Summer 6-16-2018

Teacher Practices to Help Alternative Education Students

Angela Daws

Teacher Practices to Help Alternative Education Students Transition Back to Their Zoned School

Angela Leigh Daws

Kennesaw State University

May 2018

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in the

Bagwell College of Education

Susan Stockdale, PhD, Chair

Melissa Driver, PhD, Committee Member

Arvin D. Johnson, EdD, Committee Member

Dedication

When I began this adventure several years ago, I was a single mom with young children. My girls have watched me balance family, school, and career for over 9 years. As I take a step back and reflect, I have learned to admire their understanding and unconditional love. Therefore, I dedicate this dissertation to my two girls, Hayley and Abby. I love you more than the sand on the beach and more than stars in the sky. You both are my world!

Acknowledgments

Without the guidance of my committee, I could not have completed this journey. I am so grateful for their dedication to my success. Their encouragement and sound advice kept me focused until the end. The feedback and recommendations gave me valuable insight into the world of research. Also, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Jorrín for numerous reviews and correspondences. He was a tremendous help throughout the process.

To my extended family, thank you for supporting me through each class and research process. My girls and I love each of you and could not have completed without your help. You are truly a huge puzzle piece to my success.

Lastly, I would like to thank my work family who supported my endeavor. The continued support and leadership will always be remembered. My coworkers who participated in this study showed constant professionalism. The dedication to your students has made a huge impact on my life.

Abstract

The problem addressed by this study is that alternative schools have a high recidivism rate, due in part to a difficult transition for students back to their traditional, zoned school. The purpose of this study was to identify practices of experienced alternative school teachers perceived as helping students transition from the alternative school setting to the traditional school setting, as well as challenges teachers face. To identify these practices (and challenges), data were collected from 5 teachers at a disciplinary alternative school by surveys, interviews, and observations. Three research questions guided this study:

1. How do experienced alternative high school teachers build positive relationships with students?
2. What practices do experienced alternative high school teachers implement to support students' successful transition back to zoned schools?
3. What challenges do experienced alternative high school teachers have when helping transition students back to their zoned schools?

Teachers in a disciplinary alternative school have an opportunity to educate students socially and academically. Challenges included lack of social skills among students and parents, challenges related to mentoring, lack of parental involvement, and lack of communication with the zoned school staff. Teacher-identified themes indicated students need social skills education and positive, caring teacher support. Strategies to help students transition successfully include providing adult mentors, developing a transition plan with all stakeholders, and encouraging extracurricular activities at the zoned school.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Think about the problem, every challenge, we face. The solution to each starts with education."

– George H. W. Bush, 1991

The words of former President George H. W. Bush (1991) are quoted above to signify the importance of educating alternative school teachers regarding successfully transitioning students from an alternative setting back to their zoned school. Zoned schools are the traditional schools to which students are assigned based on location. Students are placed in the alternative school setting of this study because of disruptive behaviors at their zoned school. Alternative schools for students with behavioral issues are designed to serve students who disrupt the traditional school setting. Alternative schools are aligned with the state curriculum in academic areas. Teachers at the alternative school offer students from various backgrounds a second chance after being expelled from the zoned school.

I have served over 9 years in the alternative school setting. Over these years I observed the relationships between students and teachers. I also realized how beneficial teachers became when transitioning students back to their zoned school after alternative school. From my perspective, students attending the alternative school needed additional teacher support. However, zoned school teachers could not make a connection with students because of behavioral issues within larger classrooms. I became intrigued by how teachers can support students at an alternative school and help them transition back to a traditional school setting.

Staff at the alternative school where I serve try to focus on creating close relationships among all stakeholders. Teachers, administration, and staff members build trust and create a unique bond with students at the alternative school. I began thinking about my students losing that connection when they return to their zoned school. The staff at the alternative school are

equipped through professional learning and conferences to teach at-risk students. The main purpose of our school is to send students back equipped to succeed in the mainstream school system. Half of the time, our students return; some feel more comfortable in an alternative setting.

My goal is to explore the ways I can help at-risk students transition successfully and succeed at the zoned schools. Alternative schools tend to have smaller classroom sizes and encourage students to engage in productive community activities. A successful transition requires involvement of community, teachers, administration, and family. Most schools have support staff for students who are at risk at failing or dropping out of high school, but few resources are available for the transition from a behavioral alternative school to the zoned school. Lack of communication between schools could be the source of the problem. Support from teachers at both the alternative and the zoned school could help students succeed in a traditional school setting. By examining different strategies, I hope to give all stakeholders practices to help these students succeed.

Teacher support can be created through individual teachers' interactions with students (Bartlett, Holditch-Davis, & Belyea, 2005). Classroom settings and atmosphere also play a role in creating positive teacher support. Positive teacher support can provide students with a positive school experience impacting student achievement academically and socially. Research has shown forming positive engagements with classroom teachers can create success beyond the classroom (Hallinan, 2008). Connell and Wellborn (1991) described creating support for students as addressing needs related to competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Teacher support of students in these areas helps increase student motivation and engagement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Klem & Connell, 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Numerous students for various reasons are unsuccessful in the traditional school environment. Although teachers may identify the students who are struggling academically or socially, teachers are often restricted because of time constraints or other duties, which hinder their ability to find solutions to students' challenges. Struggling students may repeatedly exhibit disciplinary issues. Often, these issues stem from their poor academic abilities or behavioral problems at their zoned school or elsewhere in the community. Alternative education is a necessity for these students.

Experts in the field have suggested that positive adult support, such as in alternative settings, can be a useful tool in reaching students at high risk of not completing high school (Carter, 2004; Daloz, 2004). Often, students with behavioral issues need positive adult role models for additional help in achieving academic success (Carter, 2004; Daloz, 2004). Students with teachers who exhibit a caring and respectful attitude tend to do much better in school (Downey, 2008). Caring and respectful teachers have been characterized by their willingness to listen attentively, provide encouragement, hold their students to high expectations, and simply enjoy the company of their students (Downey, 2008).

Conrath (1988) purported that youth who are at a socioeconomic disadvantage may use an uncaring attitude for self-protection. Effective teachers can counteract this attitude by first refusing such an attitude in their classroom and then by letting their students know they take their business of teaching and learning very seriously (Downey, 2008). These teachers use flexibility in their approaches toward teaching and learning and are cognizant of their students' backgrounds and needs.

In this doctoral dissertation, I explored the practices teachers at an alternative school used to transition students back to their zoned school. This particular school serves all middle and

high school students within a middle Georgia school district who have been expelled from their zoned school.

Students attending alternative school for behavioral infractions from their zoned school experience difficulties ranging from emotional distress to behavioral issues (Morris, 2000). Some students have a difficult time transitioning back to the zoned school (Morris, 2000). Once students return to the zoned school from the alternative school under study, teacher support is typically limited due to a larger school environment. To help eliminate classroom disruption, a system of teacher support could help avoid repeated offenses due to behavior (Morris, 2000). Educators of students lacking adequate social and academic skills become frustrated and mentally exhausted (Morris, 2000). Many years of witnessing the struggles at-risk students face daily have prompted me to research how I can create a teacher support system to help students succeed when they return to their zoned school.

A qualitative case study was used to obtain a thorough view of teacher practices to address student needs in alternative education and help them transition back to traditional school settings. The teacher–student relationship can help students grow personally through an increased sense of self-worth, competence, and self-efficacy (Kram, 1985). Teacher behaviors that support successful student transition back to zoned schools also may increase student intrinsic motivation. Teaching a student with disciplinary issues how to become intrinsically motivated can be a positive step to form teacher–student relationships. When students become intrinsically motivated, students start to believe in their ability to succeed and continue to make improvements academically when they return their traditional zoned school (Levin & Nolan, 2010). Self-motivated students think about consequences of negative behaviors in the classroom before disciplinary issues occur.

Statement of Problem

The problem addressed by this study is that alternative schools have a high recidivism rate, due in part to a difficult transition for students back to their traditional, zoned school. According to the Georgia Department of Education (2017), disciplinary alternative schools offer students a different education within the state content standards. Approximately 432 alternative or nontraditional school settings serve students in the state of Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). Disciplinary alternative schools were solely created to help zoned schools maintain order and a safe learning environment for all learners. Although alternative schools have been successful, these schools have high recidivism rates (Slaten, Irby, Tate, & Rivera, 2015)

However, little published literature has discussed whether alternative schools are equipping students with skills to transition back to their zoned school. What can alternative school teachers do to increase student success when they return? How do teachers build positive relationships with students in alternative schools? What challenges do they face helping transition students back to their zoned schools?

Teacher–student relationships support students in the school and classroom. Researchers have demonstrated the positive impact of the interpersonal relationship between a positive adult role model and students when the adult and students interact daily (Bartlett et al., 2005; Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002). Positive relationships may result in a positive experience at an alternative school, resulting in lower recidivism rates (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). As a teacher in an alternative school for over 9 years dealing with behavioral at-risk students, my goal is to reach students academically and give them the skills needed to succeed once they return to their zone school. Examining experienced, highly qualified teachers'

practices to support students' successful transition back to zoned schools could yield valuable insight for educators trying to cultivate more positive teacher–student relationships to help improve students' transition back to a traditional school setting.

Schools around the country deal with disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Researchers for years have developed new theories on why students interrupt a classroom and how educators can improve classroom management (Braden & Smith, 2006). At-risk youth whose teachers exhibit a caring attitude and respect for all students do much better in school (Downey, 2008). Caring teachers are characterized by their willingness to listen attentively, provide encouragement, hold their students to high expectations, and simply enjoy the company of their students (Downey, 2008). At the alternative school, teachers delve into behaviors and solutions to help students considered at risk of disciplinary referrals. Students attending the alternative school are likely to require teacher support and positive teacher–student relationships. One goal at the alternative school is to help students successfully return to their zoned school and then sustain appropriate behavior.

Very little published literature from previous research has shown teacher perspectives and experiences in an alternative school that only enrolls students whose behavioral infractions led to expulsion from their traditional schools. Disruptive students expelled from their traditional zoned school lack skills to be successful both socially and academically. Part of the focus of the disciplinary alternative school in this study is to help improve student behavior and academic performance and then help students transition back to their zoned school setting.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to identify practices of experienced alternative school teachers to help students transition from the alternative school setting to the traditional school

setting, as well as challenges teachers face. To identify these practices (and challenges), data were collected from teachers by surveys, interviews, and observations. The disciplinary alternative school is designed to help students expelled from their zoned school become successful both socially and academically. The research from this study may be of value to disciplinary alternative school teachers who desire to reduce recidivism rates. Students returning to their zoned school should be equipped with skills to be successful in the traditional setting. Alternative school educators, zoned school educators, students, administrators, and parents could benefit from the findings of this study.

The alternative school is designed to support students at risk of not completing school because of behavioral issues. To reduce recidivism, alternative school teachers need to understand what skills will help students be successful when they return to the traditional school setting. Creating positive teacher support in a school can be beneficial to students with chronic behavioral issues (Downey, 2008). Students are placed in the alternative school because of numerous behavioral issues or single-factor behavioral infractions. Teacher support at the alternative school can be crucial for students transitioning back to their zoned school.

However, limited published research has provided ways to support students in an alternative school from an alternative school teacher's perspective. Thus, another purpose of this study was to fill this gap in the literature. This study explored teacher practices to support students in transitioning back to the traditional school setting. Teachers from other traditional high schools in Georgia may use findings to develop or implement best practices to help transition alternative school students to zoned schools, potentially reducing recidivism.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

1. How do experienced alternative high school teachers build positive relationships with students?
2. What practices do experienced alternative high school teachers implement to support students' successful transition back to zoned schools?
3. What challenges do experienced alternative high school teachers have when helping transition students back to their zoned schools?

Context

This county's disciplinary alternative school was created for students removed from their zoned school setting because of disciplinary issues within the community or school. This particular alternative school serves a diverse population. The purpose of the disciplinary alternative school is to recognize individual differences and to provide rigorous learning environment for students who were unsuccessful in a traditional school environment. The main goal of the school is to successfully transition students to their traditional zoned school setting. A student required to attend disciplinary alternative school is placed based upon the school board's decision during a school tribunal. Students who have committed serious or chronic misbehavior will go before the school during the tribunal. The length of the stay depends on the severity of the situation and prior history of the student. The school receives students daily, and the student population can range from 140 to over 350 by the end of the semester. Students are still accountable to complete high school graduation requirements set by the state. Enrollment in the alternative school is not optional; students enrolled in the school received expulsion from zoned school. Students attending signed a behavioral contract and attended orientation. The

alternative school provides transportation from the student's zoned school in the morning and back to the zoned school after dismissal.

Participants in this case study were five high school teachers teaching in this alternative school for at least 3 years. Teachers who participated chose to teach students considered at risk of dropping out and with chronic behavioral issues. As Table 1 details, the offenses for students at this alternative school include criminal behaviors outside of school, drugs on school property, fighting, chronic disciplinary issues, bullying, or weapons on school property.

