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Los Angeles

Let's YAP About the Future:

A Youth Attribution Program for African American 6th Graders

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Erin Necole Cue

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Let's YAP About the Future:

A Youth Attribution Program for African American 6th Graders

by

Erin Necole Cue

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Sandra Graham, Chair

Ongoing reports of the achievement gap suggest the need for understanding African American students' perceptions of their own academic failure and the need for more effective interventions that can increase motivation and academic outcomes for African American youth. The current study examined whether harmful attributional beliefs associated with academic failure among African American 6th grade low achievers could be altered through a brief attribution retraining intervention. This 3 week evidence-based intervention was guided by principles of an attributional theory of achievement-related behavior. The lessons in the intervention were aimed at helping students understand that positive academic outcomes can be obtained through increased preparation and effort. Throughout the intervention students were encouraged to associate academic failure with lack of effort instead of stable maladaptive attributions, such as lack of ability and discrimination. Participants included a total of 64 African American 6th

graders who exhibited maladaptive attributions about their academic failure and were identified as low achieving students. These students were randomly assigned to the attribution treatment group or to a wait-list control group. Data on attributions, expectancy-related affect, and academic achievement were gathered before the intervention, one week post intervention, and at a 6-week follow-up. Results showed significant increases in adaptive attributions and decreases in maladaptive attributions for males in the treatment group compared with control group males. However, there were no significant changes in expectancy related affect or academic achievement among intervention boys or girls. Additional exploratory analyses provided further support for positive changes in causal attributions for the experimental group in comparison to the control group. For example, by the 6-week follow-up treatment group students were more likely than control group participants to select lack of effort as a cause for failure in an open-ended assessment of the most important cause for achievement failure and less likely to endorse low ability or external attributions. In general, results of the current study suggest that brief attributional retraining interventions can be useful in changing harmful attributions associated with academic failure and addressing achievement challenges faced by African American youth. Implications for future research, policy and practice are discussed.

The dissertation of Erin Necole Cue is approved.

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2014

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, husband and daughter.

Mom, thank you for always believing in me and for the many sacrifices you made so that I could pursue my educational dreams.

Husband, thank you for your patience, support, love and help throughout this journey.

To my new bundle of joy, thank you for your priceless smile and laughter that helped me push through to the end of one of the most challenging tasks I have ever endured. I hope this accomplishment will inspire you to persevere in pursuit of your dreams (when that time comes).

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Introduction

For many African American students, setbacks happen far too often. The history of African Americans in the education system is often characterized by ongoing mistreatment, inequalities, and the known achievement gap, which leaves African American students far behind other American counterparts (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Since the 1960s, national reports have continuously illustrated the gap between African-Americans, Whites, and other minority groups (Hedges & Nowell, 1998). Recent results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2009) indicated that in comparison to all other groups, a higher percentage of African American students scored below basic on reading and mathematic achievement levels. Although researchers have associated these outcomes with a number of factors including socioeconomic status and parental involvement, few have explored African American students' attitudes and beliefs about their own academic failures (Barton, 2003).

For example, how do African American students typically respond to academic challenges, both structural and specific? Do they give up or do they try again? What are the differences between African-American students who achieve success despite various obstacles and persist in the face of setbacks or failures and those who do not? Some researchers have suggested that the differences among African American students' achievement is linked to their perceptions of school and academic outcomes (Ford, 1992; Ogbu, 1991). For example, Ford (1992) noted that gifted African-American students were more likely than non-gifted African American students to exhibit stronger beliefs in the American achievement ideology (meaning *if I work hard or put forth effort in school, I will succeed*). Likewise, attribution theorists have suggested that the perceived causes of academic failures may lead to differences in achievement and expectations of future success for many students (Weiner, 2000).

In general, the purpose of this dissertation was to examine African American students' personal beliefs about the causes of their academic failures. More specifically, I sought to understand how African American students' beliefs about their academic outcomes could be used to help improve their academic achievement and help them reach their full potential.

African American students' beliefs about the causes of their failures is an area that has not been explored in-depth, especially with regard to early adolescents. Nonetheless, with increasing dropout rates, suspensions and ongoing reports of low academic achievement (NCES, 2010; NAEP, 2009), educators must begin to understand African American students' perceptions and attitudes toward school and use the insights gained to address issues that are challenging African American students in our education system (Nieto, 1994; Cook-Sather, 2002).

Goals of the Proposed Study

The goal of the proposed dissertation was to understand African American 6th graders' perceived attributions for failure outcomes and how these attributions are linked to academic, psychological, and behavioral outcomes for these youth. Attributions are central to a theory of motivation that has proven to be exceedingly rich and applicable to a broad range of achievement outcomes (Graham & Williams, 2009; Weiner, 1985). The overarching goal of the proposed study was to examine whether harmful attributional beliefs among 6th grade low achievers could be altered through a brief attribution retraining intervention that would not only change such beliefs but also improve students' academic, psychological, and behavioral outcomes. Harmful attributional beliefs include the belief that one's academic failure is a stable characteristic that cannot be changed.

Literature Review

In the next section, I will briefly explain the motivational sequence proposed in an attributional theory of achievement-related behavior. Then I will highlight how current interventions, which have been guided by attribution theory, have proven successful in increasing academic achievement. Next, I will provide some evidence that supports my belief that this theory could be useful in understanding African American students' academic achievement and linked psychological and behavioral outcomes that are outlined in the attribution theory. Following this, I will show how current attribution retraining interventions have been seen as promising for improving outcomes for African American students, especially after the transition to middle school. I will conclude the literature review with one additional approach to studying attributions that relates directly to the lived experiences of African American youth.

Weiner's Attribution Theory

Causal attributions are the reasons individuals give for why certain events or outcomes may occur. For example, students may ask "Why did I fail the exam?" or "Why did I get a low grade on this assignment?". Attribution theorists note individuals are more likely to ask *why* when they fail at an outcome versus succeed at an outcome (Graham & Weiner, 1993; Weiner, 2000). Weiner's attribution theory of motivation (1985, 2000) outlines a motivational sequence for how the reasons people give for their failures and successes may lead to different psychological and behavioral outcomes.

Causal ascriptions. Within the achievement domain, there are four main causes or reasons individuals enlist to explain their failures. Most individuals attribute their failures to their ability or aptitude, effort/strategy, luck, or the difficulty of the task (Weiner, 1985). In

attribution theory these causes are referred to as causal ascriptions. Amongst these four causal ascriptions there are two that have been identified as most often reported by individuals (Graham & Weiner, 1993; Weiner, 1985); these include ability (e.g., "I failed the test because I was not smart enough") and effort (e.g., "I failed the exam because I did not try hard enough").

Causal dimensions. Although it may be evident that failing because of effort is different from failing because of ability, Weiner (1985) has identified how these and other causal ascriptions may differ by labeling the properties associated with perceived causes of failure. In attribution theory, causal ascriptions can map onto three different properties or causal dimensions: (1) locus, (2) controllability, and (3) stability (Weiner, 1985, 1995, 2000).

The first causal dimension is *locus*. With locus, the individual classifies the reason or cause as either internal or external. For example, attribution researchers view associating one's failure with ability/aptitude as internal and associating failure with task difficulty as external (e.g., "the task was hard for *everyone*") (Weiner, 2000).

Controllability, the second causal dimension, refers to whether the cause is determined by volitional influence (Weiner, 2000). For example, an individual sees effort as subject to the individual's own volitional influence because it is his or her responsibility to try harder (Weiner, 2000); however, other causes such as low ability, bad luck, and task difficulty are viewed as out of the individual's control (Weiner, 1985, 2000).

The third dimension, *stability*, refers to whether a cause can be changed over time or whether it will remain constant (Weiner, 1985,1995). Effort is considered an unstable factor because the amount of effort that an individual puts forth from one assignment to the next can vary over time; however, other causal ascriptions such as an individual's ability are considered

fairly stable and unlikely to change (Weiner, 1985, 1995). Table 1 illustrates how each of the four main causal ascriptions maps on to each of the three causal dimensions.

Causal consequences. In attribution theory, causal dimensions are associated with various psychological and behavioral consequences. Individuals may display different feelings, emotions, and behaviors depending on the reasons provided for academic failure (Graham & Weiner, 1993). Attribution researchers have described the causal dimensions of controllability and locus as primarily linked to psychological consequences (Weiner, 2000). The controllability and locus dimensions are connected to emotions or feeling outcomes. For instance, locus is associated with feelings of pride and self-esteem. In the case of success, one's perception that the outcome is due to something related to one's self brings about a sense of pride; however, in the case of failure, perceiving that the outcome is because of one's self can have a negative effect on one's self-esteem (Weiner, 2000).

Two different sets of emotions stem from causes associated with the controllability dimension. Controllability is linked to emotions of guilt or shame (Weiner, 1995, 2000). For example, imagine that an individual perceives an outcome as related to effort, which attribution theorists classify as controllable. If the individual believes that his or her failure is due to insufficient effort, then he/she may feel guilty for not trying harder. Now consider an uncontrollable cause, such as low ability/aptitude. Associating academic failure with aptitude, a cause that students cannot control, can lead to feelings of shame, because the student feels they were not smart enough to succeed at the task and they believe there is nothing they can do about it (Weiner, 1995; Graham & Weiner, 1993).

In the motivational sequence, individuals link expectancy of success to causes related to the stability dimension (Weiner, 1979, 2000). For example, if a student perceives his/her failure

to be related to a lack of preparation (or effort), then the student is likely to perceive this outcome as unstable in the future and may exhibit hope that the outcome can change. In comparison, if the student views his/her failure as caused by lack of aptitude or ability, which is seen as stable, then the student is likely to expect his or her failure to be unchangeable in the future; thus, the student will display less hope (Weiner, 1979, 1985).

Next in the temporal sequence, these psychological consequences associated with stability are linked to several behavioral consequences such as achievement strivings/academic performance, motivation, persistence, and choice of participating in the task (Weiner, 2000). For example, perceiving failure as caused by lack of ability can cause individuals to have lower achievement strivings, low motivation, and low persistence for the task, because they have lost hope that the outcome will change in the future (Weiner, 1995, 2000).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I focused on the causal stability dimension, since it is specifically related to understanding students' hopes and expectations of success in the future, which is one of the primary goals of this study. Although the emotions and feelings of African American youth, such as their self-esteem and shame, are also important to these students' success and well-being, the focus of the proposed study may be most important to African American students' future growth and academic performance. Furthermore, previous research has indicated that, despite their low academic performance, many African American youth do not struggle with lack of pride or self-esteem, but often exhibit low achievement strivings, motivation, and expectations (van Laar, 2000; Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2007).

Attribution Retraining Interventions

In addition to identifying consequences linked to perceived attributions for academic failure, this theory's principles have also been influential in the creation of interventions

designed to help improve students' academic outcomes (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Perry & Penner, 1990). These social-psychological interventions often referred to as *attribution retraining interventions*, have evolved based on the motivational sequence associated with the stability dimension. In particular, attribution retraining interventions have proven successful in altering harmful or maladaptive beliefs (e.g., the belief that failure outcomes are caused by stable attributes) and increasing students' academic performance and reports of more adaptive beliefs (e.g., failure outcomes are due to insufficient effort and can be changed) (e.g., Good et al., 2003; Wilson & Linville, 1982, 1985).

Researchers have begun to recognize the positive effects brief social-psychological interventions, such as attribution retraining interventions, have on increasing students' motivation and academic performance. For example, Yeager and Walton (2011) stated that social-psychological interventions are successful because they are designed to alter the beliefs and attitudes of students, which are the basis for students' behavior. These social-psychological interventions are also successful because they are often heavily based on theory and current research (Yeager & Walton, 2011).

In general, attribution retraining interventions have been designed to change students' beliefs about their academic failure outcomes from stable to unstable causes. Most often, researchers have selected students to participate in attribution retraining interventions based on established criteria that suggest students' display maladaptive beliefs and/or low academic performance (Graham & Williams, 2009). Successful attribution retraining studies have used methods such as experimental tasks, presentations of lessons; role models sharing of personal experiences and statistics to explain to students that academic failure is unstable and should be

attributed to low effort (Dweck, 1975; Good et al., 2003; Noel, Forsyth, & Kelley, 1987; Perry & Penner, 1990; Wilson & Linville, 1985).

For example, Dweck's (1975) work on increasing attributions for helpless children was one of the earliest accounts of attribution retraining interventions in the achievement domain. In this study, Dweck (1975) recruited elementary-age children who were characterized as least likely to take responsibility for their academic failures and more likely to give up if failure outcomes persisted. Dweck (1975) used an experimental task in which students in the attribution retraining treatment group were allotted just enough time to complete all but one of their assigned math problems. The experimenter then conveyed to these students that the reason they failed the task was because they did not try hard enough. Dweck (1975) found that students who were told they needed to try harder were more likely to persist in spite of failure on future tasks than the control group. In addition, the altering of attributions also increased students' performance on the task (Dweck, 1975).

Another prominent example is Wilson and Linville's (1985) study with freshmen college students. In this particular study, students were selected based on their current grades and concern for grades. First year college students who scored below the class median in each area were asked to participate in the study. For students selected to participate in the treatment group, researchers used upper classmen as role models and presented statistical reports to relay to the students that lower grades were common during the first year, but grades would increase after the first year, thus emphasizing the stability dimension and the likelihood that the negative outcome could change in the future. Results of this study indicated that individuals who received the treatment, versus those who watched a video unrelated to grades, improved on two measures of academic performance, including sample Graduate Record Exam questions and their next

semester's grades (Wilson & Linville, 1985). This study is significant because it was one of the first attribution retraining studies to specifically focus on the stability of the outcome and use role models to relay the message that things will get better.

Like these examples, many attribution retraining interventions have provided evidence for Weiner's (1995) hypotheses that expectancy and achievement strivings are related to the perceived stability of causes. More specifically, the results of attribution retraining interventions indicate that by increasing students' adaptive thoughts (e.g., if I work harder, my failure outcomes will change), researchers can also improve their achievement outcomes (Wilson & Linville, 1982, 1985). In addition, the results of attribution retraining studies have shown that these interventions are suitable for a variety of students at different stages, especially during transition periods.

Researchers have described transition periods as the most fitting time to pursue attributional retraining interventions because students are unaware of what to expect in their new contexts (Perry, Stupinsky, Hall, Chipperfield, & Weiner, 2010; Wilson & Linville, 1982). Although most of the attributional retraining programs have been administered during the transition to college, recent studies have shown that these programs can also be successfully used in the transition to middle school (e.g., Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Good et al., 2003). For example, one attributional retraining intervention by Good et al. (2003) was aimed at improving standardized test scores among junior high school students through positive attribution messages relayed by college mentors. The results of this study indicated a significant increase in test scores among low-income minority 7th graders following their transition to middle school (Good et al., 2003). Since the transition to middle school is often related to a decrease in academic performance, liking of school, and motivation, especially among African

Americans students, attributional retraining interventions during this period and among this population may be helpful (Alspaugh, 1998; Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Midgley, Anderman, & Hicks, 1995; Simmons, Black, & Zhou, 1991; Taylor & Graham, 2007).

