulkind and Foote (2009), “middle school reformers have widely promoted advisory programs as a way to strengthen connectedness at the middle level” (p. 21). Advisory programs permit adult advisors to meet with groups of students for the purpose of mentoring them in the areas of social skills, emotional skills, and academics. The program is supposed to foster more student personalization in the school setting. (Shulkind & Foote, 2009, p. 21). Advisory initiatives can be an avenue to convey caring to youth. Noddings (2006) acknowledges, “More attention should be given to the study and critical appraisal of lifestyles” (p. 188). During this retreat, caring was stitched into the weekend because adult leaders modeled a “caring literacy” which illustrated to youth an inherent language of how to appreciate others. Noddings (2013a) defines an ethic of care as “concerned with how, in general, we should meet and treat one another—with how to establish, maintain, and enhance caring relations” (p. xiv). Art was also used to deepen an understanding of adolescent lives.

While the FDS and ACES surveys can be distributed in multiple environments/organizations, these tools can be of great value to middle school advisors. Distributing the FDS and ACES surveys to students who receive advisory can take the whole student into account, particularly when addressing behavior. Because adversities and frustration can be delicate to handle, art can buffer the delicacy, and perhaps discomfort. Therefore, art can also be incorporated in advisory programs as it expands communication possibilities (Redford, 2015).

Middle school advisory: A caring affordance. As observed, the retreat environment allowed open, safe expression, an example of a social affordance, as this showed caring. And caring plays a part in establishing and maintaining positive adult-youth and youth-youth relationships. These relationships are also examples of social affordances as it is important youth feel a sense of belonging. When Hamlet was reading Scientific American magazine during a collaborative group process, it was clear that youth do not respond the way expected of them all the time. As stated by Clark and Uzzell (2005), "The same environmental features do not afford the same function for all individuals" (p. 177); which made flexibility and attunement on the part of event organizers vital. The flexibility of adults showed youth that adults were paying attention to them; the agenda was altered from what organizers originally planned. This simple attunement may even be received as caring.

Advisory programs are affordances for youth. By implementing public health, in the way of social and emotional learning through FDS and ACES, into middle school advisory programs can help educators set the tone for a more inclusive educational environment. As Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, (2017) report, "Educator practices that support students

emotionally and let them experience their own voice, autonomy, and mastery lead to positive student-teacher relationships" as well as heightening student engagement" (p. 23).

Middle school advisory: Ensuring engagement and motivation. According to Wilde (2012), "Engagement is generally considered to be among the better predictors of learning and personal development" (p. 2). Therefore, it is critical to examine engagement when addressing student health and wellbeing because there appears to be a relationship. According to Conner and Pope (2013), "Engagement has been found to be a protective factor, buffering youth from risk behaviors and unhealthy outcomes" (p. 1427). Such outcomes include decreasing drug and alcohol use (Conner & Pope, 2013). Thereby, linking engagement with public health goals to improve student health. Motivation is another important factor. Ryan and Deci (2000) also point out that "motivational tendency is a critical element in cognitive, social, and physical development because it is through acting on one's inherent interests that one grows in knowledge and skills" (p. 56). Integrating different modes of communication and ways to interact may motivate students to go to school, show care to students, and expand their social and emotional skills.

Summary

Using the FDS can provide insight about ACES and trauma. Therefore, the FDS is one avenue for how to integrate trauma-informed practice. All adolescents experience frustration and it is essential not to focus on what they are frustrated about but why and how they experience frustration. Children with trauma or who face adversities, can inform how to move an ethic of care from theory to practice as applying care theory can result in a more inclusive culture in schools. In addition, community youth programs can inform schools how to solidify a caring environment. Implementing care in schools in the manner in which this dissertation discusses can

also inherently individualize education practices. Furthermore, implementing an ethic of care can provide solutions in regard to teacher burnout, disengaged learners, and effective drop-out prevention strategies.

This research values the tenets of self-determination theory (SDT) by incorporating concepts of relatedness and autonomy. It was observed, during the retreat, that understanding and appreciating that youth value opportunities to be active, need unstructured time, and giving youth a voice in group rules helped youth feel respected and supported. In terms of social cognitive theory (SCT), this research unveiled that the environment was important in establishing a trusting, caring relationship with youth. It is not enough to tell someone they are cared for; care is expressed through action. It was observed that this environment showed caring to youth by involving them in conversation and decisions. In SCT, the environment influences youth behavior. One example of this for this particular environment was observed during group norms. The adult leader told the youth they could "pass" on something, not forcing participation. Olaf Obama exclaimed, "Really, that's an option!?" in an excited manner. Rules are part of the environmental conditions.