Table 1

Percentage of Type of Offense Resulting in Student Assignment to the Alternative School, 2017

Offense	%
Criminal behavior outside of school	28
Drugs on school property	23
Fighting	16
Chronic disciplinary problem (class/school disruption)	12
Bullying	11
Weapon on school property	10

Significance

Students with chronic behavioral problems in school are at risk for later violent behavior as well as academic failure (McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding, 2010). Research has indicated students who drop out of high school will earn around $9,200 less annually than students who graduate (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). A college graduate will earn from $400,000 (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009) to $670,000 (Stark, Noel, & McFarland, 2015) to over $1 million (Burrus & Roberts, 2012) more than a high school graduate over a lifetime. In the United States alone, an estimated $250 billion is lost annually in earnings, taxes, and social services due to high school dropouts (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009). In Florida and Georgia, in 2007,

over 20% of 16- to 24-year-olds were high school dropouts; national rates were 16% (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009). Burrus and Roberts (2012) pointed out that 70% of prison inmates are high school dropouts. These researchers maintained society cannot afford to ignore this problem any longer, and the costs of implementing preventative programs are far less than the social costs of drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, delinquencies, and school dropouts (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). According to Becker and Luthar (2002), the cost of alternative schools is one sixth the cost of maintaining an uneducated adult and much less than expanding prison or welfare programs.

Rumberger (2013) advocated investing time and money into protecting the needs of the youth who will support a large number of retired individuals in the 21st century. Rumberger also pointed out the critical role youth play in the labor market. The talents found in all young people are critical to the well-being of the economy; however, the numbers entering the labor force are declining, and the numbers of at-risk youth are increasing. Rumberger noted that the problem of at-risk youth not only is a drain on society economically, but also affects national security. If reading skills, unemployment, underage pregnancies, and drug and alcohol abuse numbers do not decline, according to Rumberger, not enough qualified people will remain to preserve the strength and well-being of the United States.

Further, school districts should use strategies based on a careful evaluation of the district's unique circumstances and needs (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). Moreover, every student is different; therefore, what works for one may not work for another. Research findings have suggested school districts have an assortment of intervention strategies to select from for the diverse situations teachers will encounter with students. This solution-oriented approach

involves a proactive stance by administrators, who may recommend determining what the teacher is doing right and using that information to help eliminate the problem (O'Hanlon, 1999).

Early identification of students at risk is critical for successful intervention programs. Even as early as kindergarten, students can be identified who are at risk of dropping out of school (Kronick, 1997). The earlier detected, the better the chances of preventing more dysfunctional behaviors from later developing. Drug abuse, teen pregnancies, and students dropping out of school would be greatly lessened if students were identified early and provided the appropriate intervention (Kronick, 1997). Assessments tools found in the literature varied depending on the age of the student. For instance, the Conners Comprehensive Behavior Rating Scales are used to help detect at-risk students at the elementary level (Conners, 2008). At the middle-school level, reading, mathematical abilities, and monitoring the number of absences are good indicators to identify potential dropouts (Conners, 2008).

The more evidence gathered, the better the chances of identifying the reasons leading a student to drop out of school. Wells (1990) suggested the best ways of gathering information are through checklists, student records, surveys, and exit interviews, with data analysis leading to the appropriate intervention. Many intervention plans are available for students who are at risk of failing and dropping out of school. Further, effective intervention programs are not the work of just one person, but rather the work of a number of individuals and institutions. Interventions often include the cooperative work of students, parents, teachers, school administrators, peer groups, outside agencies, and community (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990). Regardless, intervention plans will not fare well without one key element: high-quality relationships and connectedness (Brendtro et al., 1990).

Fostering a safe and nurturing environment enables students to thrive both emotionally and educationally. Strategies include up-close and personal attention, addressing individual student needs, flexibility, demonstrating equality among ethnic and racial groups, getting parents involved, knowing that each person is unique, and making sure expectations for the individual student are harmonious with the needs of that student (Kronick, 1997). Other programs are designed to help students develop social skills by involving students in school functions. An Alabama school district connected at-risk high school students with elementary school children, and both benefited from the experience because of the one-on-one attention and feelings of importance that arose from the alliance (Conrath, 1988). Teachers enhance the retention of at-risk youth by getting to know their students and earning their trust through consistent, positive intervention (Conrath, 1988). Teachers can become a positive role model, teach interesting and relevant information, monitor academic programs, keep a line of communication open with students, encourage participation in extracurricular activities, act immediately when patterns of failure appear, and communicate with parents or guardians of each child (Conrath, 1988). Teachers also can be effective by providing structure and predictability in the classroom, which many at-risk youth lack in their life (Conrath, 1988).

Researcher's Perspective

The results of this study should help teachers use specific practices when working with students transitioning from an alternative setting. I was motivated to research my topic based on my 9 years of experience in alternative education. Day after day, students are expelled from their home school and assigned to the alternative school. Most of these students are affected by home environment, chronic behavioral issues, lack of a support system, and learning disabilities. Several factors change the structure of a child's life, including the home environment, blended

families, or parents incarcerated or absent from home. These factors contribute to the need for positive teacher support in the classroom. Thus, I explored teachers' practices to build positive relationships with students and support students' successful transition back to zoned schools.

My teaching experience and other roles within the school gave me the opportunity to explore ways teachers can support students in an alternative setting. I believe my experiences have led me to understand and empathize with students having chronic behavioral issues. However, I made every effort to remain neutral as a qualitative researcher and analyze and interpret the findings without bias.

I have experienced life as a student of poverty and now experience life as an educated middle-class citizen. Both experiences taught me to appreciate the difference. Without my own life experiences, I could neither produce this research nor understand the struggles most of my students face daily. Those experiences enabled me to use my personal worldview of constructivism in a qualitative research study.

Conceptual Framework

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2012), the conceptual framework guides and aligns the entire research process. The framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

Personal goal and problem statement. My personal goal is to help at-risk youth transition from the disciplinary alternative school back to their zoned school. The related problem statement is a high rate of recidivism at alternative schools, due in part to unsuccessful transition of students back to their zoned school.

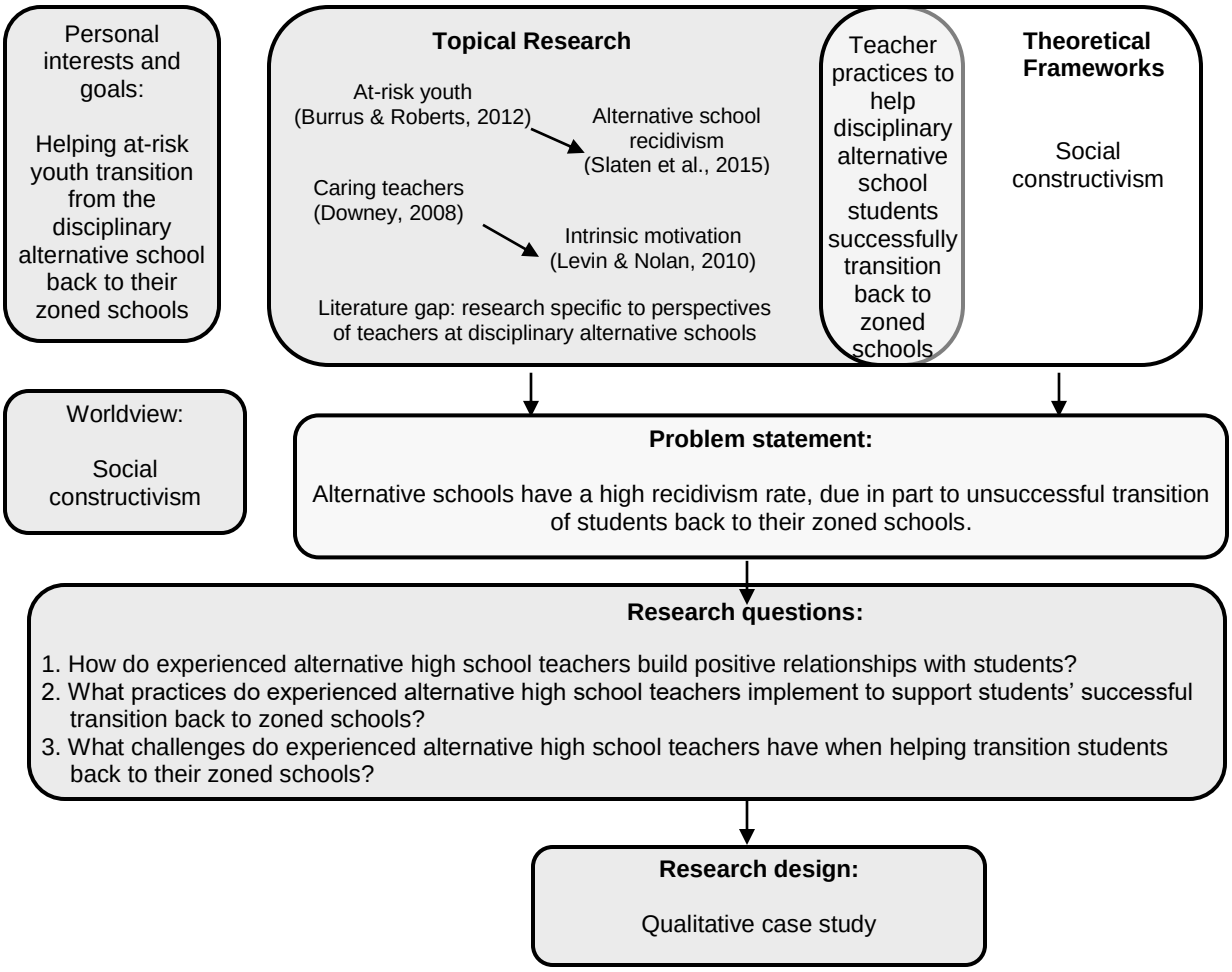

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study, *Teacher Practices to Help Alternative Education Students Transition Back to Their Zoned School.* References cited: "Dropping Out of High School: Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Remediation Strategies," by J. Burrus and R. D. Roberts, 2012, *ETS R&D Connections, 18*; "Recommendations for Fostering Educational Resilience in the Classroom," by J. A. Downey, 2008, *Preventing School Failure, 53,* 56-63; *Principles of Classroom Management: A Professional Decision-Making Model,* by J. Levin and J. F. Nolan, 2010, Boston, MA: Pearson; and "Towards a Critically Conscious Approach to Social and Emotional Learning in Urban Alternative Education: School Staff Members' Perspectives," by C. D. Slaten, D. Irby, K. Tate, and R. Rivera, 2015, *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology, 7*(1), 41-62.

Research design and questions. One of the most significant roles of the conceptual framework is to guide the translation of evidence on effects of the research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). A qualitative design was most appropriate for gathering teachers' descriptions of practices and challenges. The phenomenon investigated was, as shown in Figure 1, teacher

practices to help disciplinary alternative school students successfully transition back to their zoned school. My research approach to addressing the research questions flowed from the conceptual framework. The research questions were answered through qualitative data related to teacher practices to develop positive relationships with students, teacher practices to transition students back to zoned schools, and challenges teachers experienced. Observed data, such as relationships between students and teachers, were helpful for explaining the reality of students transitioning from an alternative school back to their zoned school and challenges teachers have when helping students transition. Different themes were embedded within responses to interviews and surveys.

Theoretical framework. The constructivist believes that there should be an interactive link between the researcher and participants and between teacher and students (Guba, 1990). Guba (1990) noted knowledge is socially and historically situated, and thus researchers or teachers need to address issues of power and trust. The teacher's relationship with students is impacted by the social and historical constructs of power and trust. The individual interaction between social influence and knowledge is called social constructivism (Neiman, 2001).

Constructivism is based on the idea that social contact influences learning. This worldview connects with the idea of developing positive teacher–student relationships in the classroom by creating a deeper understanding and connection. This study examined how teachers build positive relationships with students.

Topical research. The conceptual framework for this study (Figure 1) shows some of the topical research that framed this study. Burrus and Roberts (2012), for instance, described the significance of the problem of at-risk youth dropping out of high school. The problem is real and costly to all citizens. Further, to meet the needs of at-risk youth, school leaders should use

strategies based on a careful evaluation of the district's unique circumstances and needs (Burrus & Roberts, 2012).

The recidivism rate is high in the alternative setting. According to Slaten et al. (2015), students attending a disciplinary alternative school are likely to return. Students with behavioral infractions need additional support and skills to transition successfully back to their zoned school. Giving educators solutions could help reduce a student's chance of returning to a behavioral school.

Downey (2008) emphasized the importance of caring teachers to help at-risk students succeed. Caring relationships with teachers allow students to begin believing in their ability to succeed (Downey, 2008; Levin & Nolan, 2010). Students develop intrinsic motivation and self-worth and may continue to make improvements academically when they return their traditional zoned school (Levin & Nolan, 2010). These concepts are developed more fully in the literature review.

Definition of Relevant Terms

The following terms are used in this particular case study.

Alternative education. Alternative schools serve students who were unsuccessful based on disciplinary issues (school or community) in a traditional public school environment. The goal of alternative education in this case study is to recognize individual differences and to provide learning experiences for students to acquire academic, vocational, social, and life skills.

At-risk student. Students from a low-socioeconomic background, ethnic-minority groups, or uninvolved families are often considered at risk of dropping out. In this study, the term includes students at risk of behavioral issues. At-risk students in this study were placed in an alternative school because of chronic behavioral issues in school or the community.

Recidivism. For the purposes of this study, recidivism refers to students being reassigned to the alternative school for repeated incidents.