Attributional Approach to Understanding Motivation in African American Youth

Because of the richness of attribution theory and the established linkages between causal ascriptions and the related psychological and behavioral consequences, many researchers have expressed that attribution theory could be extremely useful in answering some of the unresolved questions about African American students' low academic achievement and motivation (Graham, 1994; van Laar, 2000; Weiner, 2000). For example, Graham (1988, 1989) argued that attribution theory is a suitable framework for studying African American youth because it addresses some of the basic principles a theory needs when studying this diverse population (Graham, 1988, 1989, 1994). For instance, attribution theory is "concerned with the self", "the cognitive as well as personality factors that guide behavior", and most importantly is "sensitive to the dynamics of failure" (Graham, 1988, pp. 4-5). In general, researchers using an attributional lens to study the ongoing reports of African-American students' academic failures may propose that African-American students' low achievement is linked to perceived stable attributions for academic failure, because in the attribution theory stable causal ascriptions are linked to both low expectations of future success and low academic performance.

Researchers have found evidence to support the claim that causal stability is related to expectancy and achievement for African American students (Graham, 1984; Willig, Harnisch, Hill & Maehr, 1983). For example, Graham (1984) and Willig et al. (1983) found that low ability (a stable attribute) was associated with low expectancy, low persistence, test anxiety, and low math achievement for African American students. Graham's (1984) study also revealed

socioeconomic differences. This study found middle class Black students were more likely to attribute their failures to lack of effort than lower class Black students and White students from both low SES and middle SES groups (Graham, 1984). The results of this study infer that possible individual differences may exist among African American students' causal attributions; however only a few studies have used a within-group approach to examine the links between African American students' causal attributions and the psychological and behavioral consequences associated with these attributions.

Most of the studies in the attribution literature have used comparisons studies (where in most cases African American students are compared to White students) to examine the influences causal attributions have on African American students' academic outcomes, but the results of these studies have shown mixed findings. For example, some reports showed that Blacks tended to be similar to Whites in their perceived causal attributions. Specifically, researchers reported that black students were equally effort-oriented and also attributed their failures to lack of effort as much as White students (Graham, 1998; Bank, McQuarter & Sonne, 1995). However, another study found that African American college students tended to make more increased external attributions for their academic failures than White college students and although these external attributions appeared to be associated with higher expectancy for these youth, after the first two years of college expectancies tended to decline for African American students (van Laar & Weiner, 1998).

Researchers (Neblett, Phillip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; Garcia Coll et al., 1996) have suggested that a better way to understand African American students' achievement motivation is to study individual differences using a within-group model. This type of model provides the opportunity for researchers to explore differences within this unique group.

Currently, there is little known about the differences that exist within African American students' causal attributions, such as differences in the perceptions of causal attributions for low achievers versus high achievers and gender differences. In fact, only a small amount of the existing attribution studies have examined gender and achievement level differences. Mixed findings of earlier attributional research revealed that boys were more likely to attribute their achievement to ability and luck, while other studies found no significant gender differences (Chaplain, 2000; Lightbody, Siann, Stocks, & Walsh, 1996). Still, researchers have suggested that attribution retraining studies could be useful in closing existing gaps between male and female attributions for achievement. To my knowledge, there has only been one attribution retraining study that has identified gender differences as a result of implementing attribution retraining interventions (Heller & Ziegler, 1996; Wilson & Linville, 1985). This study found that the intervention was stronger for males than for females (Wilson & Linville, 1985). Likewise, the attribution literature on achievement differences is also limited. The few studies that have explored achievement level differences in student attributions have varied in their findings and have mostly compared students with learning disabilities to those without learning disabilities. These studies also reveal mixed findings. Some have shown that students with learning disabilities attributed their success more to luck than to ability and others found no significant differences between the two groups (Aponik & Dembo, 1983; Cooley & Ayres, 1988; Pearl,1982) More work is needed in this area to understand how students may differ in their attributions as a function of gender and achievement level and whether attribution retraining interventions may have a stronger impact on students based on their achievement level and gender. Through better understanding African American students' beliefs about their academic failures and the psychological and behavioral consequences linked to these beliefs, researchers

can alter harmful beliefs and improve achievement outcomes for African American students through effective interventions.

Attributional retraining among African-Americans. Ongoing reports of the racial/ethnic achievement gap suggest the need for more effective interventions that can increase motivation and academic outcomes for African American youth (Gresham, 2004). Although few attribution-retraining interventions have concentrated on improving achievement outcomes for African American students, researchers have found some support that attributional retraining interventions could be effective in improving African American youth's academic outcomes (e.g., Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Blackwell et al., 2007). Based on comparative analysis of the effects of attribution retraining programs, some researchers have reported more improvement among African Americans' academic performance, engagement, and school identification than among Whites after participating in these interventions (Aronson et al., 2002). Similar positive effects have been reported for attribution retraining interventions that used majority African American populations. Results of these studies indicated positive effects on African American youth's academic competence, motivation, and persistence. In addition, the researchers found that students participating in the treatment group were more likely to attribute their academic failure to lack of effort after the attribution retraining intervention (Hudley, 2001; Graham, Taylor, &Hudley, in press). Still, no studies exist that have examined the effects these types of interventions have on African American students' psychological consequences (such as hope and expectancy for success).

Attributions of discrimination. Another unexplored area, which is thought to be relevant to the experiences of African American youth, is attributions of discrimination. Researchers who study African Americans and other stigmatized groups have argued that these

groups may also attribute negative outcomes (such as academic failure) to discrimination (Graham & Hudley, 2005; Major, Quinton, & Schmader 2003). It is reasonable to assume attributions of discrimination would be associated with academic failure for this population of students, since previous research indicated that most African American students report experiencing discrimination from peers and teachers in school (Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, Schmeelk-Cone, Chavous & Zimmerman, 2004; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, & Jackson, 2008). In addition, researchers have found African American students are more likely to report discrimination than their White counterparts and these experiences are linked to academic disengagement and negative attitudes toward school (Smalls, White, Chavous & Sellers, 2007; Wong, Eccles & Sameroff, 2003).

In the past, researchers have suggested that the external properties of attributions to discrimination may be helpful to African American youth's self-esteem because it acts as a self-protective mechanism, and students are able to attribute their academic failure to something other than themselves (e.g., "my teacher is prejudiced") (Crocker & Major, 1989). However, it is highly likely that attributions of discrimination could be considered stable by African American youth, especially if they have endured these types of behaviors before or have been forewarned of these actions by parents as some of the racial socialization literature has suggested (Hughes et al., 2006). Thus stable properties of this causal ascription imply that attributions of discrimination may also be harmful to African American youth's future expectations of success and achievement strivings (van Laar, 2000). Thus, if addressed in an attribution retraining program, students would be encouraged not to succumb to these beliefs, but to overcome perceived discrimination by continuing to put forth effort, increasing their academic performance and disproving negative stereotypes that may be associated with their group. In support of this

idea, research has shown that some African American students may already take on this mindset. For example, Eccles et al. (2006) found that, while for some African American youth, the expectation of future racial discrimination can lead to lack of engagement and motivation, for others it can lead to increased motivation and engagement. Still it is important to note that this area of research is new and exploratory, because little research has examined the dimensions associated with this proposed causal ascription. Furthermore, most of the literature surrounding discrimination has focused on the consequences of discrimination (e.g., Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000), but few researchers are examining how to cope with this particular attribution.

Summary and Overview of the Dissertation

A review of the current literature revealed evidence that supports the idea that attribution theory and attribution retraining interventions can be useful in understanding and improving achievement outcomes for African American students. Still few studies exist which examine the following: 1) individual differences among students' attributional patterns, 2) whether causal attributions are linked to specific psychological and behavioral consequences, and 3) whether attribution retraining interventions can be used to improve future expectations of success and hope for African American youth. Lastly, there is also a need for the exploration of additional attributions that may be specifically related to African American youth. The purpose of the proposed study was to expand upon the current literature and address these limitations by creating an attribution retraining intervention that focused on African American students transitioning to middle school. This evidence-based intervention was guided by principles of attribution theory and several methods that have been successful in other attribution retraining interventions. The lessons were aimed at encouraging students to recognize that failure is related to lack of effort and that positive academic outcomes can be obtained through preparation and

effort. Unique to this study was the ability to address attributions that relate directly to the needs of African American youth and to include same-race role models and peers to provide further evidence that unwanted outcomes can be changed and obstacles can be overcome through increased effort.

Research Question and Hypotheses

The following research question was examined in this study:

Can harmful beliefs (e.g., the belief that academic failure is a stable characteristic that cannot be changed) be altered through a brief attribution retraining intervention to improve psychological (i.e., hope and expectations for future success) and behavioral outcomes (i.e., achievement strivings/academic performance, persistence and engagement) for African American students' at risk for academic failure?

For African American students who are doing poorly and who attribute their academic failure more to stable causes, I hypothesized that an attributional retraining intervention would alter students' existing beliefs such that they will attribute failure outcomes to more unstable causes. Furthermore, I speculated that this altering of beliefs would also improve both the students' psychological and behavioral outcomes. Although only a few of these interventions have been created for African American youth, the results of these few studies have shown positive effects on African American students' achievement outcomes (Hudley, 2001; Graham et al., in press).

Methodology

Sites

The students in this study were selected from three public middle schools in the greater Los Angeles area. Each school was selected based on the large percentage of African American

students attending the school (at least 50 percent) and the percentage of students who received free/reduced lunch. The percentage of students who were eligible for free/reduced lunch at the three schools ranged from 52-97 percent. Appendix A shows the racial/ethnic breakdown of the students at each school, the percentage of students who received free or reduced-price lunch and the number of sixth grade students enrolled at the time schools were recruited.

Participants. Participants were drawn from a population of 520 6th grade students who attended the three schools. Of the students who were recruited 306 returned their parental consent form. The ethnic breakdown of these students was 55 percent African American, 39 percent Latino, 4 percent white and 2 percent who were classified as Other. Although the focus of my dissertation was on African American students, to ensure that other students did not feel discriminated against or excluded all students from other racial/ethnic groups who returned a consent form were recruited to take the screening questionnaire; however, I will only focus on the 168 African American sixth graders who participated in the screening questionnaire. This sample included 76 males and 92 females (55%).

Recruitment of participants. Students were recruited in their homeroom during the beginning of their 6th grade year. During recruitment, students received a parental consent form and letter (written in both English and Spanish). These forms explained the purpose of the study and the guaranteed confidentiality. Only students who returned a signed consent form were able to partake in the survey. As an incentive to return the forms, all students were entered into a raffle, regardless of whether the parent granted permission for their child to participate. In addition, the researchers made additional visits to the classroom as a reminder to return the consent forms. Before students were able to complete the survey, they were also asked to sign a separate consent form stating that they personally agreed to participate in the survey. Students

and parents were informed that after the pre-questionnaire a small group of students would also be randomly selected to participate in a special program during lunch.

Measures

Screening measures consisted of both self-report and teacher ratings. Measures in this study aligned with the three main components in attribution theory: causal attributions for academic failure, psychological consequences and behavioral consequences. In addition, to these components students were also asked to participate in nominations of peers, which would later be used to recruit peer role models to participate in the intervention.

Causal attributions. Attributions for failure were captured by a modified version of the attributional questionnaire presented in Graham, Taylor and Dolland (2003). In this measure students were asked to recall the last time they did poorly on a test and to explain what caused this outcome. After students had written about their experience, students were asked to rate a set of attributions as possible reasons for their failure. These attributions included a total of 11 items that assessed four attributional factors: low ability (e.g., "I'm just not smart enough."; $\alpha = .73$), lack of effort (e.g., "I should have studied more", $\alpha = .59$), discrimination (e.g., "teacher didn't like me, because of my race/ethnic group", $r = .67$) and external factors (e.g., "The teacher was an unfair grader.", $\alpha = .59$). Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (5= definitely a reason, 1 = definitely not a reason). A principle component factor analysis of these items confirmed the four orthogonal factors, which accounted for a total of 65% of the variance in students' ratings. The first factor, lack of effort, included three items and accounted for 25% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.79). The second factor was related to external causes and accounted for 17% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.89). The third factor accounted for 12% of the variance

(eigenvalue 1.40) and included two items related to perceived discrimination. The fourth and final factor was lack of ability, which accounted for 9% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.03).

Following these attributions students were provided with 2-3 lines to identify the most important reason for their academic failure. This option could include one of the causal attribution items provided or any additional reason they thought was related to their poor performance. This item was worded in the following way: "Of all the reasons we listed here or any other reasons you can think of, if you had to pick the most important reason for why you did poorly, what would it be? Write it here." The causal attribution measure and factor loadings are shown in Appendices B and C.

Psychological consequences. Measures of future expectations and hope were used to assess students' beliefs and emotions related to their academic achievement and future goals (see Appendix D for complete measures). Attribution theorists have hypothesized that psychological consequences such as hope and future expectations of success mediate the relationship between causal attributions and behavioral consequences (Weiner, 2000).

Future expectations. Students' future expectations were measured using a modified version of the Children's Future Expectation Scale (Wyman, Cowen, Work & Kerley 1993). This measure included 4 items (e.g., "How sure are you that you will get good grades in middle school?") that were rated on a 5-point likelihood scale (1= not at all sure, 5 = very sure, $\alpha = .72$).

Hope. Students' belief that they were in control and able to sustain paths to desired goals was measured by the Children's Hope Scale, which consisted of 6 items (e.g., "Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem"; $\alpha = .81$). Items were rated on a 6-point Likert-scale ranging from "none of the time" to "all of the time" (Snyder, Hoza, Pelham, Rapoff, Ware, Danovsky, Highberger, Robinstein & Stahl, 1997).

Behavioral consequences. Several behavioral measures were used to evaluate students' achievement, behavior and performance in the classroom. These measures included self-reported achievement performance, engagement, as well as teachers' ratings of engagement and persistence (see Appendix E).

Academic performance. Academic performance was measured by students' current grade point average (GPA). Students indicated their current grades in mathematics, English, history and science. GPA was calculated using a 4.0 rating scale *(1=D, 4=A)* obtained from school record data.

Engagement. Self-reported engagement was measured with 4 items developed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education, Inc. (IRRE, 1998). Students were asked to respond to items such as "I work very hard on my schoolwork" (1=very true, 4= not at all true; α =.77).

Teachers' rating of students' engagement. Teachers were also asked to rate students' engagement in the classroom (e.g., "in my class this student concentrates on doing his/her work") by using the Teacher Report of Engagement Questionnaire (Wellborn & Connell, 1991). This measure included 6 items on a 4-point likelihood scale ranging from "never" to "always" (α =.89).

Teachers' rating of students' persistence. To determine how tenacious students were in class, teachers reported on students' persistence. Students' persistence was captured by 3 items (i.e., "gives up easily on schoolwork," "asks for help without trying," and "prefers to review work they already know") that were created based on a previously used measure in (Graham, Taylor & Dolland, 2003). Teachers rated these items on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always) (α =.83).

Peer Nominations. In addition to answering items related to causal attributions, psychological consequences and behavioral consequences, students were also asked to complete peer nominations. This measure was created based on previously used peer nomination procedures (see Appendix F for an example). Peer nominations were included so that participants could nominate positive peer role models from a 6th grade roster of students who were enrolled in their school. Students nominated classmates based on three characteristics, 1) admire and look up to, 2) care about school and try hard and 3) coolest kids. Students' nominations on this measure were used to select positive peer role models that could be selected to participate in the intervention.

Survey Procedures

Surveys were administered to students during their homeroom classrooms. Trained research assistants (including both undergraduate and graduate students) administered the survey. Each question was read aloud to the students and research assistants were available to answer any questions that the students had. Each survey took approximately 40 minutes to complete. Once students completed the survey they received a small monetary gift as an appreciation for their participation.

With parental permission, each participant's math teacher was also invited to join in the study. Teachers were recruited to report on students' engagement and achievement in the classroom. Each teacher received an information letter and consent form that explained the study and their requested participation. Teachers who agreed to partake in the study were contacted during non-instructional time and asked to complete a short questionnaire. If the math teacher was unable to participate or preferred not to, the student's English or science teacher was contacted.