Through the incorporation of art, social justice, varying communication platforms, using positive language, and integrating social and emotional skills, an appreciative approach (influenced by appreciative inquiry) to education was observed can be an effective strategy for engaging youth and creating holding environment. Using a multi-faceted, integrated approach to work with youth naturally demonstrated one approach to applying Nodding's ethic of care and create a caring mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) that can potentially promote health and wellbeing for youth and adults that work with them.

Reflection and Repurposing Time: A Challenge of Leadership

I approached this massive undertaking because I wanted to challenge myself to spend more time understanding and appreciating the complexities of human behavior. It was necessary to dedicate time to introduce and flesh out access points and experiences that can change youth behavior. As a leader, I wanted to challenge myself with being able to arrive at a proactive, applicable way to make student, educator, and community lives easier. It was necessary to spend time in an area that is relevant to all human beings: care. It is because I spent a significant amount of time with the complexities of this research that I feel confident in my diagnosis: community and school educators need to take the time to intentionally cultivate a culture of caring. This can happen by locating and asking the right questions, spending time with people who challenge us, deliberating new ways of dealing with stress, and defining more constructively how to spend our time as youth educators. It is my hope that people who read this dissertation will take on the challenge necessary to begin transforming lives just as this research has transformed mine.

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Appendix A: Frustration Discomfort Scale (Harrington, 2005c)

Listed below are a number of common thoughts and beliefs that people may have when they are distressed or frustrated. Please read each statement and decide how well this usually describes your own beliefs. Circle the number that best indicates the strength of this belief.

RATING SCALE: absent = 1 mild = 2 moderate = 3 strong = 4 very strong = 5

1. I need the easiest way around a problem; I can't stand making a hard time of it

1 2 3 4 5

2. I can't stand having to wait for things I would like now

1 2 3 4 5

3. I absolutely must be free of disturbing feelings as quickly as possible; I can't bear if they continue

1 2 3 4 5

4. I can't stand being prevented from achieving my full potential

1 2 3 4 5

5. I can't stand doing tasks that seem too difficult

1 2 3 4 5

6. I can't stand it if people act against my wishes

1 2 3 4 5

7.I can't bear to feel that I am losing my mind

1 2 3 4 5

8. I can't bear the frustration of not achieving my goals

1 2 3 4 5

9. I can't stand doing tasks when I'm not in the mood

1 2 3 4 5

10.I can't bear it if other people stand in the way of what I want

1 2 3 4 5

11.I can't bear to have certain thoughts

1 2 3 4 5

12.I can't tolerate lowering my standards even when it would be useful to do so

1 2 3 4 5

13.I can't stand having to push myself at tasks

1 2 3 4 5

14.I can't tolerate being taken for granted

1 2 3 4 5

15. I can't stand situations where I might feel upset

1 2 3 4 5

16. I can't bear to move on from work I'm not fully satisfied with

1 2 3 4 5

17. I can't stand the hassle of having to do things right now

1 2 3 4 5

18. I can't stand having to give into other people's demands

1 2 3 4 5

19. I can't bear disturbing feelings

1 2 3 4 5

20. I can't stand doing a job if I'm unable to do it well

1 2 3 4 5

21. I can't stand doing things that involve a lot of hassle

1 2 3 4 5

22. I can't stand having to change when others are at fault

1 2 3 4 5

23. I can't get on with my life, or be happy, if things don't change

1 2 3 4 5

24. I can't bear to feel that I'm not on top of my work

1 2 3 4 5

25. I can't stand having to persist at unpleasant tasks

1 2 3 4 5

26. I can't tolerate criticism especially when I know I'm right

1 2 3 4 5

27. I can't stand to lose control of my feelings

1 2 3 4 5

28. I can't tolerate any lapse in my self-discipline

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B: Focus Group/Interview Questions (Youth and Adults)

*** Note: Participants may choose one or more questions to serve as a prompt for creating their art work and/or writing in their journal**

1. If something or someone continuously upsets you how do you feel about being the one who has to change? Please explain.
2. Describe one or more experiences where you or someone you know felt out of control or like they were losing their mind? What happened?
3. When someone points out something wrong about something you said or done but you know you are right how do you handle it? Please explain.
4. How do you handle people or circumstances that you think might make you angry?
5. Are there any feelings that disturb you? If so, what are they?
6. How much of your time is spent doing thing you don't like to do?
7. What expectations do you have for people around you (adults, teachers, parents, friends, etc.)
8. Describe an experience when you felt used by someone. How did you handle it?
9. Describe your emotions when someone wants you to do something right away even when you do not feel like doing it.
10. Describe a time when you did not meet a goal. How did that feel?
11. Describe times that you did not get something you wanted right away? How did it feel?
12. Name a time you decided that you did not like someone or decided not to be friends with someone.
13. When do you notice you are happy to do what you are doing at the moment?
14. Is there anything or anyone that you feel is in your way from achieving what you want? Please explain.
15. What tasks, if any, are too difficult for you? How do you handle doing them?