Student achievement. This term refers to academic progress made by a student over a period of time (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

Success. In this study, success is defined as a student passing all courses and attending classes with no disruptive classroom behaviors.

Traditional public school. A traditional public school is maintained at public expense for the education of the children of a community or district and constitutes a part of a system of free public education commonly including primary and secondary schools.

Transition plan. A transition plan directs the process of transitioning an alternative school student back to the traditional school. In this study, the transition plan was designed from research and teacher perceptions on ways to help alternative school students transition to their zoned school. The transition plan discussed in the final recommendations of this study refers to the research conclusions regarding an effective plan for students returning to a zoned school from an alternative school.

Zoned school. This type of school is designated to a student based on street address. The county determines a student's school based on area of school and address. Transportation is provided to students attending a zoned school.

Summary

Chapter 1 includes the statement of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, context and significance of the study, the researcher's perspective, conceptual framework, and definition of relative terms. This study was designed to benefit teachers and students in disciplinary alternative schools. Results from this study could help teachers build positive

teacher–student relationships and use strategies to support students' successful transition back to zoned schools. Research has shown teacher support can benefit students with behavioral issues.

Chapter 2 will include a review of relevant literature. Chapter 3 will present a description of the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 will present the data collected and analyzed. Chapter 5 will offer a summary of the findings and conclusions to support positive student–teacher relationships in an alternative setting and successful transition of students back to the traditional school setting.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review was conducted to examine topics relevant to helping students with behavioral issues, including types of support and skills. I explored previous research on topics such as school strategies and practices with students with behavioral issues, alternative settings, and effective transition plans. I searched various literature databases from the Kennesaw State University Online Library for published articles in online journals and evidence-based databases such as ProQuest and JSTOR for integrated information available as systematic reviews and abstracts. Key words searched included *at-risk students, recidivism, alternative school, transition, disciplinary issues,* and *disciplinary alternative education, teacher relationships,* and *caring teachers.* I used the Kennesaw State University Online Library System to access most of the research for the literature review to guarantee the use of scholarly articles. The ERIC database was utilized to search for articles and journals. I also reviewed books related to the study.

Currently, limited research has been published regarding alternative school teachers' practices to effectively transition students back to their zoned school. How well teachers equip students before their return to the traditional school could determine the rate of recidivism in the alternative setting. An alternative school's main purpose is to remove disruptive students from the traditional school setting and remediate disruptive behaviors that have contributed to students' lack of success in a regular school (Aron, 2006).

A well-known theorist, Vygotsky, explored the theory of social constructivism (Huang, 2002). Vygotsky explored the theory regarding learning in an environment that supports interaction with people (Huang, 2002). Social constructivist, according to Vygotsky (1978), is based on the developmental theory that students learn according to their context and social

environment. Social interactions are considered learning activities. Social constructivism is considered individual learning by working with others and through social interaction. These two factors are sometimes missing with students attending an alternative school. Social constructivism correlates to the impact of social environment on a child's learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The theory is related to a large body of research showing school context and social support in the classroom are among the most important factors in disadvantaged students' academic success (Becker & Luthar, 2002).

Historical Background

Historically, the need for interventions regarding children living in poverty has continued to grow. However, the U.S. Constitution is not clear on the direction education should take in the lives of children (Sanders, 2000). A traditional school is sometimes challenging for students exposed to poverty. Over the years, American policy makers have adopted new interventions to assist students living in poverty and raised by a single parent (Sanders, 2000). During President Lyndon Johnson's administration, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was passed (Sanders, 2000). This act focused on mitigating the effects of poverty on children's education. The federal government designed ways to contribute funds to elementary and secondary schools. When calculating the funds, the government issued money according to the state poverty rate (Sanders, 2000).

However, by 1983, U.S. students were not performing at a globally competitive level (Sanders, 2000). By 1988, lawmakers explored the need for changes regarding federal involvement in education. The granting of Title I funds began to depend on the academic performance of economically disadvantaged students at a school or district (Sanders, 2000).

During President Clinton's administration, the Educate America Act was passed, which focused on the actual quality, outcomes, and accountability of educational programs (Sanders, 2000).

School reform continues in America. The federal legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was designed to hold educators accountable in improving education for students living in poverty and other marginalized subgroups (Schlechty, 2011). Schlechty (2011) noted an improvement from years prior and acknowledged the accomplishments of the accountability system. The main focus was on improving literacy among at-risk students and students in poverty (Schlechty, 2011).

Barriers to Achievement for At-Risk Students

At-risk children have certain indicators predisposing them to failure to complete school (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Academic indicators such as grade point average, attendance, and discipline may alert educators that students are in danger of failing academically (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). At-risk students are not unable to learn or succeed in the world; they just have a greater chance of academic failure due to the lack of adult and financial support (Schlechty, 2011). Becker and Luthar (2002) observed that schools serving at-risk populations typically lack resources, qualified teachers, and positive classroom climate. Through legislative and reform efforts such as the No Child Left Behind Act, Americans realized the need to change to allow all students the same chance at succeeding in the education system and beyond. However, researchers such as Schlechty (2011) have claimed schools have lost a sense of community, and educators are faced with many new competitors from a society pushing powerful commercial interests such as electronics and instant gratification that distract students from homework, school, and educational activities. Further, adolescent students have many needs, sometimes greater than what the school system can provide (Huebner, Drane, & Valois, 2000). Becker and

Luthar (2002) described adolescence as a period when teacher–student relationships tend to weaken, even as the student need for adult mentors increases. A clear barrier is a lack of adult role models.

Lack of adult role models. Adults set the example for children. Continuing education is also a form of limitation for a child in poverty (Karlin, 2007). Limited resources can lead to cyclical poverty over generations. Parents often cannot guide children in the right direction because of lack of knowledge about educational resources.

Moreover, the typical family unit has changed over the years. Single parents are the new norm. The effect of a single-parent home can cause several problems within the life of an adolescent. Sometimes young adults feel a sense of role confusion when living in a single-parent environment. They tend to focus on the role of the adult rather than the fact that they are still children themselves (T. G. O'Connor, Caspi, DeFries, & Plomin, 2000). Young women sometimes rush into marriage for financial security. College is less of an option for most adolescents in this situation. In some single-parent homes, the parent is working several jobs; children are left to help take care of younger siblings and take on some of the responsibility of the adult within the household (T. G. O'Connor et al., 2000). Such at-risk youth are not focused on further education.

Karlin (2007) stated the major reason for high school dropout rates is a lack of motivation. However, teachers play an important role in developing motivation among poverty-stricken children (Karlin, 2007). Teachers can develop students' self-esteem. Students need a sense of belonging to school and guidance toward further education. Guidance counselors may be a good source of information for a young adult who does not have the financial resources for college. Becoming a teacher is not just about teaching children knowledge, but also about counseling

these students so that they can become an important voice in the community of tomorrow (T. G. O'Connor et al., 2000). Sometimes students in low-income families are motivated to change their life and develop needed skills to enhance their future. Teachers can provide at-risk students with options of overcoming these obstacles. Encouraging students through teacher support can motivate students to complete high school and continue their education (T. G. O'Connor et al., 2000).

Adult role models have a meaningful impact on academic achievement of a student. Educational experiences as early as primary school can determine the success or failure of a student (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003). Individual teachers can have a long-term impact on students' academic achievement. The first school experiences can determine a student's perception of school from the beginning (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003).

Several factors can impact a student's schooling experience positively or negatively, including the relationship between teacher and student (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003). The student must sense a teacher cares about the student's well-being and academic success. Respect, empathy, and structure can have a positive impact on students (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003). Students must feel accepted and safe in the learning environment as well as a connection in the classroom setting (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003). Becker and Luthar (2002) noted that a safe, secure learning environment is especially important for disadvantaged adolescents.

An early study by Peart and Campbell (1999) on student perceptions of teacher effectiveness showed the positive impact of a student–teacher relationship. Participants ranged from students who had dropped out to those in college and were interviewed regarding their primary educational experience (Peart & Campbell, 1999). Each participant provided a narrative life story of his or her experience and the effectiveness of teachers. The study revealed that

meaningful adult interactions affected the academic achievement of students. Negative relationships can hinder the learning experience.

Lack of feelings of belonging. Jackson (2005) noted at-risk youth frequently feel alienated from the school, teachers, and classmates. Regarding belonging, Karlin (2007) maintained that giving students a place to fit in and direct their attention will increase grades and self-concept and reduce gang activity. A child of poverty interested in art should be directed to incorporate that concept into all subject areas, for instance. Students may have many environmental factors to overcome (Jednoróg et al., 2012), whether poverty or a language barrier. Teachers need to continue to develop new tactics to encourage and develop the self-concept and self-esteem of these students. Giving at-risk adolescents a good foundation and a sense of belonging can reduce some of the negative effects of the adolescent years. Creating an understanding of student goals and discussing transcripts involves students in monitoring and guiding their own success (Latham & Locke, 1979, 2007). Giving students the ability to analyze a situation and develop reasonable results will give them the self-esteem to keep trying and reaching for higher goals.

Christenson et al. (2008) studied how to keep students in school. They reported students engaged in meaningful school activities were more likely to graduate. School leaders as well as educators can help develop positive relationships with at-risk students to promote school belongingness and create self-efficacy (Scheel, Madabhushi, & Backhaus, 2009). Positive relationships with school administrators and staff can have a positive effect on students' attitude about school.

Participation in extracurricular and school activities. Most students attending alternative school discuss the lack of participation at their zoned school. Students with chronic

behavioral issues are often not eligible to play sports. Some students are not eligible because of failing grades or are not interested in belonging to any type of extracurricular activity. At the disciplinary alternative school, criminal behaviors are the leading cause of expulsion from zoned schools. Children going home after school with little supervision between 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. can lead to poor behavior (Howie, Lukacs, Pastor, Reuben, & Mendola, 2010). Between the ages of 9 and 17, youth learn to start making decisions for themselves. If children are not monitored, they may engage in unsafe activities such as alcohol, gang activity, and drugs (Howie et al., 2010). After-school activities offered to students with behavioral issues can help with a sense of belonging and foster positive behaviors in the classroom.

Students who participate in school activities tend to display a more positive attitude toward school (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, & Brown, 2004). Several benefits occur when student develop a sense of belonging to their community and school. Students begin to feel ownership in the success and feel responsible for positive changes around them. Also, attitudes toward teachers and peers shift in a positive way (Cosden et al., 2004). Finally, grades of students participating in extracurricular activities are higher than those not participating (Cosden et al., 2004). Creating a way to involve students builds their confidence and self-esteem, leading to academic success.

Collaboration. Common in the literature on meeting the needs of students is the notion that family, school, and community all play an instrumental part. Integrating the resources of family, schools, and communities is needed to meet the changing needs of youth and help instill in them a sense of belonging and self-worth (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). A worthwhile, simple process for communities is promoting and supporting community-service projects. The theory is that making a difference by engaging in service learning teaches responsibility, fosters moral

development, and produces intellectual gains (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). Investment in at-risk youth is advantageous to a community because the well-being of a community is often measured by the local school's dropout rate, unemployment and crime rates, and family incomes within the community (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009). Research has supported the need for collaborative efforts for youth to include other teachers, as well as parents and families (Burrus & Roberts, 2012).

Communication barriers. Cultural differences and language differences can form a great barrier within an alternative school setting (DeAngelis, 2012). Teachers without cultural understanding cannot relate to the different cultures and aspects that come with diverse at-risk students. Students with language issues are more likely to respond to peer pressure from same-language peers (DeAngelis, 2012).

Communication is also vital between teachers and parents or guardians. By the time students reach high school, parental involvement declines, especially with students having chronic behaviors (Schlechty, 2002). Parents of students with behavioral problems are exhausted from attending years of conferences about problem behaviors in the school. However, when all stakeholders join together for the benefit of the student, students have a better success rate when returning to their zoned school (Schlechty, 2002).

Charney (2002) described the importance of meaningful conversations between teacher and student to develop students' sense of belong and value as well as to help build respectful communication skills. Succeeding in school and communication are closely related (Rozkan, 2014). Rozkan (2014) researched the correlation between communication skills and social self-efficacy. An average high school student often has issues with communication. Effective communication is a skill learned through example and requires teaching and modeling effective

ways to communicate (Richmond, Wrench, & McCroskey, 2013). Individuals begin learning communication skills from birth. Teachers, family members, and peers are the main source of learning communication skills, through direct instruction, personal observation, experience, and individual practice (Richmond et al., 2013). Students considered at risk often are considered underdeveloped regarding positive communication skills (Richmond et al., 2013).

Strategies to Help Alternative School Students

The vision statement for the disciplinary alternative school under study is to educate students both socially and academically. Learning social skills and effective, respectful communication can benefit students during their time at alternative school. Through a particular program, adult mentors could incorporate social skills components before completion of the term at the alternative school.

Educating students regarding social skills and attitude for success. Social skills include ways to deal with emotional stress, coping strategies, attitudes, communication, and confrontations (Kamps, Tankersley, & Ellis, 2000). A 2-year study by Kamps et al. (2000) concluded particular behaviors decreased when social skills were implemented in school. Compliance regarding adult and teacher direction significantly changed, allowing academic instruction to increase (Kamps et al., 2000).