Intervention Sample

Recruitment Procedure. Students in the intervention were recruited based on preliminary data analyses that were gathered from the participants' screening/pre-questionnaire. Each student was selected based on the following criteria: 1) students had to have a GPA that was below the sample median and 2) students had to score below the sample mean for lack of effort (the desired attribution for this study) and/or above the sample mean on low ability, external attributions or discrimination. In general, these students were identified as low-achieving students who were less likely to attribute failure to lack of effort and more likely to attribute it to stable or external causes.

Participants. A total of 65 African American students were selected to participate in the attribution retraining intervention (see the flow chart in Figure 1). Students selected for the intervention were identified as at risk for academic failure and exhibited maladaptive beliefs about the causes of their academic failure. The intervention sample consisted of 37 females and 28 males (42%). Of the students selected for the intervention, only one male opted not to participate in the study due to a scheduling conflict with another lunch activity.

In addition to the targeted 64 students who participated in the intervention, 10 high achieving African American students identified as positive peer role models were also selected to participate in the intervention sessions. The peer role model sample consisted of 6 females and 4 males. These students were nominated by students in the study as being highly admired, looked up to and as one who tried hard in school. The number of nominations received were tallied for each student on all three characteristics. Students' who received the highest amount of nominations across all three categories were selected as peer role models. In addition, these students' had GPA scores above the sample median GPA. Role models were included in the

intervention group to potentially create positive peer bonds, model good group behavior, and decrease the stigma of only including low achieving African American students in the intervention. One peer role model was asked to attend each intervention group; however, these students were not included in the analyses for my dissertation.

After being selected, students were randomly assigned to either participate in the experimental group or wait-list control group. Random assignments were created using a randomization plan generator (Dallal, 2008). Participants were informed that their involvement in the program was voluntary and that they would receive several incentives for their participation. Incentives included free lunch and raffles for small UCLA prizes at each session. Also, at the end of the program all students who completed the program received a $10.00 gift card from Target, a UCLA college folder and attended a UCLA field trip.

The Intervention

Overview

Participation in the attribution-retraining program took place during lunch twice a week for a total of three weeks. Each lesson lasted 20 minutes and consisted of groups of 8-10 students. Researchers have noted that the strength (or intensity) of academic interventions relies on several factors, such as the number of participants in each group, the frequency of sessions and duration (or number of weeks) of the program (Vaughn, Denton & Fletcher, 2010). Therefore, the number of students in each group, sessions per week and duration of the current study were modeled after successful attribution retraining interventions that were conducted in middle schools (e.g., Blackwell et. al., 2007). Although social psychological interventions such as these are known for their brief exercises (sometimes even consisting of only one lesson), the goals of this intervention were spread across six sessions to stay consistent with attribution

retraining interventions conducted with middle school students, which tend to have more sessions to explain the intervention objectives. Previous studies have ranged from two to ten sessions over several weeks.

During the six sessions, students in this study received an effort-attribution focused intervention that was introduced as a program designed to encourage 6th graders to begin thinking about their future goals. Students in the intervention learned strategies and techniques that they could use to become more effort oriented. The lessons in the intervention were aimed at helping students understand that positive academic outcomes can be obtained through preparation and effort. Each of the lessons encouraged students to understand that they could reach their future goals and improve their current grades through increased effort. They also learned that academic failure was only a temporary setback and could be avoided in the future with adequate preparation (e.g., trying harder). These messages were relayed to the students through lessons on promoting personal responsibility for achievement, effort strategies (such as goal setting) and the sharing of personal experiences and examples provided by same-race college students and peers. I was present at each session to provide the lesson and was assisted by a trained undergraduate student.

Component 1: Introduction to the Program

The first component of the intervention (Lesson 1) introduced the students to the program and helped them to begin thinking about their future goals and how their goals were connected to their current schooling. Students began by identifying one personal aspiration for the future and then created a related short-term goal that would help them obtain their long-term goal or future career goal. Over the course of the intervention, students verbally reported their progress on their short-term goal to the group.

In this intervention it was important to start with goal setting so that students were able to identify a specific aim they wanted to achieve. Goal setting is a known effort strategy that has been found to be useful in motivating students to work hard (Bandura, 1997; Graham et al., in press). For this program, setting personal goals provided students with a tool to measure their progress throughout the program.

Component 2: Attribution Retraining

The second component (Lessons 2-3) focused on identifying perceived causal attributions related to failure and helping students attribute academic failures to effort instead of stable (such as low ability) and external outcomes. In these lessons I conveyed to the students that at some point all students fail, do poorly or fall short of meeting a goal, but how they approach or view this failure outcome has an effect on their future outcomes. In these lessons, students were asked to define effort and generate effort strategies that they could use in their classes to reach their short-term goals (e.g., asking the teacher for help, trying harder on homework assignment, creating studying tools). Overall in this component, students were taught that through increased effort and hard work they could obtain their goals and change unwanted outcomes that may occur.

Component 3: Positive Same-Race Examples

The last component (Lessons 4-6) provided positive real-life examples of how setting goals, attributing failure to effort and using effort strategies could help the students obtain their future goals and achieve better academic outcomes. These lessons used experiences of same-race role models in the media, college students and peers to illustrate how increased effort leads to future success. For example, in one lesson we examined the lives of positive African American figures (e.g., Oprah Winfrey, President Barack Obama) that faced challenges reaching their

career goals, but were eventually able to obtain their goals through increased effort. In addition, students shared their own stories of how over the course of the program their increased effort helped them obtain their short-term goals. College students also visited during the last session to participate in a college panel, where they also shared their personal experiences of overcoming obstacles and failure through increased effort. Real-life examples were used to help illustrate to students that there are other same-race individuals with similar backgrounds that have achieved their goals – despite academic failure and obstacles. The complete treatment manual including an overview of each lesson objective, activities and strategies can be found in Appendix G.

Self-Application Assignments -YAP IT OUT

At the end of each lesson students were asked to complete a small self-application assignment outside of class. This section of the program was called "YAP It Out". These assignments consisted of either a small task or question that was used to encourage students to continue thinking about the material they had learned between sessions. At the beginning of each lesson, students were asked to share their answers to the questions and/or how well they did on the task. Some examples of self-application assignments included completing effort strategies in their actual classrooms or attempting to complete the short-term goals that they created. Previous attribution retraining studies have shown that using these types of assignments helped students to better retain the information (Aronson et al., 2002). In addition, other research has shown that most students in this age group learn or remember information better when they can put the knowledge they have gained into action or apply it to their own lives (Freire, 2000).

Intervention Evaluation and Implementation

During the last session of the intervention, students were asked to complete an anonymous one-page evaluation of the program. On the form students rated how much they liked

the program, what they learned from the program and their level of involvement in the program. Students were also asked to rate their understanding of the lessons and their experience with the group leader. Lastly, students were encouraged to share how they would change the program and if they would recommend the program to other students (see Appendix H). Previous research on school-based interventions has shown that acceptability of the intervention is an important aspect of experimental-designs, because acceptability is often correlated with the effectiveness and compliance of the intervention (Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2000).

In addition to the evaluations, procedure checklists were also filled out after each lesson (see Appendix I). Research assistants completed a procedure checklist to assess the consistency in the delivery of each lesson, to determine if all components of the lesson were completed and to report on students' engagement during the lesson. An outline of the goals, activities and assignments that were to be covered during each lesson were provided to the research assistants prior to the lesson. The research assistant and myself reviewed each checklist at the end of each week to confirm that each group received the same materials and lessons.

Post-Intervention Data Collection

One week following the intervention, the experimental group and wait-list control group participants completed a post-questionnaire that included the same measures as the screening questionnaire. Similar to the pre-questionnaire, students were reminded that their participation was voluntary and the survey was confidential. The post-questionnaire consisted of the same items as the screening questionnaire and each student received a small honorarium for taking the survey. Approximately six weeks after the post-questionnaire, students in both groups were invited to complete a follow-up questionnaire. This questionnaire was also identical to the pre-

questionnaire and post-questionnaire and was provided to study potential long-term effects of the intervention for the experimental group.

In addition to the student questionnaires, teachers were also asked to complete a questionnaire one week following the intervention and again six weeks later. A $2.00 honorarium per student was provided to teachers who participated. Teachers received the honorarium at each time point. All teachers who completed the questionnaire were blind to which students were participating in the program, because students were strategically summonsed from a separate class period.

Wait-List Control Group. Participants in the wait-list control group were administered all questionnaires at the same time as the experimental group, but did not receive the attribution intervention until all data had been collected. Once the experimental group completed the intervention and both groups had completed the questionnaires, the wait-list control group had the opportunity to participate in the intervention.

Results

The main goal of this study was to test the effects of an intervention designed to improve low achieving African American students' maladaptive attributions and psychological and behavioral outcomes. In this attribution retraining intervention, I provided strategies to help students increase their effort and change unwanted achievement outcomes in the future. In addition, same-race peers and college students shared real-life experiences that further illustrated how increased effort leads to future success.

To address this research question I used data collected from students who participated in the intervention (i.e., students in the experimental group and wait-list control group). Data collected from peer role models were excluded from the analyses, because these students were

merely included in the intervention to create positive peer dynamics and decrease the stigma of only including low achieving African American students in the intervention. Survey data were collected from all students one-week prior to the intervention (pre-questionnaire), one week following the intervention (post-questionnaire) and six weeks after the post-questionnaire (follow-up questionnaire). Preliminary analyses showed no significant differences between the experimental and wait-list control group at the pre-questionnaire on any of the analyzed variables (all *ps* > .05). These variables included the causal attributions and psychological (e.g., hope) and behavioral outcomes (e.g., GPA and student engagement), which were presented in the measures section. Table 2 presents the descriptive data for both groups at the pretest for all variables used in the analyses. Results of intervention effects on causal attributions and psychological and behavioral outcomes are presented in the order that the concepts are depicted in the motivational sequence outlined in attribution theory (see Figure 2). First, intervention effects related to causal attributions (which vary based on their stability) are described, then findings related to expectancy and hope and, finally, results of behavioral outcomes are presented.

Effects of intervention on causal attributions. Repeated measure analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to test the effects of the intervention on students' causal attributions for academic failure. For each causal attribution, a 2 (Treatment) X 2 (Time) X 2 (Gender) ANOVA with repeated measures on the second factor (i.e., time) was conducted to determine changes in causal attributions from pre-questionnaire to post-questionnaire (or the immediate effects of treatment) and again from pre-questionnaire to follow-up questionnaire to explore possible lagged effects. Researchers have deemed repeated measure ANOVAs as the more appropriate analyses for research designs that measure continuous dependent variables at multiple time points, because these analyses take into account intervention effects on an

individual basis while also controlling for the variability between subjects (Singh, Rana & Singhal, 2013). In addition to running the ANOVAs, effect sizes for each significant interaction were calculated with Cohen's *d.* These effect sizes were interpreted using Cohen's (1988) guidelines for interpreting effect sizes (i.e., large effect size is .80 or higher, a moderate effect size is .50 and a small effect size is .20).

Separate 2 X 2 X 2 ANOVAs on each causal attribution were carried out immediately after the intervention (i.e., pretest to posttest). These data are displayed in Table 3. There were no effects of the intervention on any of the attributions at the immediate posttest. On the other hand, results of the repeated measure ANOVAs on the follow-up data indicated a significant three-way interactions for lack of effort ($F(1,52) = 4.00$, $p = .05$) and a three-way interaction for attributions to discrimination that approached significance ($F(1,53) = 3.07$, $p = .09$). Results are displayed in Table 4. Although standard alpha .05 was used in testing hypotheses for treatment effects, results approaching significance were also taken into account because of the small sample sizes. Small sample sizes have the tendency to increase the chance of incorrectly accepting the null hypothesis (i.e., assuming no significant effects when effects do exist), because they often require large effects for any results to be significant. Since previous social behavioral interventions have repeatedly shown small effects, using only strict alpha levels may compromise the statistical power, thus researchers have suggested using a more lenient alpha (Murphy & Myors, 2004). As seen in Figure 3, the significant three-way interaction for lack of effort was generated primarily by a different pattern of change across time for the males. Results showed that while both experimental girls and control group girls increased slightly on lack of effort, boys in the experimental and control group did not show the same pattern. Instead, boys in the experimental group increased while boys in the control group decreased.

On the discrimination measure (see Figure 4), the significant three-way interaction showed that the differences in groups across time also revolved around the males. While little change was found for both experimental and control girls, the pattern for boys' attributions to discrimination showed a steady decrease for experimental boys and increase for the control boys from pretest to follow-up.

Additional separate 2 (Treatment) X 2 (Time) ANOVAs within gender for lack of effort and attributions to discrimination were run to determine whether significant differences existed in treatment effects across time for girls and boys. Results of these analyses indicated a nearly significant two-way interaction for boys on lack of effort ($F(1,23) = 3.68$, $p = .06$) and attributions to discrimination ($F(1,24) = 2.97$, $p = .09$); however, no significant results were found for girls.

Mean ratings as a function of group and gender for attributions to lack of effort and discrimination suggested that experimental boys perceived their academic failures to be more related to lack of effort at the follow-up questionnaire (Time 1 $M = 2.97$, $SD = .99$; Time 3 $M = 3.64$, $SD = .74$) than did boys in the control group (Time 1 $M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.32$; Time 3 $M = 3.15$ $SD = 1.15$). In addition, experimental boys were less likely to attribute their academic failure to discrimination at the follow-up questionnaire (Time 1 $M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.39$; Time 3 $M = 1.35$ $SD = .69$) than were boys in the control group who were more likely to attribute their academic failure to discrimination during the follow-up questionnaire (Time 1 $M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.27$; Time 3 $M = 2.38$ $SD = 1.48$). Paired t-tests revealed that experimental boys did show a significant increase in attributions to lack of effort from the pre-questionnaire to the follow-up questionnaire ($t(26) = -2.03$, $p = .05$, d=.50); however, the change in attributions to discrimination for experimental boys was not significant (see Table 4).

In general, it appears that boys varied the most on the two attributions as a function of both group and time. No other main effects or significant interactions were found for these causal attributions or for lack of ability and external attributions. Overall, results of these analyses indicated that the goals of the attribution retraining intervention were partially upheld. For example, lagged effects showed students increased in unstable attributions (i.e., lack of effort) and decreased in maladaptive attributions (i.e., discrimination); however, the latter results should be treated with caution since the t-test was non-significant.

Effects of intervention on psychological and behavioral outcomes. Separate repeated measure 2 (Treatment) X 2 (Time) X 2 (Gender) ANOVAs were also used to test whether the intervention had an impact on psychological (e.g., hope) and behavioral outcomes (e.g., students' motivation and student engagement), which were also measured at each time point. Results of these analyses indicated no significant results for any of the variables tested. Specifically, no interaction effects were found for the following psychological and behavioral outcomes: hope, future expectations, student engagement, GPA, teacher's rating of engagement and teacher's rating of persistence. Findings imply that the brief attributional retraining intervention did not impact students' motivation and affect as measured by these rating scale instruments.

Given the positive changes in causal attributions for the experimental boys from pretest to follow-up, I also examined the correlations between all of the outcome variables at the 6-week follow up. These analyses are shown in Table 6. Results of correlational analyses showed that experimental boys were making associations between causal attributions and psychological outcomes, while control group boys were not. Consistent with attribution theory, experimental boys associated lack of ability and discrimination with lower future expectations. These students also perceived these two attributions as being highly correlated in the positive direction. No other

correlations were found for the treatment group. Attribution theory suggests that ascriptions such as lack of ability and discrimination are linked to lower future expectations, because of their stable characteristics. Thus, results of correlation analyses suggest that African American males in the intervention may have become aware of the negative effects of attributing academic failure to lack of ability and discrimination.