Appendix C: Demographic Questions (Youth and Adults)

1. What is your age?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. What is your gender?
4. School you attend?
5. Highest level of education?
6. What part of the county do you live?

Appendix D: Participant Journals

Identify and describe any frustrating experiences you have had. Descriptions include who was involved, what happened, where it occurred, and when it happened.

1. Did you handle it?
2. How was it handled?
3. Would you do anything differently in the future as a result of this experience?

Appendix E: Parental and Child Assent Forms

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Patrick O'Shea (dissertation chair) in the Department of Education at Appalachian State University. I am conducting a research study to gain an understanding of student frustration.

I have permission to use the Frustration Discomfort Scale survey (15-30 minutes) to identify sources of frustration intolerance. A short demographic survey will also be distributed to participants (15 minutes). In addition to completing the survey, I will conduct a focus group (45 minutes), art making session (45 minutes), observation (24 hours), and follow up interviews (45 minutes) so that I can gain more insight about youth frustration as it relates to their environment. Youth will also be given the option of keeping a 7-day journal about frustration in lieu of the interview after the conclusion of the retreat. Apart from the 24-hour observation period and optional 7-day journaling experience, participants would be asked to participate in 180 minutes of research. Data collection would not disrupt their time at OWL unless there is an extenuating circumstance which would require an intervention to help a participant with a frustrating experience during the retreat. The surveys, focus group session, and art making session are embedded in the OWL retreat time. The interviews will be conducted outside of the OWL retreat.

Their participation will help me to check the clarity and comprehension of the survey questions thus ensuring its usefulness for any subsequent research. Your consent, as well as your child's participation, in this study is voluntary. If you or your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Participation in the research is not tied to attending the OWL retreat.

There are no foreseeable risks with this study however, one potential risk is breach of confidentiality. To ensure anonymity, your child's name will not be used and his or her identity will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law. Your child will not be asked to give his or her name and the surveys will only be viewed by me. All surveys from the study will be destroyed within a year of their completion.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation is a chance to contribute to an important body of research relating to social and emotional well-being.

If you have any questions concerning this research study or your child's participation in the pilot study, please contact me at fynnnp@appstate.edu or Dr. O'Shea at osheap@appstate.edu

Sincerely,

Nicole Penelope Fynn

I give consent for my child _____ to participate in the above study.

Parent's Name: _____

Parent's Signature _____

(Date) _____

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (828) 262-2120.

CHILD ASSENT

I would like to participate in a study concerning frustration and caring. I understand that I may be asked interview questions and that I will be asked to fill out a 28-question survey. I will also be given an opportunity to be asked questions in an interview concerning frustration and caring. I acknowledge that participation in this project is voluntary. I am also aware that I can stop my participation in this study at any point.

Name:

_____

Appendix F: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Survey

Retrieved from https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/

Prior to your 18th birthday:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __

2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __

3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever… Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __

4. Did you often or very often feel that … No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __

5. Did you often or very often feel that … You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __

6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __

7. Was your mother or stepmother:
   Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or
   Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or
   Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __

8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
   No___If Yes, enter 1 __

9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide? No___If Yes, enter 1 __

10. Did a household member go to prison?
    No___If Yes, enter 1 __

Now add up your "Yes" answers: _ This is your ACE Score

Vita

Nicole Penelope Fynn was born in Monessen, PA. She graduated from Appalachian State University in North Carolina in June 1998 with a B.S. in Health Promotion and Education, and a minor in nutrition. A year later, Nicole entered the University of South Carolina to continue studying Health Education and Promotion, and in May 2001, she was awarded a Master of Public Health degree. In May 2014, Nicole commenced work toward her Ed. D. in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University.

Nicole Fynn is a board member for St. Matthew's Community Center and Chapel in Todd, N.C., and also serves as a Guardian Ad Litem. She remains active as a health educator working in food systems, promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of youth, and helping non-profits with grant funding. She resides in Boone, N. C. with her son, Fynn, and two Siamese kittens, Nikko and Nina.