The classroom teacher not only presents the curriculum but also spends time and energy nurturing students' needs (Collier, 2005). Caring teachers who feel a moral obligation and responsibility can develop students into becoming ethical and caring after high school (Bartley, 2007; Bongo, 2011; Buese, 2005; Cha, 2008; Martin, 2009; McCollum, 2014; Thompson, 2010).

Literature is sparce giving specific strategies for teaching social skills, as opposed to indicating the positive outcomes of students learning social skills. McCollum (2014) offered

some specific strategies gleaned from a qualitative study with five elementary teachers; some practices could be transferred to high school students. Student-centered teaching practices related to increasing social skills included (a) creating a sense of classroom community; (b) having engaging, interactive lessons; and (c) allowing teacher humor and personal sharing.

In an older study, Johns, Crowley, and Guetzloe (2005) suggested targeting the entire class for instruction, rather than singling out a student; discouraging negative peer influences; and encouraging positive peer interactions and networks. Successful social skills instruction needs to be perceived as valid by the student, clear, and context specific (Johns et al., 2005). Strategies include realizing teachable moments, the teacher modeling social skills, recognizing positive social skills throughout the day, offering group projects and learning, teaching conflict resolution, and teaching coping and self-management skills. Breaking the skill into small steps, modeling the skill, and using role playing are also effective (Johns et al., 2005).

Sancassiani et al. (2015) conducted a systematic review of research on school interventions designed to improve students' social and emotional skills. They limited their study to 22 randomized controlled trials and concluded interventions should be sequenced (step by step), with active learning, focused time on skill development, and explicit goals. Teaching social skills involves teaching self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and awareness of others, decision-making, and relationship skills (Sancassiani et al., 2015). Whole-school approaches that did not extend to parents and community were described in 55% of the studies they reviewed. Whole-school approaches emphasized flexible practices and student empowerment. Successful interventions involved life skills training, training on healthy behaviors, yoga, exercise and nutrition, and goal clarification. The authors noted the studies went beyond a problem-focused approach to offer positive training on youths' overall well-being.

Student who are not given an opportunity to gain social skills will often lack academic skills (Logue, 2007). Logue (2007) noted the importance of an early foundation in social and behavioral skills and described the need for social workers to train teachers to impart social skills to young students rather than punishing them for lacking them. DiPerna and Elliott (2000) included student behavior, interpersonal skills, and academic self-concept as factors contributing to academic success. Ray and Elliott (2006) determined that social ability influences students' academic performance. Specifically, Ray and Elliott found a relationship among self-concept, social skills, and academic achievement for fourth and eighth graders. The researchers concluded social adjustment could be a focus of intervention to improve student achievement.

Manning (2007) discussed how many students are not academically successful based on lack of self-concept. Manning explained that adolescents experience doubts and damage to their self-concept, based on their development of critical thinking and ability to self-evaluate. Self-concept increases as a result of academic achievement, and thus students benefit from supported opportunities to succeed at school. Manning noted that students need to feel competent in areas they deem important; continual messages of poor behavior do not elevate self-concept. Positive reinforcement is more effective. Specifically, supporting students to succeed in areas they are interested in will help develop self-concept and feelings of competence. Manning, like many other researchers, noted close relationships with teachers increase students' social skills and achievement. Manning also noted the positive impact of peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and supportive social interaction.

Brigman, Webb, and Campbell (2007) examined a specific school using a counselor-led program designed to create an atmosphere promoting academics and social skills among middle school students. Several state-mandated tests in math and reading were compared between the

class receiving the skills program and a control group. Findings showed students in the program received higher scores on the math assessment and reflected significant changes in behavior.

Social skills have long been an issue within the workforce. In the current workplace, employers are increasing expectations for employees to have advanced social skills (Mitchell, 2008). Lear, Hodge, and Schulz (2014) noted that good social skills are important when looking for employment and being a productive employee. According to Ortiz, Region-Sebest, and MacDermott (2016), employers are searching for employees with valuable social skills. Coffelt, Baker, and Corey (2016) reviewed the importance of a variety of social skills including public speaking, the ability to lead meetings, and negotiating a contract.

Transition plan. Returning to a traditional school setting after attending an alternative school is not easy for high school students. Teachers working in an alternative school need a transition plan to help students be successful once they return. Transition involves a process. Students should be prepped before entering the alternative school, during time at the alternative school, and when leaving the alternative school to transition back a traditional school setting (Griller Clark, Mather, Brock, O'Cummings, & Milligan, 2016).

Once a behavioral offense occurs, educators should consult with parents, teachers, school administrators, and a probation officer to help initiate a plan to transition students to an alternative setting (Sawyer & Borduin, 2011). The offense should be the start of the plan. The plan should continue after the student is released back to the zoned school. Studies have shown most students still need monitoring after completion of an alternative school term (Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller, & Havel, 2002). After-care services are pertinent to create a positive change after release (Bullis et al., 2002).

According to Leone and Weinberg (2012), a smooth transition involves an appropriate class schedule, emotional support, collaboration with an adult role model at the school, and several progress evaluations during the school year. Students who are performing at an appropriate grade level are less likely to engage in inappropriate behaviors at their home school (Nellis & Wayman, 2009; Seigle, Walsh, & Weber, 2014). Therefore, a focus on academic level and appropriate coursework is important during the transition.

The transition process and planning should start well before the actual transition occurs (Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2010; Müller, 2011; Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2010). Staff at the zoned school should be assigned to the transitioning student prior to return and should contact student to create a plan for transition (Feierman et al., 2010). All stakeholders including guardians should be involved in the process (Feierman et al., 2010; Müller, 2011; Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2010). The transition plan is not always communicated to everyone before the actual transition occurs (Wojcik, Schmetterer, & Naar, 2008) but should be. The staff located at the home or zoned school should be prepped by alternative school personnel regarding any updated transcripts and student evaluations (Wojcik et al., 2008).

The transition plan should include a plan to monitor and evaluate progress immediately following the return to a traditional zoned-school setting (National Center on Education, Disability and Juvenile Justice, n.d.). The contact person at both zoned and alternative schools should track student outcomes regarding high school graduation requirements along with employment options after high school (Leone & Weinberg, 2012; Müller, 2011). The transition plan is critical in providing a successful transition back to the zoned school (Leone & Weinberg, 2012; Müller, 2011). By creating a transition plan, all stakeholders can provide a productive transition plan to ensure at-risk students have accountability and connections at both locations.

Adult mentor programs at alternative schools. Students who are at risk because of disruptive behavior, low motivation, and poor home life exhibit problems functioning in a normal school setting. These students often require separate learning environments that focus more on behavior modification than the academic sector of education. Secondary students who are deemed at risk in school often lack confidence and success in their academic endeavors. Jackson (2005) observed at-risk students often felt alienated from school administrators, classmates, and teachers; they felt labeled and judged by educators. These students developed negative attitudes based on feeling powerless (Jackson, 2005). Increasing teacher or adult support for struggling students could prevent negative classroom behavior, increase graduation rates, and motivate students to become emotionally and financially independent adults (Johnson & Lampley, 2010).

Johnson and Lampley (2010) described how a district in Tennessee implemented a mentoring program called Linking Individual Students to Educational Needs (LISTEN). The LISTEN program targeted students identified as at risk based on certain academic indicators of grade point average, attendance, and discipline (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Johnson and Lampley conducted research during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 academic years to determine the impact of the LISTEN mentoring program on at-risk adolescents in Grades 6–8. Adult mentors offered caring, one-on-one support.

Johnson and Lampley (2010) compared results for 54 students who had failed at least one school year, obtained 10 or more discipline referrals in a year, or had 10 or more unexcused absences in one year. Grades were compared before and after the mentoring program. After a year of mentoring, students' grades were significantly higher, and 51 of the 54 students improved. Further, discipline referrals decreased significantly, and attendance improved

significantly after the program. The LISTEN program improved students' academics and behavior. Johnson and Lampley concluded the positive role model available for advice and direction had a positive impact on at-risk youth.

A study by Nichols, Spang, and Padron (2005) showed teachers mentoring at-risk students to be a valuable component of a collaborative partnership between a university library and educators to build information literacy. The university researchers partnered with teachers in kindergarten through Grade 12 to create goals and expectations of information literacy. Part of the program involved a mentoring program. Students reported the most positive effects from teacher mentors who included technology as an incentive and were upbeat (Nichols et al., 2005).

In a qualitative case study, Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2012) examined 11 mentors of at-risk elementary school students. Participants were studied for 2 years. Mentor assignments stayed the same over the research period, and mentors met once a week with mentees. The research indicated mentors offered encouragement, relating style, time and presence, and language nuances (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). The researchers deduced effective practices for cross-cultural mentoring between young students and adult mentors.

Converse and Lignugaris-Kraft (2009) evaluated a school-based mentoring program including 34 at-risk students. Students' behavior improved during an 18-week period. Students who participated in the mentoring program showed reduced office referrals and significantly improved attitudes about school. Further, those mentors who believed the program would be successful met more consistently with mentees, had more informal meeting (e.g., playing games), and reported fewer office referrals than those mentors who questioned the impact of the program. The researchers concluded mentoring of at-risk youth could help to improve attitudes about school and prevent behavior problems (Converse & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2009).

Positive Teacher–Student Relationships

Research has shown that attitudes, beliefs, and practices of educators can have a positive effect on at-risk students (Moon, Callahan, & Tomlinson 1999). Educating teachers on how to develop relationships with at-risk students through professional learning will help them understand the struggles of at-risk students (Moon et al., 1999). Providing teachers with strategies on overcoming different learning barriers should create a significant difference in the academic success of the students (Moon et al., 1999).

Professional training for teachers regarding effective student support can benefit students at an alternative school. Teachers providing support to students can help overcome academic challenges (Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton, 1994). A positive teacher–student relationship can give a child a sense of confidence in the classroom, increase motivation, and reduce recidivism once a student returns to the zoned school (Howes & Ritchie, 1999, 2002). Professional development regarding teacher–student relationships cultivates a positive learning environment (Boynton & Boynton, 2005).

Positive teacher support helps improve academic success by providing students with time, advice, modeling, school ethics, expectations for classroom behavior, and instruction (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). Teacher–student relationships geared toward increasing social and academic skills have been successful among at-risk students (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002). Positive relationships with teachers enhance social skills and the student's high school experience (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

As of 2018, Georgia had 64 alternative public schools serving 2,935 students (Public School Review, 2018). Students placed in a public alternative school are at risk of educational failure (Public School Review, 2018). A teacher support system for students attending an

alternative education should be designed to place a student with a caring, supportive adult (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Research has shown teacher–student relationships can affect a student's behavior and increase student achievement. Supportive relationships from teachers from early education to secondary students can deter behavioral issues from students considered at risk (Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

Factors Impacting Positive Teacher Support

Teacher turnover. One factor hindering the impact of caring teacher support is the recidivism rate of staff at behavioral alternative schools. At a typical school, teachers give up the profession within the first 5 years of teaching (National Commission for Teaching and America's Future, 2002). A higher turnover rate has been reported among teachers working with at-risk students; one of the reasons teachers leave the profession is student behavioral problems (McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson, & Robinson, 2008). This teacher burnout or turnover leads to an increase in less experienced teachers among certain demographics, including students with behavioral issues, ethnic-minority students, and students of low socioeconomic status (McKinney et al., 2008).

Attachment issues. Teachers may face considerable obstacles when trying to develop trusting, supportive relationships with students. The early connection between mothers and their children impacts the way students view teacher relationships (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Daily interactions with teachers can be influenced by the student's relationships with caregivers (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Security attachments to caregivers in the beginning stages of a child's life can influence classroom behaviors (E. E. O'Conner, Collins, & Supplee, 2012). The attachment insecurities developed at an early age can affect a student's relationship with teachers (Burt, Obradovic, Long, & Masten, 2008). Conflict with a caretaker at an early age can create

insecurities regarding adults and cause power struggles in a school environment (Burt et al., 2008). Success in the classroom can be linked to previous conflicts in relationships during adolescence (Spilt, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012). However, even if attachment issues are present in adolescence, emotional support from teachers helps reduce classroom disruptions (Ahnert, Harwardt-Heinecke, Kappler, Eckstein-Madry, & Milatz, 2012; Hughes, 2012).

Subject matter or context. In the literature, components to promote positive teacher support vary depending on the researcher. Some researchers focused on different aspects of the relationship, whereas others focused on the context presented in curriculum. Regardless of either aspect, the combination can contribute to how a student perceives teacher support. A student who dislikes a certain context might consider the teacher of that particular subject as nonsupportive (Ames, 1992; Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006). The support factor is solely based on the dislike of the subject. Subject areas favored by a student could determine the level of support student feels in the classroom.

Teacher classroom behavior and expectations. Teacher support of students is often determined by teachers' actions in the classroom. Teachers provide support by creating consistent classroom expectations, establishing goals, and assisting students with making the right decisions (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Teachers can help students become intrinsically motivated by allowing them to take ownership in their success and providing support when students are making life-changing decisions (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006).

McIntosh et al. (2010) studied nearly 1 million elementary school students at 2,509 schools in the United States. Behavior was tracked by office discipline referrals and a computer software program. Students were assigned a category based on the average number of referrals. The researchers wanted to determine whether office referrals were a useful measure of behavior

in terms of decision-making data and intervention development. Students showed consistent mean growth trajectories in number of referrals. McIntosh et al. concluded that behavioral infractions were a valid early indicator of further problems, stressing the need for early intervention early in the school year.