Summary of intervention effects. When significant effects were documented, they were consistent with the goals of this brief attribution retraining intervention. For example, the primary focus of this intervention was to increase unstable attributions (such as lack of effort) and decrease maladaptive attributions towards academic failure (such as lack of ability, external attributions, and discrimination). Although results did not show decreases in all the casual attributions, participants did decrease in attributions to discrimination and results showed increases in attributions to lack of effort, for the experimental boys 6 weeks after the intervention. Overall, results revealed that this brief intervention was able to change some of low achieving African American male students' maladaptive attributions for academic failure. The second focus of the intervention was to increase psychological and behavioral outcomes for these youth, since targeted students struggled with the transition to middle school and academic achievement. However, the results of the intervention did not show a change in these outcomes as a result of changes in causal attributions, but correlational analyses at the 6-week follow-up showed that as experimental boys' attributions to lack of effort increased and attributions to discrimination decreased, they were also associating attributions to lack of ability and discrimination with lower future expectations. Low ability and discrimination were also correlated, which infers that males in the intervention group may have recognized these attributions as maladaptive.

Exploratory Analyses

In addition to running the repeated measure ANOVAs and correlations, three additional exploratory analyses were conducted to further test whether the intervention had positive effects on students' academic behavior and attributions toward academic failure. These analyses included (a) comparing causal attributions of the experimental participants at each time point to high achieving students' scores taken during the screening questionnaire, (b) coding responses to an open-ended question that asked students to identify their primary reason for failing an exam, and (c) summarizing students' evaluations of the program to measure the ecological validity of the study (including acceptability, importance of intervention effects, and student participation). For these analyses I used data collected from students' evaluations of the program as well as data from student questionnaires at all three time points (i.e., pre-questionnaire, post-questionnaire and follow-up questionnaire).

Comparison to high achievers. To further examine possible changes in causal attributions for the experimental group, I decided to compare attributions of these low achievers with the attributions of high achieving students identified from the screening sample. As a reminder, students in the intervention exhibited maladaptive attributions and were identified as at risk for academic failure; thus positive comparisons between the experimental group at the post-test and high achieving students' causal attributions could provide other evidence for improvement in these students' motivational outlook on school and their achievement.

To create the sample of high achievers I used data collected from the pre/screening questionnaire. Of 168 students in the screening sample, high achievers were defined as those who had a GPA at or above the 75th percentile. Based on this criterion 55 students were identified as high achievers.

In choosing high achieving students as the comparison group, it was assumed that high achievers at the screening questionnaire exhibited the motivational mindset needed to do well in school and that the two groups were distinctly different on causal attributions. Table 7 shows the mean ratings for each of the causal attributions by group. High achievers' attributions were assessed only at the screening test. Experimental group attributions were assessed at three time points. Results of separate independent t-tests showed that the groups were statistically different on all four causal attributions at the pretest, as hypothesized. To test effects of the intervention, I compared the experimental group's mean scores for each causal attribution at the post-questionnaire to the high achievers' attributions at the screening questionnaire. Then to test for improvement 6 weeks after the intervention, I repeated these analyses using the experimental group's follow-up scores. Independent t-test comparing scores of high achieving students to the experimental group's scores at the post-questionnaire showed that students in the experimental group were still significantly different in their attributions to lack of effort ($t(84) = -1.72$, $p < .05$) and ability ($t(83) = -3.13$, $p < .01$), although the experimental group's attributions to lack of ability were decreasing. In contrast, no significant differences were found between the two groups on attributions to external factors ($t(83) = -1.57$, ns) and discrimination ($t(83) = -1.90$, ns). Changes in the external attributions from significant to non-significant indicated that although the experimental group was significantly different from the high achievers at the pre-questionnaire, by the post-questionnaire the two groups were no longer different on these two attributions. Result at the 6-week follow-up were very similar. There were no significant differences between the experimental group and high achievers on external ($t(82) = -2.82$, ns) and discrimination attributions ($t(82) = -1.18$, ns), while attributions for lack of ability ($t(82) = -3.22$, $p < .01$) and lack of effort ($t(84) = -2.03$, $p < .05$) remained significantly different.

Most important causal attribution. After students completed the 11 attributional ratings in the attribution questionnaire at each time point, I asked the students to pick which one was the most important (i.e., "Of all the reasons we listed here or any other reasons you can think of, if you had to pick the most important reason for why you did poorly, what would it be? Write it here:"). Based on students' responses to this question I tallied the percentage of students who picked ability, effort, external and discrimination attributions at each time point. Each selected attribution was classified using definitions that were derived from the results of the factor analyses loadings (see Appendix C). For example, the response "I'm just not smart enough" was coded as lack of ability. In addition to selecting one of the 11 items, a very small percentage of students decided to choose their own attribution or not to answer this question. The total percentage of missing data accounted for less than 10% at the pre and post-questionnaire for both groups and there were no missing data at the follow-up questionnaire. In regards to the additional attributions students provided, most were classified into one of the four main causal attributions and the small percentage of those that could not be easily classified, were identified as *other* (e.g., "the reason is because I wanted to be first", "because I didn't know").

Using students' responses to this open-ended causal attribution question, I examined how the four main causal attributions for academic failure changed from pre-questionnaire to the follow-up questionnaire for both the experimental and control groups. If the intervention was effective, I would expect that over time the attribution students picked as the most important would increasingly be lack of effort. On the other hand, if students' chosen attribution was something other than lack of effort (e.g., lack of ability), I would expect that over time they would be less likely to be choosing that non-effort attribution. Figure 5 displays a graphic presentation of the percentage totals for each of the four causal attributions at each time point.

As I predicted, percentage totals revealed that the experimental group increased in their attributions to lack of effort (first panel in Figure 5), while the control group's attributions after the post-questionnaire. Also, on average fewer students in the experimental group identified lack of ability (second panel in Figure 5) and discrimination (fourth panel in Figure 5) as their most important causal attribution from pre- to follow-up than the control group. In fact percentages showed that for the experimental group, attributions to low ability decreased by half at the post-questionnaire. Although results for external attributions displayed slight increases in both groups at the post-questionnaire, the experimental group still reported fewer attributions to external factors than the control group at the post- and follow-up questionnaire (third panel in Figure 5). In general, these findings suggest that the experimental group showed both positive immediate and long-term effects, such that they were more likely than the control group to endorse lack of effort as their most important cause. Additionally, the experimental group was less likely than the control group to associate their academic failure with maladaptive attributions such as lack of ability and discrimination over time.

Students' evaluation of the program. At the end of the three-week intervention, students participating in the experimental group completed a short student evaluation (see Appendix H). Qualitative and quantitative data derived from students' evaluations of the program were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine positive effects of the intervention that extended beyond altering causal attributions (such as liking the program and knowledge gained in the program). In general, the student evaluations were aimed at exploring students' perceptions of the treatment acceptability and social validity of the program. Specifically, students were asked to answer questions related to how much they liked the program, significance of intervention effects, skills acquired, and opportunities to use skills

learned in other settings. Overall, results of students' responses to multiple-choice items on the evaluation showed that students reported high levels of program acceptability. Specifically, analyses of student evaluations for the experimental group indicated that over 90% of students liked being in the program and spending time with the group leader. In addition, over 90% of students revealed that they completed activities outside of the group (which consisted of completing strategies that increased effort) and that they were willing to complete the program again. Above 80% of the participants expressed that they felt the program made some difference in their grades and that they tried in the program (or participated on a consistent basis). Students also indicated that they learned things that would help them do better in school. More than 70% of the students expressed acceptability of the curriculum and of how the program was implemented. For example, students expressed that the program was easy to follow, that they liked the prizes, and that they learned new skills and things that would help them in class.

At the end of the evaluation students were asked to complete the following question: "Is there anything else you would like to tell us about our special program?" This open-ended item was analyzed with an inductive-deductive approach (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). This particular coding was used to identify additional components and themes that contributed to the treatment acceptability and overall effectiveness of the intervention. Results of these analyses revealed positive findings that related to the knowledge participants gained in the program, their enjoyment of participating in the program, and positive interactions between students and the leader. Examples of these findings included comments such as "the program helped me and my grades," "I really enjoyed having fun in the program," and "our leader is special for teaching us." Results of both close-ended and open-ended items on students' evaluations suggest that the intervention had a positive effect on targeted students. As previously mentioned, treatment

acceptability is often correlated with the effectiveness of the intervention and with students' compliance to the intervention (Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2000).

Summary of exploratory analyses. Overall, the results of the above exploratory analyses provide supplementary evidence for the effects of the intervention. For example, analyses showed that students in the experimental group expressed similar attributions to high achieving students after the intervention. In addition, these students' beliefs about the most important reasons for their academic failure also changed after the intervention. After participating in the intervention the experimental group was more likely to attribute their primary reason for academic failure to lack of effort and less likely to attribute it to lack of ability and discrimination. Although the experimental group did not decrease in their attributions to external factors, they still reported fewer attributions to external factors than the control group.

Furthermore, results of students' evaluation of the program revealed high levels of acceptance for the program. In addition, students' responses to both the open-ended and multiple-choice items on the student evaluation suggested positive student engagement in and out of the program and a positive relationship between the students and the instructor. Students also had positive responses to items related to the importance of the intervention, the skills acquired, and the extent to which students used the skills gained. Overall, these analyses provided additional support of the positive intervention effects for low-achieving African American students who participated in the program.

Discussion

Previous interventions, guided by attribution theory, have proven successful in increasing students' motivation and academic performance. The focus of these interventions has centered on altering students' maladaptive beliefs about their academic setbacks and helping students

believe that they can change unwanted failure outcomes through increased effort. Although ongoing reports of low academic achievement among African American youth suggest the need for such interventions to improve their motivation and academic achievement, there have been few attribution retraining interventions that have concentrated on improving achievement outcomes for this population of students (Hudley, 2001; Graham et al., in press). The purpose of the proposed study was to expand upon the current literature and address this limitation by creating an attribution retraining intervention that focused specifically on African American students transitioning to middle school. The overarching goal was to examine whether harmful attributional beliefs among 6th grade low achievers could be altered through a brief attribution retraining intervention. I also wanted to test if changes in causal attributions, resulting from the intervention, could improve African American students' psychological and behavioral outcomes.

Effects of Attribution Retraining Intervention for Low Achieving African American Students

Results of the present study showed that this brief intervention was able to change the maladaptive attributions of low achieving African American males. In the experimental group, these males increased in their ascriptions to the more adaptive attribution, lack of effort, while also decreasing in attributions to discrimination. Consistent with hypotheses outlined in attribution theory, African American males also associated maladaptive beliefs (i.e., lack of ability and discrimination) with lower future expectations. However, it is unclear why the intervention was more successful for African American males than females. Some researchers have proposed that an effective curriculum for African American males engages them in meaningful activities, incorporates material they are able to connect with and allows them to discuss real issues (Howard, 2014; Tatum, 2005). Thus, the use of many of these elements in the present intervention may have contributed to the significant changes in African American males.

For example, students in the intervention had the opportunity to discuss reasons for their academic failure as well as learn about popular African American figures that faced challenges before achieving success in their careers (including many African American males such as President Barack Obama, NFL star Michael Oher and popular hip-hop artist Jay Z). Another possibility, as shown in an earlier attributional study that found gender differences with college students, is that the messages provided in the study may have been new to males. Wilson and Linville (1985) proposed that the stronger effects for males in their study were due to females being more prone to discover the messages presented in the intervention on their own before the intervention could be completed. For example, girls may have asked teachers or other school staff about failed assignments and were informed by these individuals that failed assignments were not stable and could be changed with increased effort; thus, messages received in the intervention were only novel to males.

Supplementary analyses also shed light on several additional effects of the intervention that were not revealed through the traditional intervention analyses. Results of comparisons to high achieving students, students' open-ended responses and their evaluations of the program suggest that the initial goals of the intervention were being met. In general, findings showed that after the intervention the experimental group was more likely to endorse lack of effort and less likely to attribute failure to the other three maladaptive attributions (i.e., lack of ability, discrimination and external attributions). Also, similarities between high achiever and experimental group causal attributions over time suggested further improvement in student perceptions of achievement. More positive intervention effects were revealed through student reports of high levels of program acceptability and engagement. In addition, students reported

that through the intervention they were able to learn skills useful in their classes as well as enhance their academic performance.

The present study adds to the current literature in two specific ways. The first contribution this study provides is further support that attribution retraining interventions can be used to increase adaptive beliefs about academic failure and, more importantly, they can be used to alter undesirable attributions. Previous attribution retraining studies for African American youth have shown increases in attributions to lack of effort (e.g., Hudley, 2001), but the present study provides preliminary evidence that attributional retraining interventions can also be useful in changing harmful attributions that have yet to be explored, such as ascriptions to discrimination. Being able to alter attributions to discrimination is particularly important for African American youth because many students within this population report experiencing unjust treatment, which has been shown to have negative effects on their psychological well being and academic performance (Wong et al., 2003). The second contribution this study provides to the literature is evidence interventions such as these could be beneficial in improving African American students' psychological outcomes. Since no attributional retraining studies designed for African American students have explored the effects of these types of interventions on student psychological consequences, the results of this study provide additional support for the use of attribution retraining interventions to address the achievement challenges faced by African American youth.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions

The present study should be viewed as a pilot for other attribution retraining interventions aimed at improving motivation and academic performance for African American youth. This attribution retraining intervention was implemented, similar to many interventions of this nature,

as a preventive measure used to avoid decreases in motivation and achievement often seen during the transition to middle school (Blackwell et al., 2007; Good et al., 2003). Social-psychological interventions in education are usually implemented early in transition because students' thoughts and feelings are presumed to be more likely to be malleable during the beginning of the transition period as opposed to the end. It is also presumed that altering students' maladaptive beliefs near the beginning of these transitions will have a lasting impact on their experiences in these new settings (Perry et al., 2010).

Considering the positive intervention effects found in the current study, it is believed that similarly implemented attribution retraining studies would be able to make more significant impacts on psychological and behavioral outcomes if they have larger sample sizes and make slight modifications to the current design. The results of this study could be used to help refine, modify and determine the feasibility of a larger scale intervention with similar goals. Below I have identified several strengths and limitations of the present study that could be valuable for future youth attribution programs.

One strength of the present study was the use of three elements essential to the design of school-based interventions that are often omitted in similar interventions for at risk youth. These elements were a controlled design, specific criteria to select the sample and careful treatment implementation. Using a randomized and controlled design helped to control for additional factors in the environment that may have influenced student outcomes. Likewise, the use of specific criteria, by which to select participants, assisted with clearly identifying the sample and accurately interpreting the data analyses. Lastly, detailed training manuals and monitoring of the intervention helped to ensure that each group received the same treatment and that each lesson

was implemented as outlined in the manual. These elements also allow for the study to be replicated in other contexts (Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2000).

Another strength of this intervention was the effective use of instructional time and the use of reflection activities that encouraged students to think about the material outside of the intervention sessions. To avoid interrupting school class time, this intervention was conducted during lunch, which allotted limited time for intervention lessons. It has been noted that the use of time during each intervention session can affect the power of the intervention (Vaughn et al., 2010). Therefore precise classroom management and a daily routine were integrated into the curriculum to efficiently use the 20 minutes allotted for the intervention. After students gathered their lunches and began eating, the daily routine included recapping the previous lesson, an activity and providing instructions for the reflection exercise. Providing a daily routine and having good classroom management eliminated disciplinary issues and disruptions by creating a positive classroom culture as well as establishing positive teacher-student relationships.

I also felt additional tools outside of the intervention lessons were needed to help reinforce the material provided during each session. Initially, it was believed that students would view reflection exercises as more homework. To the contrary, students were excited about the opportunity to share with their peers the tasks they completed while away from the group. As expressed in their evaluations, many students who participated in these activities found the strategies and assignments to be useful in improving classroom behavior. For interventions with limited amounts of time to provide the curriculum, auxiliary activities or assignments, especially reflections, could be used to help students retain the material learned in each lesson (Aronson et al., 2002; Freire, 2000). Unfortunately, without detailed analyses that examine the effectiveness of these supplemental activities, I am unable to assess the extent to which these activities were

helpful to students in the intervention. Future studies that use similar activities should incorporate additional procedures that would allow for such an assessment. This could be accomplished by calculating the percentage of students who participated in the activities or by incorporating another treatment group that does not receive the reflection activities and comparing the two groups.

The most influential strength of this study, in my opinion, was the inclusion of materials and measures that were appropriate for the population being studied. Researchers have noted that interventions for at risk minorities should be culturally sensitive (or culturally specific) because designing interventions with the targeted population in mind (especially for African American students) is essential to its success (Miranda et al., 2005; Graham et al., 2003). The current intervention included several components that were culturally responsive to the sample. For example, the use of same-race role models in popular culture and same-race college students further supported the aims of the intervention by providing positive real-life examples of how setting goals, attributing failure to lack of effort and using effort strategies can help students obtain both their future goals and positive academic outcomes. Nonetheless, the successes of the popular culture figures highlighted in this intervention included academic related achievements as well as sport accomplishments; thus, it is possible that introducing only positive African American figures with achievement-related challenges and successes could have made a stronger impact on overall student achievement and motivation. Still, past research has shown that similar mentor characteristics are useful in helping students connect to the messages provided and aid them in creating stronger bonds and trust with mentors (Lee, 1999). The use of these elements as well as opportunities for students to acknowledge attributions to discrimination may have been influential to the success of the intervention. In general, previous interventions that have

incorporated culturally relevant components have proven to be more effective for ethnic minority youth (Miranda et al., 2005).

Conversely, several limitations may have hindered the study from yielding more significant results. One limitation of the study was the relatively small sample size. Although, many school-based interventions have been successful with small sample sizes, there is some belief that the small number of participants in this study may have contributed to fewer significant intervention effects and insufficient power needed to detect differences between effects in the group. Small sample sizes have the tendency to increase the chance of incorrectly accepting the null hypothesis and assuming no significant effects when effects do exist (Murphy & Myors, 2004). Small samples also effect the generalizability of the current findings. Thus, the intervention results can only be applied to low achieving African American middle school students from low-income areas.

Another limitation of completing experimental studies in natural settings is the inability to take into account all contextual factors that may influence the intervention effectiveness. Research has shown that contextual factors, such as influences from home, school and peers, can also have an impact on student motivation and achievement. For example, these elements can vary depending on parental involvement, support from teachers and even peer influence (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991; Miller & Brickman, 2004; Guay & Vallerand, 1997). Future studies should try to incorporate measures that capture such contextual factors that may contribute or take away from the intervention effects. Such variables could be used in a multilevel approach, which will allow the study to account for both individual characteristics as well as additional contextual characteristics.

Results of exploratory analyses for this brief intervention suggest that more sustained change in psychological and behavioral outcomes could have been found with additional lessons or boosters. Extra lessons aimed at connecting adaptive attributions to positive psychological and behavioral outcomes could have increased the intervention effects on outcomes such as hope and student engagement. Students could have also benefited from boosters that were administered after the intervention to reinforce lessons learned in the intervention. These additional lessons could have aided in maintaining long-term effects by providing students with the chance to repeat lessons or strategies shared in the program.

Another limitation of this study is the need for better measures that help address the main goals of attribution retraining interventions. Measures that were used in this study focused simply on effort as a reason for failure, but much of the goals of the study were centered on increasing effort and preparation as an avenue for increasing positive academic outcomes in the future. Items like "I should have studied more" and "I didn't try hard enough" express beliefs about current failure, but do not assess their beliefs about the benefits of increased effort in the future. Additional effort items that are more future-oriented are needed to address the goals of the study. Modified academic self-efficacy items such as " I could have done better, if I tried harder" or "I can do almost all the work, if I don't give up" get at the heart of attribution retraining interventions and would help to identify whether students view increasing effort as a strategy for changing unwanted academic outcomes in the future (Midgley et al., 2000).

Additional Considerations for Future Attribution Retraining Interventions

There are two additional areas that I would like to introduce for researchers to consider when designing attributional studies for African Americans. These considerations are based on

review of the current literature and feedback that was received from educators and researchers at the conclusion of this study.

Little is known about the impact that parent and teacher involvement could have on school-based interventions. Future research should consider incorporating parents and teachers into the design of attribution retraining interventions. Research shows that parents (and teachers) can be very influential in student academic performance (Varner & Mandara, 2013). In this study, the focus was on including same-race peers and college students to illustrate how effort leads to future success, but these messages can also be reinforced through parents and teachers. In addition to links between parental involvement and academic performance, other studies have also found that negative attitudes of teachers toward Black students may be linked to their underachievement (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). Getting parents and teachers involved in attribution retraining interventions that provide positive messages about student academic performance may help to reverse negative achievement outcomes and reinforce positive messages that encourage increased effort. Parent and teacher participation could also help maintain intervention effects long term.

Future research should also explore other aspects of attribution theory, such as additional attributions that African Americans associate with academic failure, students' reasoning for academic success and other causal dimensions related to these attributions, such as controllability. If attributions to discrimination exist, there may be other unexplored attributions that African American students associate with their academic failure. In addition, investigating attributions to success may provide insight into possible protective factors, such as external support or the encouragement of concerned teachers. It has been argued that we as researchers focus more on the deficits and shortcomings associated with African American student

achievement and not enough on the positive (Ford et al., 2001). Studying reasons for academic success provides an opportunity to focus on African American students' strengths. Student beliefs about academic success could also prove to be beneficial in formulating interventions for these youth.

Additional consideration should also be given to other causal dimensions associated with perceived attributions, such as controllability (which is thought to be linked to achievement-related emotions as well as achievement strivings and evaluations). The stability dimension was the primary focus of this study because it is linked to expectancy for success and achievement strivings; however, changes in attributions as a function of the intervention could have also altered students' emotions, depending on whether the attribution was seen as controllable or uncontrollable. For example, attribution theory suggests that students who fail because of lack of effort (a controllable cause) may exhibit feelings of guilt, while students who fail because of lack of ability (an uncontrollable cause) may exhibit shame. It would be beneficial to measure achievement-related emotions both before and after the intervention to determine if changes in attributions also affect students' emotions. It would also be important to measure students' perceptions of achievement evaluation and fairness, which are also hypothesized to be linked to the controllability dimension. Measuring perceptions of fairness and achievement evaluation could be especially important for this population of students (who identified discrimination as one of the causes for their achievement). For instance, if students continue to fail even after the positive changes in attributions and achievement behavior they may feel that they are being evaluated unfairly as result of their race/ethnicity or that their increase in effort is not being taken into account.

Implications for Policy and Practice

In regards to implications for practice, the lessons and messages presented in the current intervention provide ways for educators to encourage positive thinking about school and help African American students achieve their future goals. This study also offers a quick and inexpensive approach that can be used in classrooms to increase motivation for African American youth.

From a policy perspective, this study comes at a fitting time because it aligns with current initiatives set by the White House to promote "Educational Excellence for African Americans." The present study provides an effective approach that can be used to improve educational opportunities for African American youth. Furthermore, with some modifications that address cultural differences, this intervention can also be beneficial to middle school students in other racial/ethnic groups who are struggling academically with the transition to middle school.

In conclusion, through better understanding African American students' beliefs about their academic failures as well as the psychological and behavioral consequences linked to these beliefs, policy makers and educators can begin to formulate strategies and plans that can help narrow the gap in achievement and improve educational outcomes for these youth. This study shows that evidence-based interventions can be adapted to the specific issues confronting African American students. However, these interventions should not be implemented without paying attention to the perspective of these students and being sensitive to the population and culture context.

Table 1

Causal Ascriptions Related to Causal Dimensions

Causal Dimension	Causal Ascriptions			
	Effort	Ability	Luck	Task Difficulty
Locus	Internal	Internal	External	External
Stability	Unstable	Stable	Unstable	Stable
Controllability	Controllable	Uncontrollable	Uncontrollable	Uncontrollable

Table 2

Experimental and Control Groups Pretest Scores

Variable	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	M	SD	M	SD
Causal Attributions				
Lack of Effort	3.36	.94	3.31	1.07
Lack of Ability	2.79	.86	2.58	1.09
External Attribution	2.44	1.21	2.37	1.21
Discrimination	2.16	1.34	1.70	1.07
Psychological Outcomes				
Hope	4.30	1.20	4.66	1.09
Future Expectations	4.46	.43	4.51	.59
Behavioral Outcomes				
Student Engagement	3.27	.45	3.36	.56
GPA	2.09	.81	2.13	.78
Teachers' Rating of Student Engagement	2.24	.81	2.33	.83
Teachers' Rating of Persistence	2.78	.83	2.79	.93

Table 3

Pretest to Posttest Treatment Effects on Causal Attributions

Measure	Effect	F	η	p
Lack of Effort	T	1.90	.03	.17
	T x TR	.01	.00	.99
	T x G	.04	.00	.85
	T x TR x G	1.54	.03	.22
Lack of Ability	T	1.84	.03	.18
	T x TR	.01	.00	.50
	T x G	.47	.01	.93
	T x TR x G	1.50	.03	.23
External Attribution	T	1.90	.03	.17
	T x TR	.08	.00	.79
	T x G	.61	.01	.44
	T x TR x G	.99	.02	.32
Discrimination	T	2.86	.05	.10
	T x TR	.02	.00	.89
	T x G	.45	.01	.51
	T x TR x G	.01	.00	.71

Note: T = main effect of time; T x TR = Time X Treatment Group interaction; T x G = Time X Gender interaction; T x TR x G = Time x Treatment Group x Gender interaction. * $p < .05$

Table 4

Pretest to Follow-up Treatment Effects on Causal Attributions

Measure	Effect	F	η	p
Lack of Effort	T	1.43	.03	.23
	T x TR	.99	.02	.33
	T x G	.01	.00	.99
	T x TR x G	4.00	.07	.05**
Lack of Ability	T	.31	.01	.58
	T x TR	.31	.01	.58
	T x G	.23	.00	.63
	T x TR x G	.01	.00	.94
External Attribution	T	2.02	.04	.16
	T x TR	.08	.00	.78
	T x G	5.27	.09	.03
	T x TR x G	.23	.00	.63
Discrimination	T	.44	.01	.50
	T x TR	1.52	.03	.22
	T x G	.02	.00	.88
	T x TR x G	3.07	.06	.09*

Note: T = main effect of time; T x TR = Time X Treatment Group interaction; T x G = Time X Gender interaction; T x TR x G = Time x Treatment Group x Gender interaction. *p = .09, **p = .05

Table 5

Comparison between Experimental and Control Boys Means on Lack of Effort and Discrimination

Variable	Pretest		Follow-up	
	M	SD	M	SD
Experimental Boys				
Lack of Effort	2.97_a	.98	3.64_b	.74
Discrimination	2.15	1.39	1.35	.69
Control Boys				
Lack of Effort	3.44	1.33	3.15	1.15
Discrimination	1.92	1.27	1.87	1.25

Note. Within each variable, different subscripts indicate that the means are significantly different from each other. $p < .05$

Table 6

Males' Correlations Between Causal Attributions and Psychological and Behavioral Outcomes by Treatment Group at Follow-up

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Causal Attributions										
1. Lack of Effort	-	.34	.02	.34	-.20	-.07	-.13	-.16	-.11	-.12
2. Lack of Ability	.15	-	.61*	.26	-.14	-.68**	-.17	-.26	.25	.47
3. Discrimination	.24	.59*	-	-.06	-.42	-.88**	-.35	-.36	.27	.42
4. External	.13	.69**	.68*	-	.34	-.10	.08	-.22	-.24	-.42
Psychological Outcomes										
5. Hope	.50	-.33	-.20	.12	-	.42	-.04	-.02	-.18	.15
6. Future	.23	-.31	-.34	.06	.88**	-	.12	.52	-.12	-.32
Behavioral Outcomes										
7. Student	-.08	.15	.24	.53	.42	.40	-	.21	.14	-.22
8. GPA	.18	-.10	.41	.24	.09	-.08	.15	-	-.18	-.24
9. TRSE	.51	-.23	-.06	-.19	.36	.25	.21	.03	-	.52
10. TRSP	.17	-.03	.16	.04	-.02	.01	.23	.19	.74**	-

Note: Experimental group correlations are displayed above the diagonal and control group correlations are below. GPA = Grade Point Average; TRSE = Teacher's Rating of Student Engagement; TRSP = Teacher's Rating of Student Persistence. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 7

Mean Ratings of Causal Attributions for High Achievers and Experimental Group

	Causal Attributions			
Group	Lack of Effort	Lack of Ability	External Attributions	Discrimination
Experimental Pre	3.32*	2.79****	2.44**	2.16***
Experimental Post	3.63***	2.62***	2.29	1.88
Experimental Follow-up	3.64***	2.60***	2.32	1.71
High Achievers	2.94	1.89	1.92	1.45

Note: Significant scores highlight differences between experimental group and high achievers at that time point. * $p<.09$, ** $p< .05$, *** $p<.01$, ****$p<.001$

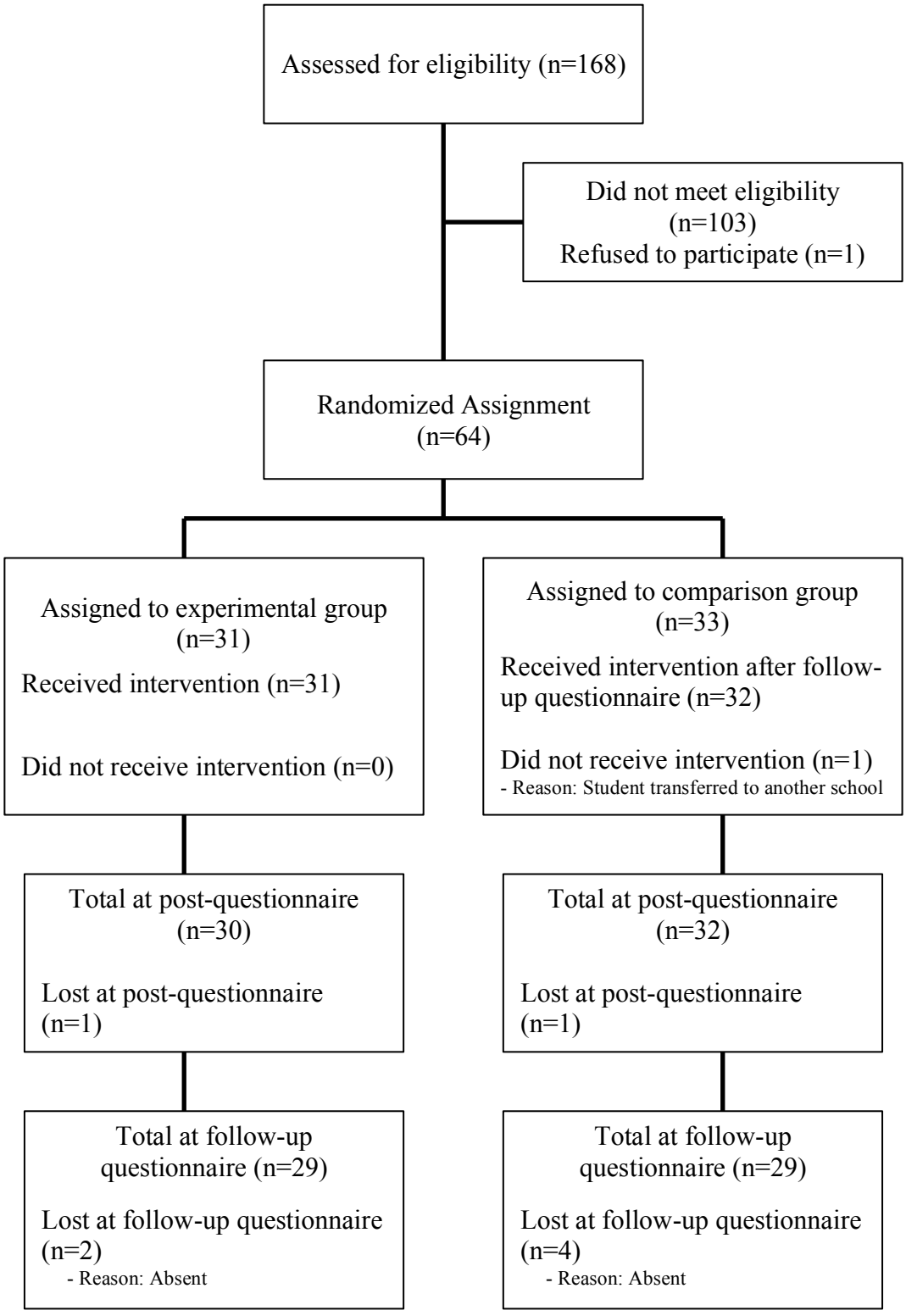


Figure 1. Flow of participants through each stage of intervention. CONSORT flowchart.