Demographics. Student characteristics including ethnicity, gender, and disability contribute to the relationship between a teacher and a student. Teachers have reported limited levels of connection with male students compared to female students (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Research of students receiving special services related to disabilities showed teachers struggled with building relationships, and students with disabilities received more office referrals because of behavior issues (Murray & Murray, 2004). The perceptions of students may vary depending on their gender and ethnicity (Dever & Karabenick, 2011). Dever and Karabenick (2011) studied authoritative teaching style, including high academic expectations and caring, as mediated by student ethnicity among 3,602 students. Hispanic students responded well to an authoritative teaching style, as did White students. The caring teaching style approached significance in terms of capturing student interest. Vietnamese students responded to an authoritarian style, with high expectations and low caring (Dever & Karabenick, 2011).

Social context. The academic success of at-risk students is influenced by their environment and exposure to others, as well as current social trends and evolving communities (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). Becker and Luthar (2002) stated social support in the classroom is a major contributor to engagement and motivation among disadvantaged students. Student feelings of acceptance by teachers had positive emotional, behavioral, and cognitive impacts (Becker & Luthar, 2002). Major social influences include parental involvement at the school

level and relationships within a school setting (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007). Research has shown the role of social context in a school setting can have a positive result in a student's life (Patrick et al., 2007). Student perceptions of the classroom impact student self-concept and thus motivation, engagement, and achievement (Patrick et al., 2007). Patrick et al. (2007) studied fifth graders' (N = 602) perceptions of the social context of the classroom, including teacher support, peer support, and interaction. Positive perceptions corresponded to increased student engagement. Effects were mediated by student motivation and self-efficacy. Students were mostly White and middle class, a limitation of their study.

Urban African American youth attending an alternative school were the participants in a study by Carswell, Hanlon, O'Grady, Watts, and Pothong (2009). The researchers evaluated an after-school intervention program that served 109 youth over 2 years. The program involved group mentoring and community outreach to students as well as parents. As part of their research, Carswell et al. gathered students' demographic information. Low socioeconomic status was a common characteristic and key factor among students in the alternative school (Carswell, et al., 2009). Most students involved in the study had family members with criminal records, and most were involved in some type of gang activity (Carswell, et al, 2009).

Hudson (2013) studied children in the foster care system. The foster care students were familiar with limited resources and struggles associated to socioeconomic status. Many students in foster care participate in substance abuse and early parenthood (Hudson, 2013). A mentor program was developed to help guide them toward a future career and to discuss lifelong skills (Hudson, 2013). The study showed most socioeconomically disadvantaged students did not pursue educational opportunities.

Caring Teachers

The theory of creating a classroom around positive teacher–student relationships has become part of the professional learning community in behavioral alternative schools (Pianta, 2006). Promoting caring teachers has impacted student motivation and learning (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). Straits (2007) encouraged educators to develop a caring relationship with students to increase student motivation and learning, especially at the secondary level. Pianta (2006) also explored the relationships in a classroom and posited the importance of caring teachers. Teachers who do not focus solely on teaching state standards and daily rituals but develop positive relationships with students as individuals help the dynamics of the classroom (Rogoff, Bartlett, & Turkanis, 2001).

Creating a connection between positive relationships and academic performance is important for students to thrive (Christenson & Havsy, 2004). According to Deci (1992), caring teachers can increase a student's interest in lifelong academics. Poor school attendance is also correlated with students' inability to connect with peers and teachers (Christenson & Havsy, 2004). Caring teachers develop positive relationships with their students through open discussions in the classroom among teachers, students, and peers (Charney, 2002). Getting to know students' personal interests beyond the classroom can help build the connection in a classroom (Denton & Kriete, 2000).

Plato (as cited in Parsley & Corcoran, 2003) expressed that the positive relationships created in school are an indicator of lifelong learning experiences. Caring teachers are not the only factor in predicting a student's success but do have a huge impact on promoting academic success, especially with at-risk students (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003). Trust must be the first step of a caring teacher. Next, the students must know the teacher is genuinely concerned about them

as people outside of the classroom. Students should feel comfortable with making mistakes and taking risks in the classroom. Last, teachers should make students feel connected to the classroom (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003).

The effectiveness of caring teachers has been researched and demonstrated. With caring teachers in the classroom, students have a better chance of succeeding. A positive learning experience and school climate result from caring teachers who build positive teacher–student relationships (Sanders & Jordan, 2000). Caring teachers explore students' perceptions, feelings, morals, and value system along with learning ability. Student perceptions of teachers are positive when teachers show they care (Peart & Campbell, 1999). Student motivation and engagement increase when teachers care. Students view a caring teacher as someone who demonstrates a consistent caring attitude among all students (Peart & Campbell, 1999).

Caring teachers were part of Sanders and Jordan's (2000) research on the influence of teacher–student relationships on student behavior, attitude about school, and school achievement. The study showed a significant positive impact of positive teacher–student relationships on student standardized test scores (Sanders & Jordan, 2000).

A positive school climate often reflects the presence of caring teachers (Becker & Luthar, 2002). Positive interactions with caring teachers who provide acceptance and support provides a nurturing classroom environment and increases student engagement (Becker & Luthar, 2002). Caring teachers can play an important role for students with behavioral issues. Students often need appropriate guidance from adults (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Croninger & Lee, 2001). At-risk students often only have caring teachers as adult role models (Carnegie Council of Adolescent Development, 1995). These students need contact with caring teachers in the classroom.

Calabrese, Goodvin, and Niles (2005) conducted a qualitative study focusing on interviews and focus groups with teachers, counselors, and administrators in an urban school environment with students considered at risk behaviorally. The frame of mind of teachers working with behaviorally students can be linked with student success (Calabrese et al., 2005). The study showed an overall decrease in the high school dropout rate among students who perceived teachers as caring (Calabrese et al., 2005).

The impact of caring teachers is important for the purpose of this study. The practices of teachers working with at-risk students are important in making a positive connection and creating a supportive, nurturing environment (Becker & Luthar, 2002). A positive student–teacher relationship is an important factor to consider when transitioning students back to their zoned school.

Teacher Leadership Research

Research has shown the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of educators can have a positive effect on socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Moon et al., 1999). Moon et al. (1999) discussed the importance of teacher development regarding teacher support and best practices. Educating teachers on how to develop relationships with at-risk students through professional learning will help them understand the struggles of diverse or economically disadvantaged students (Moon et al., 1999). Providing teachers with strategies on overcoming different learning barriers should create a significant difference in the academic success of the students (Moon et al., 1999). Becker and Luthar (2002) noted teachers often need professional development to understand culturally diverse students and to provide engaging classroom environments.

Teacher support of students in an alternative setting should increase student achievement and classroom performance (Jekielek et al., 2002). Lack of student interest and motivation often decreases the academic performance of students attending an alternative school. This study was designed to understand successful practices as well as challenges teachers face transitioning students back to zoned schools. Increasing teacher support for struggling students could prevent negative classroom behavior, increase graduation rates, and motivate students to become emotionally and financially independent adults (Johnson & Lampley, 2010).

In this study, a survey, observations, and interviews were used to gather information. The use of multiple triangulations obtained a more thorough view of student needs and teacher practices in alternative education (Thurmond, 2001). An effective teacher support system and positive student–teacher relationships can benefit all education stakeholders (Dougherty, Turban, & Haggard, 2007; Dymock, 1999; Kram, 1985; Noe, 1988). Students can expect teacher–student relationships to help them grow personally through an increased sense of self-worth, competence, and self-efficacy (Kram, 1985).

This study related to teacher leadership by analyzing the practices of experienced teachers in a disciplinary alternative school. Findings revealed challenges and successful practices for transitioning students back to zoned schools. This study investigated the importance of teacher development regarding positive teacher–student relationships. Findings could improve teaching and learning. Thus, the purpose of this research was highly correlated with the vision of teacher leadership.

Summary

Teachers in an alternative school serve an important role in preparing students to return to their zoned school. Teacher support can help give students successful tools to cope with difficult

decisions regarding behavior. Experience in the classroom can transform students' behavior and academics. However, most research has focused on teacher–student relationships in traditional schools. To understand teacher support practices in a disciplinary alternative school, teachers' practices and perceptions should be examined. The next chapter describes the study's methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative case study was based on a constructivist worldview. The research design is explained in this chapter. In this chapter, I address why I chose the qualitative design for this study. I describe the data collection process using interviews, surveys, and observations. The case study design was used to explore the perceptions of high school teachers at a disciplinary alternative school about the practices they use to support positive relationships with students and help students transition back to zoned schools.

Worldview

Understanding the purpose and significance of alternative education and teacher support starts by recognizing the reasons for alternative education versus a traditional school setting. Sagor (2004) suggested that most students placed in an alternative setting struggle in a variety of areas including academics and social arenas. Students struggling in a traditional school setting become frustrated and overwhelmed by lack of academic success. As time goes on, teachers' frustration likely will increase and cause all stakeholders to relinquish the notion that students with emotional and behavioral issues can attain a successful education in the classroom.

Most students with behavioral issues develop negative classroom behaviors to deflect their lack of understanding. Teachers' understanding of this is important and supports the improvement of the relationship with students. Building a strong connection via teacher–student relationships helps teachers and students become invested in each other and supports the development of an intrinsic motivation for both parties. Teachers' understanding of students helps address individual learning needs and helps students to develop a desire to increase their academic performance from intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic.

This study recognizes the significance and necessity of teacher support for students in alternative education. Students in alternative schools need learning experiences to acquire the academic, vocational, social, and life skills needed to be successful both at a traditional school and in their future in a global economy. This qualitative case study analyzed the perceptions of experienced, qualified high school teachers in a disciplinary alternative school in Georgia regarding teacher–student relationships and helping students transition back to the traditional school setting.

The research was based on the assumption that participants would give truthful, detailed answers. The interview instrument was assumed to be adequate for gathering information to answer the research questions.

This research investigated the practices of the teachers with a social constructivist approach. Constructivism is the epistemological approach in an educational setting (Richardson, 2003). Constructivism is a theory of learning and not related to the theory of teaching (Richardson, 2003). The social construct of the classroom and teacher–student relationships impact student learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The current case study involved detailed interviews within a particular school setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I set out to understand and explain teachers' perceptions and experiences but did not seek to quantify perceptions (Janesick, 2000). Qualitative researchers examine social situations to understand the participants' way of perceiving a particular issue (Janesick, 2000)

Research Tradition

The problem addressed by this study is a high rate of recidivism in alternative schools, in part due to difficulty transitioning students back to their zoned schools. The purpose of this study was to identify practices that teachers perceived as having a positive impact on students

transiting from the alternative school setting. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do experienced alternative high school teachers build positive relationships with students?
2. What practices do experienced alternative high school teachers implement to support students' successful transition back to zoned schools?
3. What challenges do experienced alternative high school teachers have when helping transition students back to their zoned schools?

A qualitative methodology was used as the approach for this study. Specifically, I used a case study design (Stake, 1995) using a survey, semistructured interview questions, and observations. Previous research mainly focused on quantitative data rather than qualitative perceptions of alternative school teachers regarding teacher support and relationships. According to Creswell (2013),

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

This study was designed to gather data in the natural setting—the school site—and to gather interview data to learn teachers' perceptions in their own words. I did not begin with a hypothesis to be proven, as with quantitative research, but rather sought to determine themes identified by participants. A case study was thus appropriate. Figure 2 was created using Hopscotch (Jorrín-Abellán, 2016) to illustrate the study design.

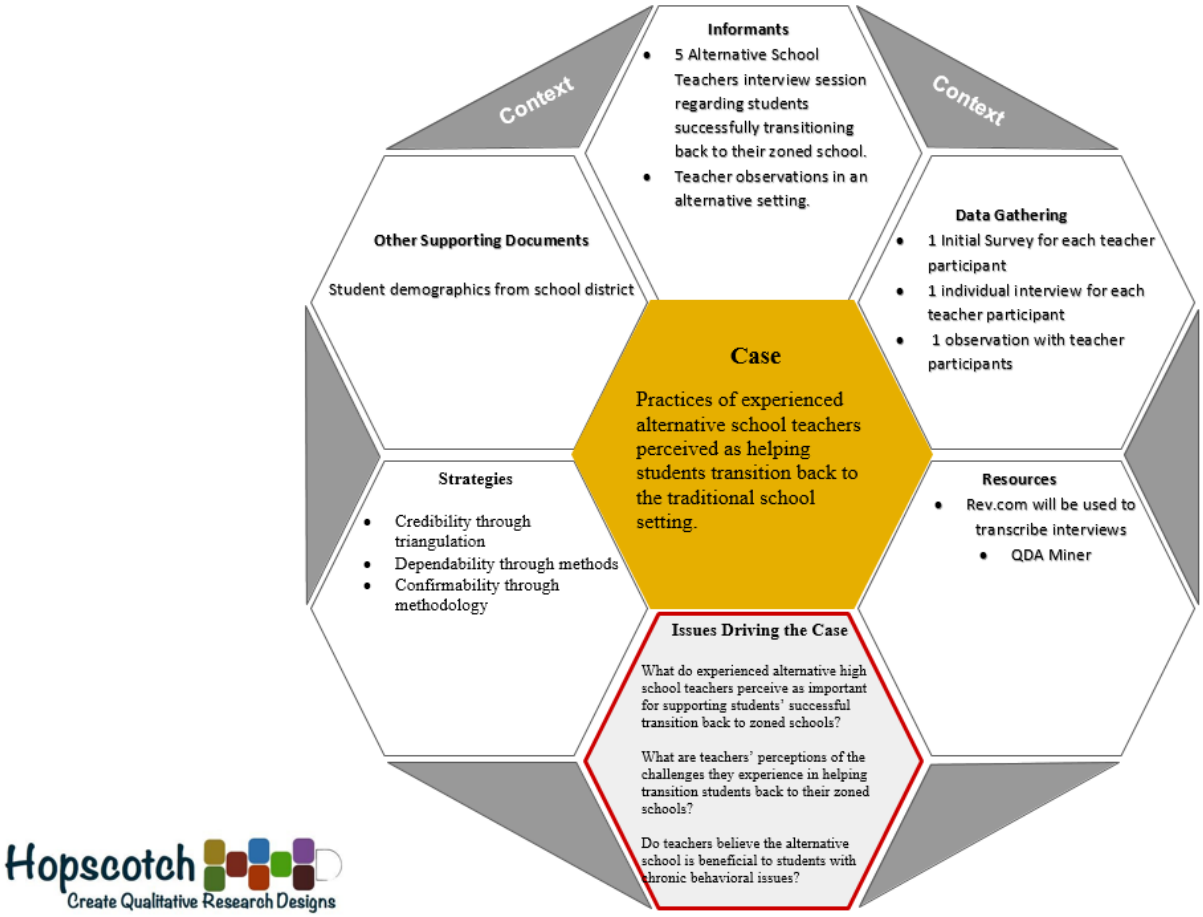

Figure 2. Study context: A visual representation of the research design.