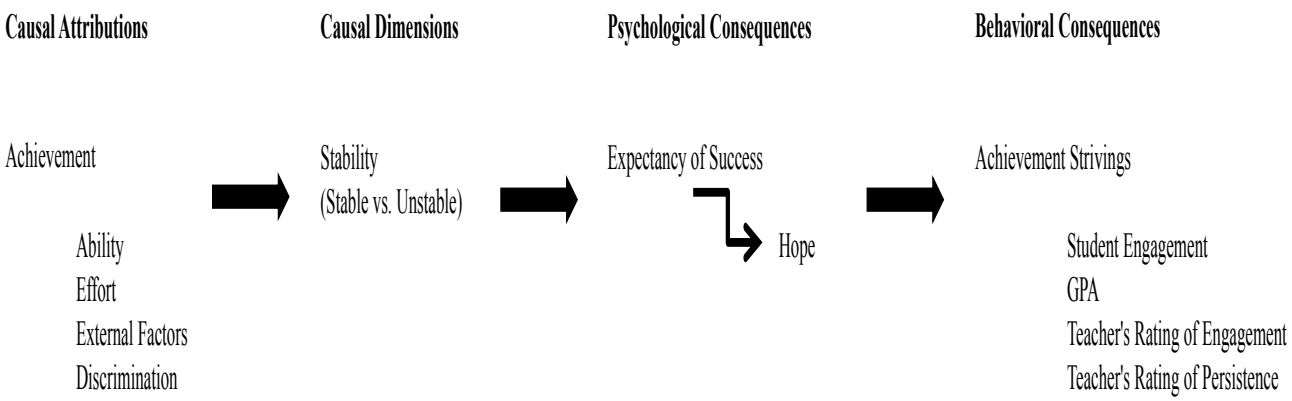


Figure 2. Partial representation of an attributional model of motivation.

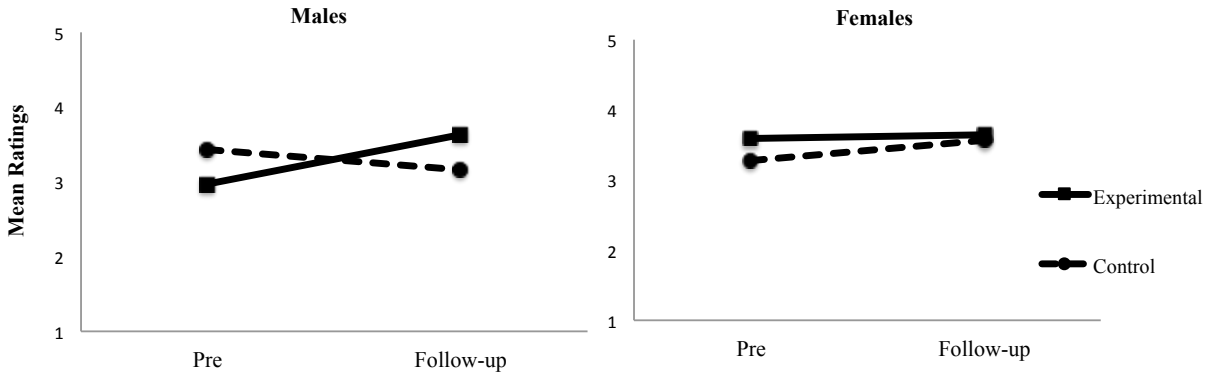


Figure 3. Lack of effort attributions endorsed by experimental and control group at pretest and follow-up by gender.

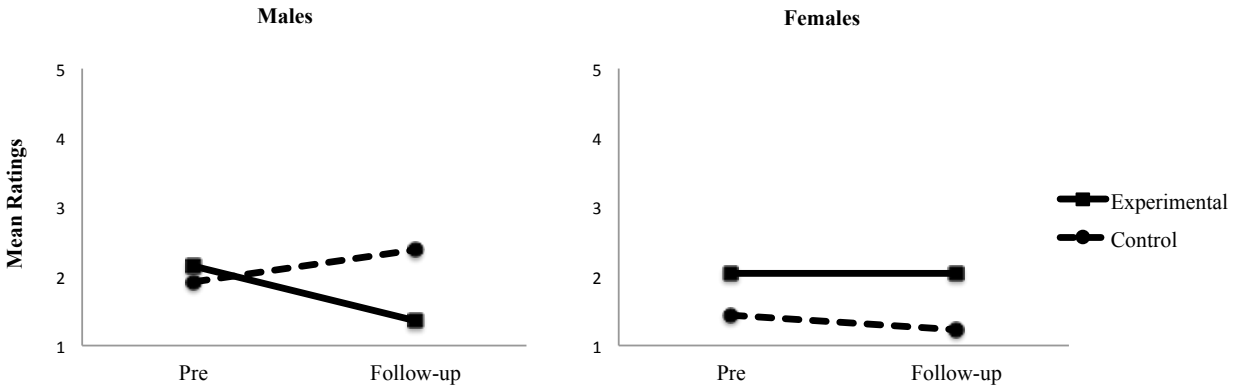


Figure 4. Discrimination attributions endorsed by experimental and control group at pretest and follow-up by gender.

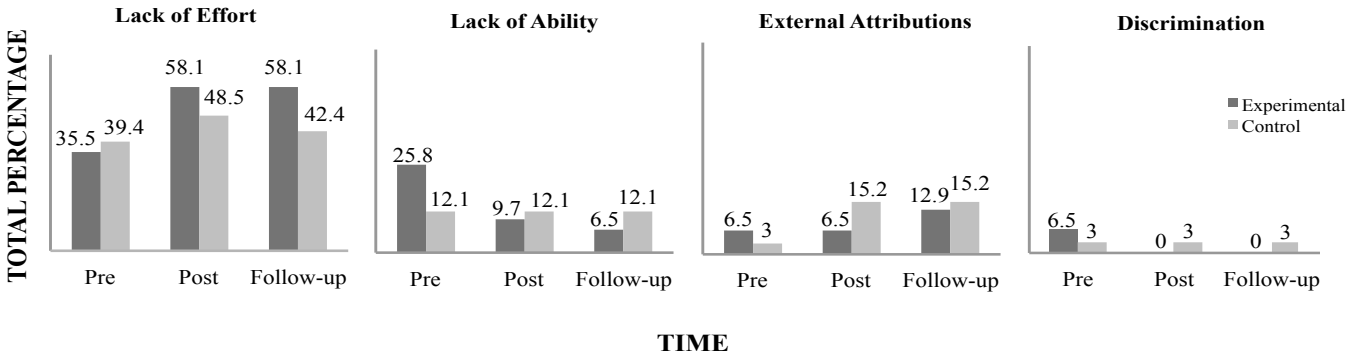


Figure 5. Percentage totals for each causal attribution by treatment group.

Appendices

Appendix A

School Sites

Schools	Percentage of Students Enrolled by Race/Ethnicity								Number of African Amer. 6th Graders	Percentage of Students on Free/ Reduced Lunch
	African American	American Indian	Asian	Filipino	Latino/ Hispanic	Pacific Islander	White	Multiethnic		
School 1	52.72	0.26	0	0.26	45.57	0.52	0.52	0	140	97
School 2	58.74	0.55	4.09	0.66	32.58	0.77	12.72	0	181	52
School 3	60.42	0.5	0.37	0.37	36.95	0.37	1	0	199	73

Appendix B

Causal Attribution Measure

When We Take Important Tests

Middle school students take lots of tests in academic subjects like math, English, and science. Now that you're in 6th grade, you've had many tests. Think about a time in middle school when you did poorly on an important test. Maybe you got a failing grade, a low grade, or at least a lower grade than you wanted or hoped you would get. Try to remember what subject the test was in, what happened, why you got the poor grade, and how you felt about it. Take a couple of minutes to write about it here…

_____

_____

_____

We're especially interested in *why* you think you did poorly on this important test – in other words the causes or reasons for your poor performance. Below are some reasons that other middle school students told us when we asked them why they did poorly on an important test – or at least not as well as they wanted to. Do you think any of the following are the reasons why you did poorly on your test?

	Definitely a reason	Probably a reason	Not sure	Probably not a reason	Definitely NOT a reason
1. I'm not good at this subject.	○	○	○	○	○
2. I didn't use a good test-taking strategy.	○	○	○	○	○
3. The teacher was an unfair grader.	○	○	○	○	○
4. The stuff I studied wasn't on the test.	○	○	○	○	○
5. I should have studied more.	○	○	○	○	○
6. The teacher didn't like me because of my race/ethnic group.	○	○	○	○	○
7. I'm just not smart enough.	○	○	○	○	○
8. The teacher thought I was less smart than I really am because of my race/ethnic group.	○	○	○	○	○

	Definitely a reason	Probably a reason	Not sure	Probably not a reason	Definitely NOT a reason
9. I did not try hard enough.	○	○	○	○	○
10. I didn't have a good teacher.	○	○	○	○	○
11. The test was too hard.	○	○	○	○	○

12. Of all the reasons we listed here (number 1-11 above) or any OTHER reasons you can think of, if you had to pick the most important reason for why you did poorly, what would it be? Write it here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C

Factor Loadings of the Items Ratings for Causal Attributions for Failure

Items	Factor loadings			
	Factor 1: Lack of Effort	Factor 2: External Factors	Factor 3: Discrim-ination	Factor 4: Lack of Ability
I should have studied more.	**.801**	.056	-.130	-.017
I did not try hard enough.	**.650**	.004	.320	.186
I didn't use a good test-taking strategy.	**.573**	-.398	.188	.309
The stuff I studied wasn't on the test.	.384	**.484**	.166	-.006
I didn't have a good teacher.	.106	**.850**	.092	.013
The teacher was an unfair grader.	-.079	**.751**	.349	.134
The teacher thought I was less smart than I really am because of my race/ethnic group.	.029	.313	**.782**	.222
The teacher didn't like me because of my race/ethnic group.	.246	.161	**.749**	-.197
The test was too hard.	-.060	-.041	-.112	**.849**
I'm just not smart enough.	.210	.082	.260	**.687**
I'm not good at this subject.	.327	.297	-.399	**.531**

Note. Values in boldface represent the highest loadings for each factor.

Appendix D

Psychological Consequences

Hope

	None of the time	**A little of the time**	**Some of the time**	**A lot of the time**	**Most of the time**	**All of the time**
1. I think I am doing pretty well.	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. I can think of many ways to get things in life that are important to me	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. I am doing just as well as other kids my age	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future	○	○	○	○	○	○
6. Even when others want to quit, I know I can find ways to solve the problem	○	○	○	○	○	○

Future Expectations

At this moment, how sure are you that …

	Not at all sure	Not very sure	Some-what sure	Pretty sure	Very sure
1. You will be able to handle (or complete) your school work when you get older	○	○	○	○	○
2. You will get good grades in middle school	○	○	○	○	○
3. You will pass high school	○	○	○	○	○
4. You will go to college	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix E

Behavioral Consequences

Academic Performance

Bubble your current grades in each class?

	A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**Below D**
Math	○	○	○	○	○
English	○	○	○	○	○
History	○	○	○	○	○
Science	○	○	○	○	○

Engagement

	Very True	Sort of True	Not Very True	Not At All True
1. I work very hard on my schoolwork.	○	○	○	○
2. I don't try very hard in school.	○	○	○	○
3. I pay attention in class.	○	○	○	○
4. I often come to class unprepared.	○	○	○	○

Teachers' Rating of Students' Engagement

	Never	Sometimes	Usually	Always
1. Pays attention	○	○	○	○
2. Likes to figure things out for him/herself	○	○	○	○
3. Concentrates on doing his/her work	○	○	○	○
4. Prefers doing school work that is easy for him/her	○	○	○	○
5. Does more work than is required of him/her	○	○	○	○
6. Works hard in my class	○	○	○	○

Teachers' Rating of Students' Persistence

	Never	Sometimes	Usually	Always
1. Gives up easily on schoolwork	○	○	○	○
2. Asks for help without trying	○	○	○	○
3. Prefers to review work they already know	○	○	○	○

Appendix F

Peer Nominations

About The Kids in My Grade

Which 6th grade students are the **coolest kids**?

You can select as many 6th grade students as you want.

○ Student 1	○ Student 3	○ Student 5
○ Student 2	○ Student 4	○ Student 6

Which 6th grade students are the **care about school and try hard**?

You can select as many 6th grade students as you want.

○ Student 1	○ Student 3	○ Student 5
○ Student 2	○ Student 4	○ Student 6

Which 6th grade students do you **admire and look up to**?

You can select as many 6th grade students as you want.

○ Student 1	○ Student 3	○ Student 5
○ Student 2	○ Student 4	○ Student 6

Appendix G

Treatment Manual for Youth Attribution Program

Let's YAP About the Future
(Youth **A**ttribution **P**rogram**)**
Curriculum

Detailed Description of Program

The lessons in this intervention are aimed at helping students understand that goals and academic outcomes can be obtained through preparation and effort. Students will begin to associate academic failure with lack of preparation (or effort) and not lack of aptitude. Each of the lessons will be aimed at encouraging students to understand that they can reach their future goals through increased effort. Even if they fail, it is only a temporary setback, which can be avoided in the future with adequate preparation (e.g., trying new strategies, trying harder, and trying smarter). These messages are relayed to the students through fun activities and same-race college students and peers sharing their own personal experiences.

Lesson 1- Introduction: My Future Goals

Objectives:

a) Explain the purposes and benefits of the program.
b) Develop group rules and standards.
c) Identify one personal aspiration (or goal) for the future.
d) Share long-term goal.