The structure of a case study design enlightens a phenomenon by concentrating on specific cases (Stake, 1995). The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of alternative school teachers to help disciplinary alternative school students successfully transition back to zoned schools. All participants were interviewed to understand their perceptions.

This case study took on a constructivist worldview (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) described a case study design as being able to focus the study on a single case and understanding the dynamics within a certain situation. Stake recommended using case study questions, or research

questions, to drive creation of interview questions.

Context and Setting

The site location was based on my current position. This county's disciplinary alternative school was created for students removed from their zoned school setting because of disciplinary issues within the community or school. The purpose of the disciplinary alternative school is to recognize individual differences and to provide rigorous learning environment for students who were unsuccessful in a traditional school environment. The main goal of the school is to successfully transition students to their traditional zoned school setting. This particular alternative school is located in rural Georgia and serves at-risk students. All students enrolled at the site are present because of serious or chronic misbehavior. A student required to attend disciplinary alternative school is placed based upon the school board's decision during a school tribunal. The length of the stay depends on the severity of the situation and prior history of the student. The disciplinary alternative school houses both middle school and high school students.

Most students attending the disciplinary alternative school are considered at-risk students with issues hindering academic success. The school goal is to educate students both socially and academically. The school receives students daily, and the student population can range from 140 to over 350 by the end of the semester. The ethnic composition is diverse, with African American, European American, Asian, and Hispanic students. The majority of students currently enrolled are African American male students.

As an alternative school, the school requires different school policies and practices set by school board. Students are still accountable to complete high school graduation requirements set by the state. Enrollment in the alternative school is not optional; students enrolled in the school received expulsion from zoned school. Students attending sign a behavioral contract and attend

orientation. The school provides transportation from their zoned school in the morning and back to their zoned school after dismissal. Students at the school are prohibited from bringing cell phones. A dress code is enforced during school hours. Students are checked into school through a metal detector and asked to remove items from pockets. Students are expected to come to school in a school uniform, which includes a collared polo shirt, tucked in, and a belt. Teachers sit with students during lunch, and students walk quietly in the hallway between classes.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was the sampling method used for this research. The location and participants were selected because of my knowledge of the population and the dynamics of the site being studied (Creswell, 2013). Twenty certified teachers taught at the school at the time of the study; 15 had over 3 years of experience. Of the teachers with over 3 years of experience, five were White, and six were Black; six were female, and five were male. I asked five veteran teachers with over 3 years of experience to participate in the study. These teachers serve special education students and regular education students. Teachers at the school have chosen to teach students considered at risk because of chronic behavioral issues. These behaviors include defiance of authority, weapons on school property, possession of drugs, and fighting. I explored the thoughts and feelings of a particular group of teachers (Creswell, 2013). I worked at the site being researched, and teacher participants assisted me in exploring the problem being investigated. A bias to be considered was that I selected the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Table 2 shows participant demographics. All were men. Participants ranged in age from 38–49 (M = 43). All had over 3 years experience in the alternative school setting; two had 10–15 years of experience.

Table 2

Participant Demographics (N = 5)

Demographic	*n*
Age	
38	2
40-45	1
46-49	2
Education	
Specialist	4
Doctorate	1
Years teaching in alternative setting	
3–5	1
5–10	2
10–15	2
Ethnicity	3
Black	3
White	2

Data Gathering Methods and Instruments

Three types of data gathering instruments were used in this study, for triangulation. A demographic survey gathered information about the five teachers in the study. The interviews were the primary data collection. Finally, observations of the teachers in the classroom served as supporting data.

Demographic survey. To begin the study, a survey (see Appendix A) was used to gather demographic information about the teachers participating in the study. Questions gathered basic information regarding gender, age, and ethnicity. Also included was information regarding number of years teaching at an alternative school. The survey asked general questions to help me understand participants' perceptions. Results are shown in Table 2.

Interviews. Face-to-face interviews (see Appendix B) were recorded by iPad with participants' permission and later transcribed by the researcher. Open-ended questions guided each interview. I used interviews as the main data source. The questions allowed me to explore leading questions and take questions in any direction I felt was beneficial to the study. I took notes to document participants' demeanor and tone during the interview. Interviews were conducted in my classroom, with sessions lasting approximately 30 minutes with each participant. Interviews were transcribed verbatim.

By conducting interviews, I could observe how participants were feeling and how they observed their situations. I conducted the interview more like an open conversation or dialogue. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), participants guiding the interview process, while the researcher maintains structure, helps garner a truer depiction of their thoughts and feelings. The researcher should respect participants by providing a nonjudgmental and nonthreatening environment. Individual interviews were in a quiet room located at the school. Participation was voluntary, and participants were reminded of this prior to interviews. All interviews were recorded and secured in a safe location. Questions were developed based on previous research.

Observations. Observations of teachers at the school were part of the study. Observations offered additional, triangulating information about classroom practices to help answer research questions. The observations allowed me to view teacher–student relationships throughout the school environment. Observations gave a clear understanding of school dynamics.

As a teacher at the school under study, I had a prior professional relationship with participants. According to Merriam (2009), a researcher with a current relationship with participants can be aware of any changes in participants during a study. After each observation, I

noted exactly what was seen and heard (see Appendix C). Teacher and student identities were protected. Field notes were gathered daily from the classroom and hallway. Classroom activities, student and teacher interactions, school culture and climate, and teacher–student relationships were the main sources of observations. The field observations were typed and coded using pseudonyms for each teacher.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred simultaneous with data collection (Merriam, 2009). I began analyzing data as collected rather than analyzing at the end of all data collection. Interviews were transcribed before analysis.

First, I reviewed responses to the demographic surveys. Then, I analyzed responses to the interviews. After interviews, reflections and my interpretations were recorded. Each interview was transcribed; I also listened to the recorded interviews. I identified key themes to begin coding categories.

Observation notes were compared to other observations. Information was grouped by each response and analyzed. Interview data were analyzed to determine common themes among responses. I had interviews transcribed with an online transcription program called Rev (2018) and typed field notes from observations. Coding was used to depict themes from the data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Themes were developed through transcription to give shape to the data by sorting information (i.e., notes, interviews) related to the research purpose (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I began coding immediately using the start list in the logged codes. The initial codes were established and began the coding process.

I used a start list (Miles & Huberman, 1984) researched from prior studies. The start list developed structure to the interview questions for participants. The preliminary list included

terms such as lack of sleep, peer interactions, apathy, school climate, culturally relevant, motivate, positive learning experience, relationships, compassion, methoring, and so on. Individual words and sentences were examined related to specific statements from participants. Additional codes were derived from the data such as job skills, tough love, patience, and school pride. I determined themes of ways to help students transition from a disciplinary alternative school. According to Ryan and Bernand (2003), specific phrases and words can be grouped into four categories.

Identifying patterns and organizing data into groups were part of the process. I read through all the data (Creswell, 2013). I recognized the tone and meaning of the participants to create a deeper understanding of the material. Words were grouped thematically. The groups helped create themes for coding (Creswell, 2013).

I also used a computer program called QDA Miner Lite (Provalis Research, 2018) to support the analytic process. For example, the software helped recognize the number of times a particular code occurred during interviews. For example, the term *basic work ethics* occurred 35 times; *parent involvement* occurred 36 times, and *culturally relevant* occurred 8 times. The program also helped compare participants' answers. I reviewed data collected daily for analysis of themes.

I started with five initial themes that emerged from the literature review: need for social skills education, positive support by teachers, adult mentors, transition plan, and extracurricular activities. Hand coding of the transcriptions revealed a sixth theme of communication between all stakeholders. The first part of the coding was established by reading and rereading participants responses and comments. I used small phrases for my coding. I began coding in the early stages to help establish coding from the very beginning. Through reading of the

transcripts, I added additional codes. From that point forward I read each transcript and coded until all transcripts were complete. Coding emerged and was updated as new data were created. I deleted words that became redundant and words that needed further explanation. Themes during the qualitative research process are called categories and are wider themes that reflect codes from common responses (Creswell, 2013). I reviewed and changed coding throughout the process and regrouped categories when needed. Some codes became more of the main topic, and additional subcategories were created.

After the first coding was completed using these six codes, data were reviewed from the perspective of each research question and reorganized as neededThe final hand-coded list identified the basic themes according to the research data. Appendix C indicates the codes developed in the process.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is important for any research to have significant results. A framework of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability ensures the trustworthiness of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2008). Credibility is created by presenting the honest viewpoints of the participants in the study. Transferability is when the same study can be duplicated in a different environment, which is not always the case in a qualitative case study. Dependability is simply when the researcher is able to document and note any changes in research, regardless of proposed outcome. Confirmability is how others perceive the results.

Credibility

Data triangulation is a method used to conduct qualitative research to create credibility (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation was part of the process for the research period. Interviews and observations were transcribed and coded within a day. Analysis of the transcribed documents

revealed themes and emergent patterns. Information transcribed immediately strengthened the credibility of the study. Participants' interviews were transcribed by an online program called Rev (2018).

The purpose of the study was to analyze teachers' perceptions regarding ways to help students transition back to a zoned school from an alternative setting. The participants reviewed transcripts to make sure the information transcribed was correct. Such member checking increased credibility of the research.

To gather honest, credible data from participants, their anonymity was ensured. Further, I employed the strategies of prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Prolonged engagement involves spending adequate time observing various aspects of a setting, speaking with a range of people, and developing relationships and rapport with members of the culture (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Persistent observation involves identifying elements in the situation most relevant to the phenomenon being investigated and focusing on them in detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Whereas prolonged engagement provides "scope," persistent observation provides "depth" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304).

Confirmability. Worldview was expressed by me as the researcher to ensure confirmability. The triangulation of the data eliminated researcher bias. Secure and timely data collection and analysis supported the methodology to allow readers to understand the process.

Dependability. I took memos and notes during interviews and observations. By producing documentation, I stayed focused and limited assumptions. I reviewed the information several times and compared various types of data. The researcher's responsibility is to represent the data as accurately and as dependably as possible.

Triangulation of the data involved comparing each participant's survey, interview, and observation data. I used self-reflection during the study to avoid inserting bias into the data interpretation. The greatest area of concern was the teachers' perceptions of strategies that impact at-risk students returning to their zoned school.

Confidentiality and Ethics

I fulfilled and upheld all ethical statutes related to conducting human subjects research. I assigned pseudonyms to each participant for the interviews and surveys. The information collected would only be used for this study.

I did not engage in any type of inappropriate behavior, personal or professional. No information gathered as part of this study will be shared with others unless the researcher is required by law to report an unsafe act or commitment of a crime (Creswell, 2015). I did not intrude upon the lives of participants. Research was conducted in a timely, appropriate manner, agreed upon by all stakeholders. The privacy of all participants was honored, and any personal information would not be disclosed without explicit permission from participants.

I did my best to earn and deserve participants' trust and confidence. Participants were thoroughly informed about the nature of my study and reminded that they could discontinue participation at any time, without repercussion. Participation in this study was not expected to cause harm of any kind. Data are kept on a password-protected computer.

Limitations of the Research Design

The main goal of this qualitative case study was to examine a particular group of teachers in an alternative setting to gain understanding of teacher–student relationships and successful practices in a disciplinary alternative school. The major limitations of this study were limited time and limited participants. However, limited numbers of participants are expected in an in-

depth qualitative study (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the study was delimited to five teachers in one school in rural Georgia at one point in time (Creswell, 2009). The school setting was limited to a single disciplinary alternative school in rural Georgia. Time constraints also should be considered a limitation. This study gathered data at one point in time. A longer term study might have different results. The research was not expanded to include a longitudinal case study. Further, student perceptions were not gathered.