Activities:

1) Facebook Page.
    a. Information sheet (For students to fill in name, favorite subject, some things they like to do and an aspiration (or goal) for the future.)

Materials Needed:

1) YAP Folder
2) Handout 1-1 Facebook Page. (For students to fill in).
3) Class roll book.
4) Flip Video Camera
5) Flip Tripod
6) Extra Batteries
7) Attendance Jar
8) Attendance Tickets
9) UCLA Gift
10) Fidelity Checklist
11) Pens
12) Lunch-_____

Strategies:

This is an introductory lesson to familiarize students with the sequence, expectations, and format of the program. This lesson also provides you with the opportunity to get to know your students and to share information about yourself with the students. This lesson has a lot of information to get across, but try to use a discussion format as much as possible. Give students a chance to think and respond to what you are saying. Pause after posing questions in order to allow students to think about their answers. Be sure to allow enough time for students to share some of the items listed on their handout.

Procedure Checklist:

☐ **Instructor introduce yourself.** Share with the students who you are and why you are here. Give the students a little information about you. (For example, what college do you attend? How long have you been in school?, etc.)

- □ Be sure to let the students know you are excited to have them participate in this program.

☐ **Introduce the program.** Explain that the class will be meeting together for a special program, two times a week for the next three weeks. Explain:

- □ "Title of this program is LET'S YAP ABOUT THE FUTURE or YAP."
- □ **"Each of you has chosen to be a part of this group and we are very excited to work with all of you. In this program you will interact with _____ and me for 6 days and we will talk about your future goals and how to reach those goals. We will also share our experiences of how we got to college.** It is very important to us that you participate each day, because your feedback and participation will help us provide and improve this program for other 6th graders like you in the future. We expect you to try your hardest, take part in discussions whenever you can, and participate in all activities."
- □ **"Remember it's only for 6 days and we meet on _____ and _____."**

☐ Attendance & Pass Out Lunches

- □ "So each time you come we want you to first grab a ticket and put your name on the back and put it in this bucket. Also make sure to get here early so you can grab your lunch and start eating before we get started with our activity of the day. Each time you come you will have a chance to win some cool gifts (including the possibility of winning a new Ipod shuffle). These gifts will be given on top of the other gifts you will get in this program. Also remember everyone will receive $10.00, a UCLA Folder and a trip to UCLA."

☐ **Starter Question:** "How many of you have thought about your future and what you want to become (your future career goals)?"

- □ "So as I said before, we will talk about how to reach those goals, starting now and into the future. The program is being developed to help students obtain their goals and become successful in school and in life."
- □ "Today we will begin by introducing ourselves and getting to know each other."

☐ **Activity - Facebook Page**: "How many of you have or know someone who has a Facebook page? Why do you think people create Facebook pages? Today I want you all to fill out a Facebook Page. I brought with me a Facebook Page Handout, so I can learn a little more about you."

- □ Allow the students time to fill out the Handout 1-1 Facebook Page. Be sure to inform the students that this is a way to get to know them and to be able to incorporate some of the things they like (along with their future goals) into this program.
- □ "Okay before we share our Facebook pages with everyone lets go over a few group guidelines."

☐ **Group Guidelines**. Introduce and discuss rules. Explain that we have to make sure everyone has a chance to talk and will feel okay about sharing what they think and feel about things. So we need to first establish some ground rules.

- □ **Have students share their rule on Handout 1**-1, Group Guidelines.
- □ "All groups have rules. Most kids even have rules for their room. Such as please *knock before you enter*. How many of you have this rule at home? Or ask me before you use my stuff?"
- □ " What did you write as a good rule for this group? "
- □ **"**Here are a few others to help us work well together and have a good group!"
    - Only one person talking at a time. Wait your turn.
    - Listen to other people. Give them your full attention.
    - Participate.
- □ "Okay, let's remember our guidelines as we begin our first activity and share our Facebook pages."

☐ **Activity - Facebook Page** (continued)

- □ "The first thing we need to do is get to know each other better. I know many of you may already know each other, but I would like to get to know you as well and I'm sure there is much more you can learn about your fellow classmates. To do that we'll go around the circle, and each person will tell his/her 1. name, 2. one thing they like to do, and 3. what they would like to be when they grow up. "
- □ "But there is one trick to our sharing… You will tell us two truths and one item that is made up and we have to guess which is true and which is not true."
- □ "Once again you will tell us your name, one thing you like to do, and what you would like to be when you grow up. "
- □ The instructor will start… List your name, your favorite subject, one thing you like to do and what you would like to be when you grow up.

☐ **YAP it Out:** Explain that after each session we will leave students with something to think about outside of the program or to do before our next session. This will be to help them think about their goals when they are away from the program and we hope that students will share their answer to the question when they return to the program the next day.

- □ "Today's YAP IT Out question is…What is one thing you can do **now** to reach your future goal?"

☐ **Gift Drawing**

☐ **If extra time:** Ask students to go into more detail about why they want to be a (….) when they grow up.

☐ **<u>Reiterate the purpose of the program.</u>**

- □ "I really hope that you will enjoy this program!"
- □ "This program will encourage you to think about future goals and how to obtain your future goals. Later in the program you will also have the opportunity to interact with college students who will share their experiences of how they obtained their goals.

<u>"Okay remember we meet for 6 days on ____ and _____. I will see you _____!</u>

Lesson 2 - Using Effort To Reach My Goals

Objectives:

a) Define effort.
b) Share steps for reaching goals.
c) Identify one short-term goal.
d) Identify students' reasons or attributes for failure or not reaching their goals.

Activities:

1) List a short-term goal for this school year that will help you reach your future career goal.
2) Name the Top 5 Reasons Students Said They Did Not Meet Their Goal of Getting Good Grades (Student Feud)

Materials Needed:

1) YAP Folder.
2) Short-Term Goal Evaluation Poster
3) Name the Top 5 Reasons Students Said They Did Not Meet Their Goal of Getting Good Grades (Student Feud)- Poster
4) Class roll
5) Flip Video Camera
6) Flip Tripod
7) Extra Batteries
8) Attendance jar
9) Attendance tickets
10) UCLA Gift – Button
11) Fidelity Checklist
12) Pens
13) Lunch - _____

Strategies:

This is the second of six lessons in YAP. The main objective of this lesson is to define effort and to learn that in order to reach our goals, we must put forth effort. Students will learn that it is important to set goals and determine ways to reach them. This lesson introduces one of the main ideas of attribution theory, by suggesting to students that through preparation and effort we can obtain our goals. In this lesson, all students should set a realistic and relevant goal for the year that will help them obtain their future goal. Since the following lessons will build on the focus and core of this lesson, extra care should be taken to be certain each student understands each activity. This is a rather long lesson so pay close attention to the time and keep a rather quick pace.

Procedure Checklist:

☐ Attendance & Pass Out Lunches

- □ Remind students to place their ticket in the bucket. Also remind them to get there early so they can grab lunch and start eating before we get started with our activity of the day. Make sure they know that each time they come they will have a chance to win some cool gifts (including the possibility of winning a new Ipod shuffle). This gift will be given on top of the other gifts they will receive in this program. Also remember everyone will receive $10.00, a UCLA Folder and a trip to UCLA.

☐ **Recap of last lesson.** Remind students of what we discussed in the last lesson.

- □ Talk about Group Guidelines. Ask a couple of students to share one of the group guidelines.
- □ Ask students if they can share anything about their classmates. Teacher can also share things that she/he remembers about the students.

☐ **Starter Question:** "For the last session, I asked you what is one thing you can do **now** to reach your future goal?

- □ Start by allowing students time to define goal. Then verbally ask students to describe why goals are important.
- □ "**But before we share, can you all tell me …**What is a goal?"
    - Try to elicit responses, such as a goal is something that you want to reach, to achieve; some state or object or action, something you want to accomplish or attain.
- □ Have students share answers to YAP It Out.
- □ "Based on your answers we are going to come up with a short-term goal for this school year that will help you get to your future career goal."
    - Remind students that we also discussed last time what we wanted to be.
- □ "We are going to come up with one realistic short-term goal that will help you achieve your future goal." Tell the students that this should be a goal that they

can complete this year such as, “turn my homework in on time”; “ask questions when I don’t understand”.

- □ Allow students to share their short-term goal with the other students by writing it on the **Short-Term Goal Evaluation Poster.**
- □ “Can anyone name one thing that all these things have in common? Or one thing that you all must do to complete these goals.”
    - See if student’s recognize that most of the items they selected as ways to reach their goals involve **effort**
- □ “What we think all these things have in common is **Effort.”**
    - “You have to put forth effort to do all these things.”
- □ Ask students “what is Effort?”
    - “The definition is trying. Setting goals gets us nowhere if we don’t put action behind the decision. We have to actually exert some effort. A goal that takes almost no effort doesn’t get you very far and you may not learn anything. It is important to put in effort, it is important to try.”

3) **Activity** - Name the Top 5 Reasons Students Said They Did Not Meet Their Goal of Getting Good Grades (Student Feud)
    - □ “Okay, now that we have set our goals, let’s play a game. When we asked most students what they could do now to reach their future goal of going to college or becoming a doctor, lawyer, teacher or athlete…they said, “get good grades”. Well this may be the same or different than what you put for your short-term goal, but I think we can all agree that this is a good short-term goal.”
        - Note that we need good grades to pass the next grade and get into college.
        - (If some students want to be athletes/dancers: Say “Remember even athletes and dancers go to college”).
    - □ “So we asked middle school students like you, what is the #1 reason that kept you from achieving your goal of getting good grades? Today in teams you are going to guess what they said.
    - □ “How many of you heard of the game Family Feud? Well this is Student Feud.”
        - Explain how to play Student Feud (Instructions at the end of the lesson).
        - Split students up into two groups and begin playing the game.

- **Play the game.**
- Once the game is over explain to students why you agree that Lack of Effort is the #1 reason students may not meet their goals.

□ "I'm sure many of you can agree with some of these reasons right? How many of you have failed because the test was just too hard? Or you felt the teacher didn't like you."

□ "We agree with the students who took this survey that Effort (I did not try hard enough) is the #1 reason most students do not reach their goals, because although you may not be able to control how much your teacher likes you or how hard the test is, you can control how much you study or try on the test. Also, you are all smart enough to succeed on a test and I know sometimes it may not feel like it or things may seem too hard, but we all feel that way at times. I even feel that way sometimes, but you have to know that this just means you have to put forth more effort to reach your goals! Through preparation and effort we can obtain our goals."

☐ **YAP IT OUT:** Explain after each session we will leave students with something to think about or do before our next session to help them think about their goals when they are away.

□ "Now that you have a short-term goal, try to complete your new short-term goal and share with us next time what happened?"

- "What happened when you tried to complete your short-term goal?"

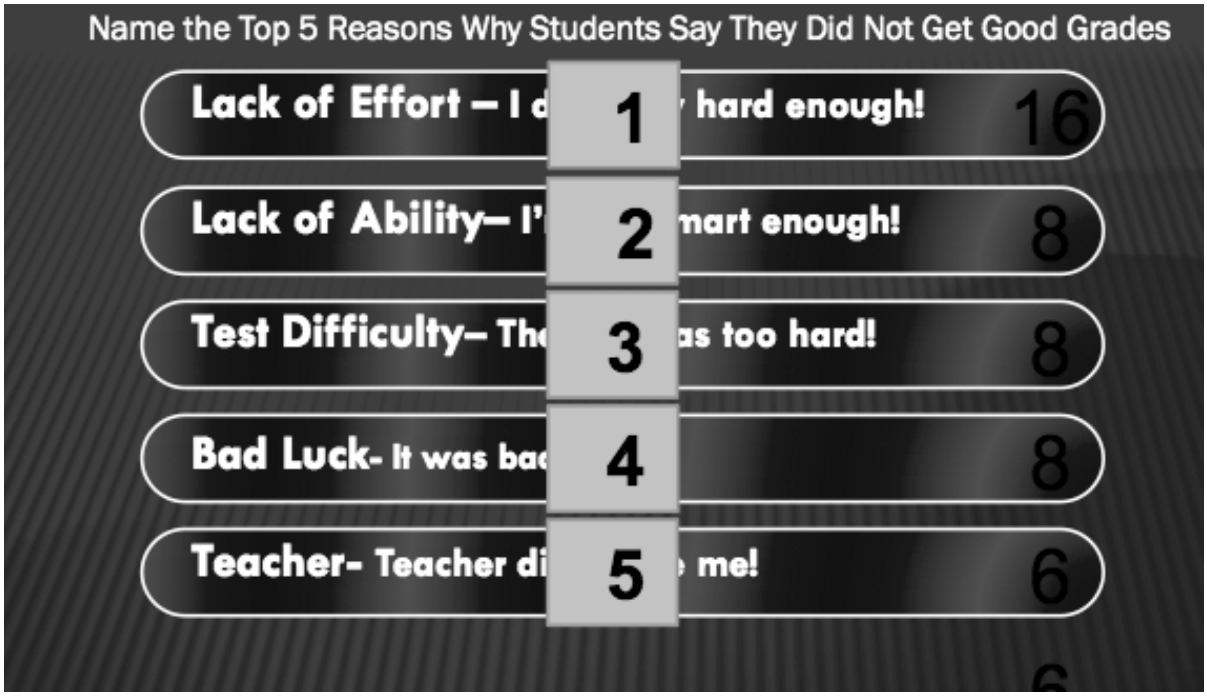
☐ **Gift Drawing**

☐ **Okay remember we meet on _____! See you then.**

□ If time: remind students of YAP It out Question.

How to play Family Feud.

1. Divide students into two teams and have the teams face off
2. The team that gives the answer that was chosen by most students gets more points (as you will see on the power point.)
3. The team that beats their hand on the desk the fastest gets to give the first answer choice
4. At the end of the game, the team with the most points wins.


Name the Top 5 Reasons Why Students Say They Did Not Get Good Grades
Lack of Effort – I d
hard enough!
16
1
Lack of Ability– I'
mart enough!
8
2
Test Difficulty– The
as too hard!
8
3
Bad Luck- It was bac
8
4
Teacher- Teacher di
me!
6
5
6

Lesson 3 – What happens if we don't reach our goal when we put forth effort?

Objectives:

a) Specify four examples of effortful behaviors that improve performance and help achieve positive academic outcomes (direct effects of effort).

Activities:

1) Effortful Strategies – Charades Game

Materials Needed:

1) YAP Folder.
2) Short-Term Goal Evaluation Poster
3) Four Effort Strategy Cards – For Charades Game
4) Class roll
5) Flip Video Camera
6) Flip Tripod
7) Extra Batteries
8) Attendance jar
9) Attendance tickets
10) UCLA Gift – UCLA Cup
11) Fidelity Checklist
12) Pens
13) Lunch - _____

Strategies:

This lesson will introduce the focus of attribution theory, by suggesting to students that unexpected outcomes (e.g., academic setback/failures) are not stable and can be altered through increased effort and using effortful strategies. Since students' personal goals and effort are the focus and core of this lesson, make sure that each student understands what they need to do on each assignment.

Procedure Checklist:

☐ Attendance & Pass Out Lunches

- □ Remind students to place their ticket in the bucket. Also remind them to get there early so they can grab lunch and start eating before we get started with our activity of the day. Make sure they know that each time they come they will have a chance to win some cool gifts (including the possibility of winning a new Ipod shuffle). This gift will be given on top of the other gifts they will receive in this program. Also remember everyone will receive $10.00, a UCLA Folder and a trip to UCLA.

☐ **Recap of last lesson.** Remind students of what we discussed in the last lesson.