Summary

This chapter described the research methodology used in this qualitative case study. The purpose was to interview and observe five experienced teachers at the disciplinary alternative school. Data collection would identify participants' perceptions regarding how they develop relationships with students, strategies they find effective in transitioning students back to the zoned school, and challenges they face.

Chapter 4: Case Study Analysis

The recidivism rate of students attending a disciplinary alternative school suggests strategies are needed to successfully transition at-risk students back to their traditional school settings. In this study, I examined experienced teachers' perceptions and experiences of productive practices to decrease recidivism. Five high school teachers at a disciplinary alternative school were interviewed and observed in this qualitative case study. The alternative high school services students from an entire school district and provides a smaller setting for students considered at risk regarding chronic behavioral issues. The disciplinary alternative school under study educates students expelled from several other high schools within the same county. The purpose of the alternative school is to educate students both socially and academically and to successfully transition students back to their zoned school. The role of all stakeholders within the county is to place students temporarily at the alternative school and prepare students to return successfully once term is completed. This particular alternative school offers academic courses compatible to a traditional school allowing students to receive Georgia high school credit.

The school district serves over 28,000 students. At the time of the study, the alternative school had an enrollment of 149 students in Grades 9–12. The student-to-teacher ratio is typically 7:1. All students receive free lunch. The student population at the time of the study was 69% African American, 20.3% European American, 8.2% Hispanic, 2% students of mixed race, and 0.5% Asian. The staff consisted of three administrators, 39 teachers, a social worker, and a counselor.

Students are enrolled in the school based on school or community infractions listed in previous chapter. Most students are behind academically and socially. Attendance issues and

lack of support outside of school also are issues. Results of this study should help alternative school educators understand students attending an alternative school for students with behavioral infractions and ways to help transition them to their traditional school.

The qualitative data obtained from the research participants are organized based on themes developed through participant interviews, which then helped answer the research questions (see Appendix C). First, a brief description is given of each interviewee. Survey data contributed to the participant descriptions.

The five participants of this study were all current teachers and considered highly qualified by the county. All participants were secondary school educators. Some of the participants had taught in regular school settings. Four participants had obtained specialist degrees, and one had a doctorate in educational leadership. They were all given pseudonyms.

Participants

Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith is European American, with over 10 years of teaching experience in an alternative school. He has over 20 years of experience in the educational field. He taught several years in a surrounding county and three other high schools near the current school. Mr. Smith started teaching at an alternative school to help at-risk students and to reduce coaching responsibilities required from previous positions. He stated he enjoys teaching most of his students and helping them acquire new concepts. He did acknowledge some of his students show little interest in school besides attending to socialize and cause disruptions in the classroom.

During classroom observations, Mr. Smith always seemed calm and was consistent regarding classroom management. He often used humor to help create a positive classroom climate, making students feel comfortable. In the interview, Mr. Smith said he enjoyed

elaborating on real-life situations and life lessons with students. Students in the classroom seemed willing to learn and eager to follow classroom instruction.

Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown is African American, with fewer than 5 years of teaching experience in an alternative school, all at the same school. Mr. Brown started teaching at the alternative school to help give back to at-risk students. He stated students at the alternative school need concerned adults in their life. According to Mr. Brown, all of his students are important and can be successful. He tries daily to let them know he really cares about them and change their mindset regarding school.

Mr. Brown interacted with students who were struggling with conflicts or academics. He was able to relate to students on a personal level. Often, I observed students asking Mr. Brown for help with situations. His inviting teaching style allowed students to make mistakes without feeling judged. He would help students beyond the classroom as well. Mr. Brown has helped students pay for graduation attire or given them special incentives for completing a school year without any type of disciplinary referrals.

The observation field notes gave several examples of positive teacher–student relationships and performance in a classroom setting. I was impressed by Mr. Brown's dedication and caring attitude with students. He was liked by many students and was nominated for teacher of the quarter several times.

Mr. Nash. Mr. Nash is European American, with 6 years of teaching experience in an alternative school. He previously taught in a traditional school setting for 1 year. Mr. Nash wants to make a difference in the lives of at-risk students. He wants all students to achieve at their fullest potential and be prepared for college or work when leaving the alternative school.

He stated part of his job is to help improve their cognitive thinking and problem-solving skills. Classroom management is important to Mr. Nash, and he supports the practice of redirection.

Mr. Nash was willing to openly communicate with students. He was willing to share experiences explaining his life journey. In the hallway, Mr. Nash was always upbeat and positive with students. Classroom observations confirmed Mr. Nash's positive teaching style. He would ask students about their life outside of the school. I did notice a struggle with classroom management at times. He had a very relaxed style of classroom management. A few times I felt overwhelmed with students walking around, and at times the classroom environment seemed chaotic. Mr. Nash did not seem to be flustered by movement in the classroom. I did notice some students did not understand his explanations during lessons, and students were not clear regarding instructions. However, his personal relationships with the students helped maintain behaviors in the classroom setting.

Mr. Simmons. Mr. Simmons is African American, with 7 years of teaching experience in an alternative school. He started working with at-risk students because he believes all students have the ability to learn and succeed. Teaching at the alternative school is inspiring to him because he is able to see young adults evolve into lifelong learners. Mr. Simmons tries to work with students by building a positive relationship through consistency and structure. He stated communication is a key component when working with at-risk students. He enjoys teaching all students and seeing them succeed after attending alternative school.

During classroom observations and hallway observations, I could understand why students enjoyed his class. He had a positive attitude, and students could see he enjoyed teaching. Mr. Simmons was inviting when I asked him about observing his classroom. His teaching style was different from that of the other participants but well received by students. He was more

interactive with students. As students passed him in the hallway, he always called them by name, and students responded positively to his greeting. He constantly circulated the classroom and spoke to each student regarding lessons. He also grouped students often during classroom activities.

Dr. Scott. Dr. Scott is African American, with over 12 years of teaching in an alternative setting. He originally worked with students with mental health issues, an experience that led to his work with students showing behavioral issues. As an African American man, he hopes to model positive behaviors, especially to his male students. He works with his students to develop coping skills to handle difficult situations. He develops personal relationships with his students to create a family atmosphere in his classroom. Each student plays a role within the school, and Mr. Scott helps students determine lifelong goals when they return to their zoned school.

Dr. Scott was very interactive and displayed a warm personality. I observed that he was well liked by students even outside the classroom. Dr. Scott was structured in the classroom and had high classroom expectations. He would allow students to earn special incentives like reading independently or academic games on the computer. During observations, I noticed the male students in the classroom were receptive to him. All students were treated equally and understood Dr. Scott's expectations.

Findings by Theme

Interview data from teachers identified six emergent themes: (a) need for social skills education, (b) positive support by teachers, (c) adult mentors, (d) transition plan, (e) extracurricular activities, and (f) communication between all stakeholders. Staff participated in interviews and shared their experiences relevant to this case study. While reading interview data of their experiences, it is important to keep in mind that the participants are educators in a high-

anxiety environment. Teaching in such an environment is extremely different from a traditional school setting. Educators are expected to teach students an exact curriculum in an environment with support lacking in several different areas. Pseudonyms have been provided to protect participants' identity. All individuals were willing to share the successful experiences and strategies they implement to respond to the needs of students in the alternative setting. Supporting observational data are included by theme.

Need for social skills education. When the doors open at 7:15 a.m., students are greeted by six faculty members and metal detectors. Observations revealed most students do not respond to any "Good morning" greetings from teachers. Teachers notice a student's lack of sleep or other cues in a student's behavior. Teachers and administrators model social behaviors to students. Sometimes, students who receive positive comments change their attitude for the day. The basic social skills are a struggle for most students; a simple "Thank you" seems odd to most of them. Interviewees were asked to share their understanding of social skills when working with at-risk students.

Mr. Smith shared his love for his students and how he wanted them to care more about academics. He stated most of his students lacked social skills with peers and adults. Further, classes teaching basic work ethics or any type of vocational job training are nonexistent. He has talked to people at the board office about a work program where students can go find a job, learn on-the-job skills, and even receive teacher visits at job sites. He said, "They've shown little interest in that. The factor that contributes to success of at-risk students, number one, is the need for social skills education to develop social skills to make it outside of school."

Mr. Brown shared his experiences and the importance of teaching social skills in all academic and nonacademic courses. He stated, "Most of my students struggle with interactions

with peers and most adults. Some of my students return several times [to the alternative school from the zoned school] due to communication skills or should I say lack of communication skills."

Similar to Mr. Smith, Mr. Nash expressed that the main factor that contributes to success of at-risk students is social skills education. Students need to develop social skills to succeed outside of school. "I can teach them math everyday, but if they are not able to interview for a job, then math is not the issue."

Mr. Simmons expressed his concern regarding social skills and worried about how students would survive without them. He feels social skills impact all factors of their lives. He shared,

> I think over the past 4 years I've been working here, I've seen how self-awareness has changed in the student. Such as disrespect. You see more student disrespect than in teachers and peers in this generation. They often don't care what they say, and when they say things that are inappropriate around teachers, administrators, and also their peers. Four years ago, it was a slight difference. Some students were more prone to watch what they say, but now the majority of the students, they just say whatever they think and feel.

Dr. Scott stated parents have a lot to do with students' lacking social skills. He stays connected with many parents regarding their child's academic success and he sees how few social skills parents acquire. He often has thought about teaching social skills to adults through a community service organization. I asked Dr. Scott how teaching chronic behavior students is different from teaching students in a traditional school. He replied,

> I think teachers at the [disciplinary alternative school] might have to deal with more student apathy and more disruptions than a teacher in the traditional school would. That's due largely I think to students' low self-efficacy and lack of social skills.

Educators working with students having chronic behavioral issues must be aware of their reactions. How teachers react can impact a student's reaction. These small moments can become a profound experience in the minds of at-risk students.

One mission of the alternative school is to educate students both socially and academically. Students lack decision-making skills to transition successfully back to their zoned school. The challenge as alternative school educators is to maintain an academic focus as well as social components. All the teachers interviewed expressed the need to hold students accountable for their actions. In this setting, students look to educators for guidance and reassurance. Teaching social skills can empower them to have a voice in their education.

Positive support by teachers. When educators create a supportive environment for all stakeholders in the school, the mission of the school can be clearly defined. A negative teacher–student relationship affects the learning environment and has a negative impact on students. School policies and differences in personalities often impact the school climate. A negative staff can model an undesirable environment when dealing with chronic behavioral issues. Students in this setting are defensive and even hostile toward any type of authority. Supportive teachers can strengthen the structure of the school.

Both Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown expressed the importance of positive teacher support. Building a positive teacher support system gives students a positive view of an authoritative figure and making a positive connection with community leaders. The teachers shared strategies to provide such support, including culturally relevant instruction, cultivation of student interests,

and communication with parents. Mr. Smith shared the following, also directly discussing recidivism:

> What I find works the best is to find out what interests them, what things are culturally relevant to them. By doing that, I can pretty much find out what I need to teach them and from what point of view we need to get some things done and build a positive support system. Students with chronic behavioral issues seem to find themselves in trouble and put themselves in situations just because there's no one to show them any positive steps to take, and that would be outside of school. They go back; they fall into the same crowd. We have a lot of students that have little interest in going back to their own home school because they have built positive relationships with faculty at the alternative school. When they get back there, nobody knows them. Most of the students that come back to our school, pretty much they fall into the same routine. They show minimal motivation at regular school. With positive relationships, we can call home and build parent relationships. The issue always when they go back to their home school is them just falling into the same routine of having confrontations with teachers and peers. Then once they get to the point where they're like 16 and 17 and still in the ninth grade, they just see where there's just no point.

Mr. Brown explained the importance of cultivating student interest in extracurricular activities as well as the simple importance of consistently reminding students of the importance of an education.

> [The disciplinary alternative school] has a wonderful support staff for students with counselor, social worker, teachers, and administration. We have teachers that are willing to work with students and go the extra mile. Sometimes it is frustrating to work with a

> student and build a positive relationship to only see them return having little success at their zoned school. If they don't show any interest in academics or extracurricular activities, they sometimes are pushed aside and forgotten until a disruptive behavior occurs. It's easier for teachers to just work with somebody who has an interest than somebody who's going to be disruptive if you do try to help them out. Not saying zoned school teachers care less, simply overwhelmed with large class size and time limitations. I constantly remind students the value of education, strive for the best. However, it is sometimes beyond my control. As I said earlier, only choice we have is to stay consistent and every day just remind them the importance of an education.

Mr. Nash described his strategy of sharing his personal experiences and mistakes in order to connect with and motivate students. He also described the support staff at the alternative school.

> When I personally think I get through to my student is when I'm sharing some of my personal past experience. I'll try to share some of my mistakes and some of my hard work based on my past. Hopefully they can see if I made mistakes and became successful, that they can do the same thing. I enjoy seeing the small role I have played in their life. I hope I have helped students turn their life around for the better by mentoring and providing them with a positive learning experience. One of my favorite moments I'd say was when a student that was previously on the wrong path came back for a visit at the school. Come to find out, he done graduated high school and joined the military. We have numerous support staff for our students, including a school counselor to help students with emotional problems and a social worker that provides assistance to students

> for things regarding clothing, or various other hardships. The school also offers free lunch to all students.