- □ "We defined goal and effort. Does anybody remember the definitions for goal and effort?"
- □ "Last week we also set some short term goals. How did we do on our short-term goals? Let's see how each of you did this week on your short term goal."
- □ Have students place sticker on the **short-term goal evaluation poster.**
    - Stickers based on a 6 rated scale ranging from *very good* to *not good at all*. Associated with a different smiley face.
- □ "Last week we also identified reasons for why students' may not meet their goals or do well on their assignments and we all agreed that *I didn't try hard enough* was the #1 answer."
- □ Acknowledge that students at least tried to put forth effort on their short-term goal.

☐ **Starter Question:** "How many of you have ever failed at something after you tried really hard to do well? Either you failed an assignment or you didn't do too well during a game? Maybe you studied or you practiced very hard? What did you do for the next assignment or game?"

- □ Explain to the students that even sometimes when we put forth effort we still may fail at our goals, but it's important that you try to change the way you approach or reach your goal. You can do this by giving more or increased effort.

- "Sometimes in school we get bad grades or we don't meet our goals, but what's important is what we do after this outcome to make sure we pass or meet our goal the next time! Never give up."

☐ **Activity** – Effort Charades

- "We believe there are four ways that students your age can increase their effort at school to change a negative/bad outcome (such as getting a bad grade on test or homework)."

  - "To remember these four strategies we are going to play charades. Charades is a word guessing game. I'm going to split you up into four groups and each group will act out one of the strategies and help the rest of the group guess the strategy."

  - "I will give you one hint. Each strategy begins with "try" and we know try = effort."

  - Each group will have 2 minutes to try to get the group to act it out.

  - **Give each group one effort strategy card.**

  - Allow all groups 1 minute to come up with how they will act out their strategy. Remind students that they cannot talk.

  - Then ask for volunteers to start.

  - Once all the groups have finished ask everyone to repeat the four strategies.

  - "Let's take a moment to repeat these four strategies."

  - "When you fail at something or don't reach a goal you set, remember this does not mean you are not smart and that you can't change your grade or reach your goal. It also doesn't mean that you should give up. This means you have to

    1. Try harder
    2. Try smarter
    3. Try a new way

4. Try again (Or simply just try again)"

☐ **YAP IT OUT:** Explain after each session we will leave students with something to think about or do before our next session to help them think about their goals when they are away.

- "For this assignment, you are going to perform one of the strategies discussed in a class of your choice. We would like for you to try out one of the strategies on an assignment/test that you are struggling with. Then next week come and share if the strategy worked for you and tell us which strategy you used."
- Provide examples such as did you ask your teacher if you could redo your homework or did you try harder by paying attention in class?
- "Be ready to share your story with your classmates."

□ If time: Ask students to list which strategy they will use and for what class. Ask students to think of the last assignment or test they did poorly on or didn't do as well as they would have liked. Ask students to provide an example of how they could use one of the strategies to help change that outcome.

☐ **Gift Drawing**

☐ **Okay remember we meet on _____! See you then.**

Lesson 4- Personal Experiences - If first you don't succeed, try, try again!

Objectives:

A) Recognize the role of effort in effecting change;
B) Evaluating sample life experiences to determine the influence of effort on outcomes;

Activities:

1) Famously Successful African Americans Who Failed At First –Wall of Fame

Materials Needed:

1) YAP Folder.
2) Short-Term Goal Evaluation Poster
3) Frames and Bios for Wall of Fame
4) Class roll
5) Flip Video Camera
6) Flip Tripod
7) Extra Batteries
8) Attendance jar
9) Attendance tickets
10) UCLA Gift –
11) Fidelity Checklist
12) Pens
13) Lunch - _____

Strategies:

This is the fourth of six lessons in YAP. Much of this lesson includes a group activity. The basic point of this lesson is for students to understand that they must keep trying even in the face of failure. The point to be emphasized is that if students do not stay persistent, failure outcomes will not change. However, after persisting and trying new strategies, students can make progress that brings them to a point where success is possible. We illustrate these main points by providing examples of famous people who failed at first, but continued to pursue their dreams and succeed.

Procedure Checklist:

☐ Attendance & Pass Out Lunches

- □ Remind students to place their ticket in the bucket. Also remind them to get there early so they can grab lunch and start eating before we get started with our activity of the day. Make sure they know that each time they come they will have a chance to win some cool gifts (including the possibility of winning a new Ipod shuffle). This gift will be given on top of the other gifts they will receive in this program. Also remember everyone will receive $10.00, a UCLA Folder and a trip to UCLA.

☐ **Recap of last lesson.** Remind students of what we discussed in the last lesson.

- □ "Last session we talked about four ways that students your age can increase their effort at school to change a negative/bad outcome. Who remembers the four strategies we talked about last time?"
- □ "We also asked you to try out one of the strategies on an assignment/test that you were struggling with. Come and share if the strategy worked for you and tell us which strategy you used. Let's see how things went."

☐ **Starter Question/Icebreaker:**

- □ "How many of you think most famous people or stars we know like Lebron James or Beyonce wake up one day and they are famous? How many of you think that they worked hard for it? How many of you think that they may have struggled or even failed at something before?"
- □ Remind students that we previously discussed at some point everyone fails or doesn't meet their goal, but it's what they do after that is important.

☐ **Activity - Famously Successful African Americans Who Failed At First**.

- □ Share with the students that this lesson is titled "If first you don't succeed try, try, again!"

- □ "Sometimes we think we are the only person or student who doesn't reach our goals or succeed in school, but the truth is that we all struggle or have setbacks at some point."
- □ "Today we will learn about famous people who have failed before succeeding so we can see other examples."
- □ Start by explaining to the students that even some of the people who we think of as famous celebrities (stars) or role models fail at some point. In this activity you will have the opportunity to read and learn about some of these individuals and then share with your classmates about these people.
    - Hand out bios. Make sure each student gets a bio. Have students read their bio and then guess which person it belongs to on the wall.
    - Note: If there are more bios than students you can play and/or have the research assistant play.
- □ Ask students to stand near the picture that they think matches their bio description.
- □ Once all the students are under their correct picture then have each student read his or her bio out to the class.
    - If time: Ask students to identify or share what type of strategy they think the person used to overcome their setback.
- □ **After students have finished reading their bios,** ask students how many of them were surprised about the stories they read? How many of you would have guessed that someone like Michael Jordan or Oprah Winfrey ever failed or struggled with something?
    - **Be sure to reiterate to the students the goal of this activity.**
        - "Each of these people have one thing in common they didn't give up they kept trying!"

☐ **YAP IT OUT:** Explain after each session we will leave students with something to think about or do before our next session to help them think about their goals when they are away.

- □ "For this weeks YAP IT OUT, we want you to think about a time in middle school or over the past few weeks when you were trying to do something in school and it didn't work out right away but you kept trying and/or you changed your strategy. Finally you got some place and changed your negative outcome to a positive outcome. Think about what kinds of things you did to get the outcome you wanted."
- □ If time: Provide an example to the students or ask students to provide an example.
- □ "We want you to share your story next week in your very own *I Can Do It* news cast"
- □ "Each of you will have the opportunity to record your classmates telling their story and providing advice they would like to give to future incoming 6th grade students.**"**

☐ **Gift Drawing**

☐ **Okay remember we meet on _____! See you then.**

- □ **"**We are glad that you all are thinking about the future and your goals. Next week we will have you share your own *I Can Do It* story."

Lesson 5- Reflecting on My Future Goals and Effort

Objectives:

a) Students will review what they have learned in previous lessons.
b) Provide personal examples of how putting forth more effort changed a negative outcome into a positive outcome.

Activities:

1) My Very Own I Can Do It Story – News Cast

Materials:

1) YAP Folder.
2) My Very Own I Can Do It Story – News Cast (Script)
3) Backdrop – My Very Own I Can Do It Story
4) Class roll
5) Flip Video Camera
6) Flip Tripod
7) Extra Batteries
8) Attendance jar
9) Attendance tickets
10) UCLA Gift –
11) Fidelity Checklist
12) Pens
13) Lunch - _____

Strategies:

This is the fifth lesson of YAP. The point of this lesson is to recap the main ideas of the program and what we hope the students have gained from the program. In this lesson students will have the opportunity to share their own experiences, which highlight some of the main lessons in the program (e.g., unexpected outcomes are not stable and can be altered through increased effort and using effortful strategies).

Procedure Checklist:

☐ **Recap of last week's lesson.** Remind students of what we discussed in the last lessons.

- "Last week we learned about famous people who struggled or failed at something before they succeeded; but we also learned that they never gave up and they put forth more effort to meet their goals."
- "Setting goals get us nowhere if we don't put action behind the decision."
- "We talked about four ways that students your age can increase their effort at school to change a negative/bad outcome."
- "Your YAP It Out was to think about a time over the past few weeks when you were trying to do something in school and it didn't work out right away but you kept trying and/or you changed your strategy. Finally you got somewhere and changed your negative outcome to a positive outcome. In other words, tell us about a time recently when you kept trying by putting forth more effort and it resulted in a positive outcome."

☐ **Starter Question/Icebreaker:**

- □ "How many of you have been on TV before or have been interviewed?"
  - "If you have not been on TV or completed an interview, I'm sure you have seen an interview on TV before."

☐ **Activity – My Very Own: I Can Do It Story**. This activity will allow students to share their own personal experiences of overcoming failure or academic setbacks. Students will share about a personal experience where putting forth effort after enduring an unexpected outcome/failure led to a positive outcome. Students will describe the effortful behaviors and the outcome. Students will also have the opportunity to share their advice to future students.

- □ "Each of you will have the opportunity to interview one of your classmates about their story and ask them for one piece of advice they may have for students coming to middle school next year."
- □ "You will tell us about a personal experience where putting forth effort after enduring an unexpected outcome/failure led to a positive outcome. Share how long you tried before you succeeded. What kinds of things did you try that helped you get to the outcome you wanted?"
- □

- □ Allow each student 1 min to tell their story.
- □ "Before you begin one of your classmates will introduce you saying: "Today we are here live with … and s/he would like to share his/her I Can Do It Story with you…"
- □ "When you finish with your story provide one piece of advice for 6th graders who will be coming to your school next year."

☐ At the end of the interviews be sure to tell the students that they did a wonderful job.

- "Great Job! Each of you provided an example of how you can reach your goals through putting forth effort. If that doesn't work you have to try a different strategy. But if you never give up, negative outcomes will change."

☐ **YAP IT OUT:** Explain that after each session we will leave students with something to think about or do before our next session to help them think about their goals when they are away.

- "What steps do you need to take to get to my future career goal? In the beginning of our program each of you mentioned what you wanted to be when you grew up. Tell us what do you need to do to get there."
  - "If you have no idea then ask parents, teachers and friends."
  - You have stated one thing you can do now to reach your goal, but what are the next steps? For example do you need to go to college; do you need to get good grades?"

☐ "Next time we meet we will (have guests who will share their) share with you the steps they took to reach their goals of going to college."

☐ We will see you_____!!

Lesson 6- What is the College Experience Like?

Objectives:

a) College students will visit and explain personal experiences of how they obtained their goal of going to college.
b) College students will provide examples of effortful behavior leading to success.
c) College students will also share experiences of how active preparation (or putting forth effort) changed unexpected or failure outcomes.
d) Students will complete an evaluation of the program.

Activities:

1) Students will come up with one question to ask the college panel.
2) Students will share what they learned from the college students about how to reach future goals.

Materials Needed:

1) YAP Folder.
2) Evaluation
3) Sample Questions (optional)
4) Class roll
5) Flip Video Camera
6) Flip Tripod
7) Extra Batteries
8) Attendance jar
9) Attendance tickets
10) UCLA Gift – Ipod Shuffle
11) Ending Gift - $10.00 & College Folder
12) Fidelity Checklist
13) Pens
14) Lunch - _____

Strategies:

This is the sixth and final lesson in YAP. During this lesson students have the opportunity to interact with college students. The point of this lesson is to show students the importance of setting goals by providing them with real-life examples of people who put forth effort and set goals to help them reach future goals (e.g., going to college).

Procedure Checklist:

☐ **Recap of last lesson.** Remind students of what we discussed in the last lessons.
- □ "Last time we shared our own I Can Do It Stories through our newscast."
  - Explain to the students that their stories highlighted:
    1. We must put forth effort to reach our goals.
    2. With increased effort we can achieve our goals and change unwanted outcomes.
    3. We have learned strategies to increase our effort.
- □ "This week we have guests who will share their stories."

☐ **Starter Question/Icebreaker: "**How many of you would like to go to college some day?"

☐ **Activity:** What is the college experience like?
- □ **"**Today we will listen to college students who reached their goal of going to college and listen to how they obtained their goals. "
  - Allow the panel to introduce themselves.
  - Then allow students to ask their questions to the panel.
  - If these questions don't come up then be sure to ask them:

    - "We have been learning about trying and putting forth effort even in the face of failure. Can you think of a time when you failed but you tried a new strategy, tried harder, tried smarter and/or tried again and succeeded? "
    - "When you were in the 6th grade was there anything that you did that you felt helped you obtain your goal of going to college?"

☐ Thank the panelist for sharing with the students.

☐ Evaluation –
- □ "Since this is our last week we want you to complete a quick survey about your experiences in the program—what you did and didn't like about the program. This is your chance to grade us."

☐ **Reiterate the purpose of the program.**
- □ "We are glad that you all are thinking about your future goals and have joined us during your lunch. We have had a great time with you and we hope you really enjoyed our program! Also, later today you will have a chance to take another survey and get $2.00 during _____ period."

- Before students leave pass out their $10.00 bill and UCLA college folder to show how much we really appreciate each student participating. Also complete the iPod shuffle drawing.
- "Also, remember that in March we will take you on a field trip to UCLA so that you can see our campus and what college life is really like! Thank YOU ALL!"

Appendix H

Student Evaluation of the Program

Date: _____

Please answer as you really think.

HOW MUCH DID YOU…	**Not Much**	**A Little**	**A Lot**
1. like being in this special program?	○	○	○
2. you like the prizes?	○	○	○
3. like spending time with the group leader?	○	○	○
4. learn new skills?	○	○	○
5. feel you learned important things?	○	○	○
6. learn things that will help you do better in school?	○	○	○
7. learn things that will help you in class?	○	○	○
8. Have you been using the skills that you learned in our special program?	○	○	○
9. Was the program easy to stick with?	○	○	○
10. Has the program made a difference in your grades?	○	○	○
	No	**Maybe**	**Yes**
11. Would you recommend this program to your friends?	○	○	○
12. Is this a program that you would do again, if you needed it?	○	○	○
	Hardly Ever	**Sometimes**	**All The Time**
13. I did my best in the program.	○	○	○
14. I tried in the program.	○	○	○
15. I completed the YAP IT OUT portion of the program.	○	○	○

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about our special program?

_____

_____

Appendix I

Procedure Checklist

Instructions: Please fill out the fidelity checklist based on your observation of the lesson. Please be as honest as possible, because your comments and feedback will help with future lessons and instruction.

Lesson # _____ Date: _____			
Curriculum			
	Yes		No
1. Did the YAP instructor cover the four main areas of the curriculum?			
1a. Recap of Last Weeks Lesson (Only for Lesson 2-6)			
1b. Starter Question			
1c. Activity			
1d. YAP It Out			
Delivery			
	Yes	Some of the time	No
2. Was the lesson implemented to the students engaging?			
3. Were students involved?			
4. Was the YAP Instructor knowledgeable of the lesson?			
5. Lesson was clear and understandable to the students?			
Other Comments:			

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