Mr. Simmons further emphasized the importance of relationships with and support for students, including "tough love" and discipline:

> I think the best thing we can do as teachers is build relationships with the students and just let them know that we care and we're there for them if they need us and ready to help. I believe positive relationships can change a school in good ways. Teachers show concern and provide our students with a more positive teacher support. However, at times, we have to show tough love. You can't show them this type of love until relationships are built.

Dr. Scott also stressed teacher support for a disciplined classroom, stating,

> The general role for all students, as far as I'm concerned, regardless of recidivism, is that they're expected to comply with classroom expectations and take an active role in their learning by being engaged in the lesson. The role, as far as they're concerned, for a majority of them, seems to be that they want to put on a show. Building teacher support helps control classroom disruptions and shows new students how to conform within a classroom setting. Most behaviors stem from not understanding the material, and they're embarrassed and don't want their peers to know, so they act out and cause disruption.

Teaching students having chronic behavior issues is not an easy task. It can become emotionally draining for educators. Most of the time, teachers leave because of the mental stress of dealing with noncompliant students and students who repeat negative behaviors. However, the gratification of helping students at an alternative school can be rewarding. The connections and relationships built can impact students for a lifetime.

Adult mentors. During the interview, all teachers expressed the need for adult mentors daily when working with at-risk students. Adult mentors create a unique relationship with students struggling with chronic behavioral issues. The participants discussed how forming bonds between adult mentors and students helps students learn to trust adults who are authority figures. The benefits for students include a variety of positive experiences to help mold their future. Mr. Smith stated,

> An alternative school that offers mentoring, through other teachers and adults within our community, helps make a strong connection with students. We offer students the opportunity to participate in our mentoring program. A lot of times teachers are limited in the ability to spend an adequate amount of time mentoring because of the alternative schedule. Just because the time when students leave for buses to return to their home school and all students leave to catch those buses, our time available is close to zero. Having community leaders step up as mentors would be beneficial to our students.

Mr. Brown pointed out that many students have no positive role models in their family or community. Teachers can provide such role models.

> Our students are challenged with daily life issues. Majority of our at-risk students experience living in poor neighborhoods, low socioeconomic conditions, also a lack of parent support and attending school, lack of attending school. They seldom have the chance to see success among their peers, family, or community. Providing them with successful adult role models who truly care about them could inspire them beyond the classroom.

Mr. Nash suggested the importance of mentors and role models who share similar backgrounds with the students. He also pointed out the importance of patience.

Adult mentors could show at-risk students the meaning of perseverance. Students could see the importance of an education and how making right decisions could lead them on a positive path. Mentors working with at-risk students would need to realize some students will repeat behaviors, and most are learned behaviors from their home environment. Change would not happen overnight.

Mr. Simmons stressed that adult mentors provide accountability to students, although in a supportive, nonjudgmental manner. He stated,

> Our students need accountability. Not saying all students lack that component at home, but most do. Single moms struggle just to keep daily chores completed. Adult mentors instill accountability to at-risk students. More one-on-one time with a positive role model fosters positive relationships and lifelong relationships. Some are more heavily influenced by their peers in a negative way. Giving them a supportive, nonjudgmental adult that requires success from the student could help the student overcome environmental struggles over time.

Dr. Scott described his experience as a mentor, detailing issues with adolescents who lack father figures:

> I have been a mentor in the past. It's mentally draining but so rewarding. Adult mentors, especially to teens lacking father figures, help create a connection with the same sex. I have experienced male students in the past that actually resent a successful male or any male for that matter. They have so much animosity regarding any type of father figure because of abandonment issues. I someday hope more positive adult role models join schools as mentors to our young adults.

The participants all shared the importance of other compassionate adults in addition to teachers in a student's life. Trust issues are a huge problem with most students with behavioral problems. Mentors could help cultivate a positive learning environment for all stakeholders.

Transition plan. The job of educators in an alternative school should not end when students return to the zoned school. Most students attending a behavioral alternative school need to learn how to communicate their basic educational needs. Furthermore, they may lack parental guidance and knowledge to return successfully to their zoned school. Creating a plan involving all stakeholders could increase the success rates of students leaving the alternative setting. A team of individuals developing an individual plan to keep students on track could be beneficial for returning students. The traditional school setting can be overwhelming for all students, but especially students with behavioral issues. Follow-up accountability could benefit all schools involved.

Participants felt a transition plan should be a must for all returning students. At times, they felt out of the loop or lost regarding students who had returned to their zoned school. With five high schools in the county, keeping track of students can be overwhelming. New students enroll daily at this particular alternative school. Teachers juggle maintaining structure in the classroom while debriefing new students on current classroom assignment. Mr. Smith expressed the following:

> I think the biggest difference I see between teaching in the alternative school and the regular school system is the students we have at alternative school, they really don't have a plan for their life. They don't see a future outside of maybe this week or the next week or maybe until the next time that we are out of school for a break, or for the weekend.

> Sending students back to their zoned school without a plan is senseless. We need to focus on ways to enhance students' success at their regular school.

Mr. Brown elaborated on a transition plan by stating,

> Our success sadly is measured by how students perform after leaving the alternative school setting. At least half of our students return with little high school credits from their zoned school. Here at the alternative school, we do not offer any vocational or job skill training, but in the regular school, they have a career center, which offers some of those job skill trainings. If we create a plan to help students transition back and new goals to enhance their future, they might have less time to create disruptions in the classroom. You see our students lack the knowledge to create goals and information regarding resources to help them succeed. Sitting down with a transition plan could help them focus on the long-term goals. See a future and become hopeful.

Mr. Nash, Mr. Simmons, and Dr. Scott agreed with creating a transition plan that involved all stakeholders. They all described having a responsibility to equip students for success once they enter a regular high school.

Extracurricular activities. Participants saw a connection between success and extracurricular activities. Education sometimes becomes caught up with academic success and does not include individual student talents beyond the classroom. Having an extracurricular activity can build leadership skills and teach a variety of skills academic teachers sometimes cannot teach because of time constraints.

Like many at-risk students, most students at the alternative school do not belong or connect to school pride. Creating a positive experience regarding extracurricular activities can help create pride and ownership of a school's success. Each student returning from the

alternative school should be required to participate in some type of school or community activity. Mr. Smith explained students had no plans for the immediate future. "Students here at the alternative school have little interest in extracurricular activities, or anything. There's hardly any parental support or communication with the parents." Mr. Brown stated,

> I think as far as teachers, the only thing we can do is try to introduce them to some extracurricular activities that might interest them, but honestly I believe that it's up to the parents to show some interest in their own child's schooling for them to be successful. Extracurricular activities bond students to staff and peers. Sometimes they become lost in the crowd and suffer isolation. They are not able to experience the connection to their school that some students feel.

Mr. Nash described extracurricular activities as motivation a little differently:

> I think attending a behavioral school has played a good role regarding students with interest in extracurricular activities. Students who enjoy those activities refuse to return because they miss opportunities to join school activities. When they are sent over to the alternative school, they lose all their rights to participate in an extracurricular activity. Therefore, once they're at this alternative school, they're just regular students. Now they're looking for something else to substitute their identity, which they are going to gravitate towards negative behavior, which is going to cause them to get in more trouble than they are already in. They soon realize behavior can affect their everyday life and return successfully to their zoned school.

Communication between all stakeholders. Who is responsible for the success of students returning to their zoned school? Participants cited the community, schools,

administration, parents, teachers, and students. However, as Mr. Smith noted, "There's hardly any parental support or communication with the parents." Mr. Nash elaborated,

> I think the biggest factor that contributes to their success is the involvement of their parent. The students that are with us just for a semester have strong parental support at the house and this leads to the question. They don't have any, they have minimal support at home. There's really no sign of academic success, and they don't have a chance to participate in a lot of activities. Students leave school and go home to an empty house. Little accountability or questions regarding their success from the day. I think we should set up a meeting between their home school principal or counselor, assistant principals, especially whoever was assistant principal involved in their meeting to have them sent over to our alternative school. They need to be a part of that, and their parents need to take responsibility in that matter too.

Mr. Smith described his experience trying to communicate to parents:

> Most of the students that come back to our school, pretty much they fall into the same routine. They show minimal motivation. You try to call home, and once again, the parent's not there. They'll be there for the orientation, but other than that, you're not going to get much response from them. The issue always when they go back to their home school is them just falling into the same routine of having confrontations with teachers and peers. Then once they get to the point where they're like 16 and 17 and still in the ninth grade, they just see where there's just no point. All stakeholders are responsible for the success of schools in the community. Just because our students need the extra attention does not mean they are not valuable to our community.

Dr. Scott commented on the importance of involvement of parents as well as teachers in the zoned schools, to help with a smooth transition:

> I think that caring teachers and parental involvement, or involvement of all stakeholders for that matter, are some of the main factors that would be important to at-risk students. If we had more information from the previous teachers in regards to the student's past behavior and performance, it would help us be better prepared as their teachers to get them where they need to be.

Mr. Nash had a different viewpoint regarding help from all stakeholders. Although less adamant about input from all stakeholders, he did note the importance of a support staff at the zoned school when students return:

> I don't think so. I just don't see where somebody who has not been in our school setting can help us. I can't go into a gifted class and teach. I think the same way there, I don't think if you have our students before, you could come in here and offer anything. I do see it as being beneficial to students to have a support staff when they return. Without educators understanding the school climate, it would be difficult to contribute to a student's success in the alternative setting.

Research Questions

Interviews revealed the emergent themes described in the earlier sections. These themes and participant insights were used to answer the three research questions guiding the case study. Classroom observational data also supported the interview data.

Research Question 1. How do experienced alternative high school teachers build positive relationships with students? Participants stressed the importance of positive relationships and positive school climate but only offered a few specific strategies to build them.

Showing genuine caring. Foremost, all the teachers exhibited personal caring for their students; they genuinely wanted to help at-risk students succeed. They delighted in student success. As Mr. Nash stated,

> I hope I have helped students turn their life around for the better by mentoring and providing them with a positive learning experience. One of my favorite moments I'd say was when a student that was previously on the wrong path came back for a visit at the school. Come to find out, he done graduated high school and joined the military.

In practice, Mr. Nash showed his caring and positive teaching style, asking students about their lives outside of school. Mr. Brown related to students on a personal level, and as a result students often asked him for help with situations. He demonstrated caring outside of the classroom as well, helping students pay for graduation attire, for instance. His inviting teaching style allowed students to make mistakes without feeling judged. Dr. Scott was interactive and exhibited warmth, treating all students equally. Dr. Simmons exuded positivity and love for teaching. He interacted continually with students to keep them engaged.

Learning student interests. Teachers noted building a positive support system gives students a more positive view of authority figures, which will help them cope in their zoned school and the community. Mr. Smith noted,

> What I find works the best is to find out what interests them, what things are culturally relevant to them. By doing that, I can pretty much find out what I need to teach them and from what point of view we need to get some things done and build a positive support system.

Observations revealed Mr. Nash made a point of asking students about their lives outside of the school. Similarly, Mr. Simmons greeted students by name in hallways. He also interacted

continually with students in the classroom, circulating and speaking to each student. Dr. Scott was also interactive in the classroom, although his classroom management was more structured. Dr. Scott allowed students to earn special incentives, such as independent reading time or academic computer games.

Sharing personal experiences. Mr. Nash described connecting with students by sharing his own experiences and mistakes: "They can see if I made mistakes and became successful, that they can do the same thing." Observational field notes supported this connection, as Mr. Nash openly shared his own life experiences with students. Mr. Smith said he enjoyed elaborating on real-life situations and life lessons with students. Additionally, the school offers free lunch, and teachers eat lunch with the students, which may increase interaction.

Patience and consistency. Teachers described the need for patience, as change will not occur immediately. They also described presenting a consistent message of positive expectations. During classroom observations, Mr. Smith always remained calm and offered consistent classroom management. He used humor to create a positive climate. Dr. Scott also demonstrated consistent high expectations in a structured classroom environment. Mr. Nash demonstrated a consistently upbeat, positive attitude in the hallway or the classroom. His consistent, positive demeanor communicated to students his love of teaching, and they responded positively.

Research Question 2. What practices do experienced alternative high school teachers implement to support students' successful transition back to zoned schools? Practices included modeling and teaching social skills, communicating with all stakeholders, building a positive relationship with students (as described for Research Question 1), encouraging extracurricular

activities, stressing the importance of an education, providing adult mentors, and creating a transition plan.

Modeling and teaching social skills. First, teachers model positive social behaviors to students. They also try to teach positive social and communication skills to students to prevent recidivism. Without social skills, students will not only fall into bad practices at their zoned school but also will be unlikely to succeed at job interviews.

Communicating. Teachers also try to build connections not only with students, but also with their parents. Teachers try to provide individualized support, as described for Research Question 1. They learn their students' histories and interests as much as possible to build intrinsic motivation. Dr. Scott noted the importance of communicating with staff at the zoned school as well to learn about each student's behavior and performance.

Encouraging extracurricular activities at the zoned school. Understanding individual students' interests also helps teachers encourage student engagement in extracurricular activities. Mr. Brown noted that students uninvolved in extracurricular activities in the zoned school "sometimes are pushed aside and forgotten until a disruptive behavior occurs." At-risk students often feel alienated, without a connection to the school. Extracurricular activities can build social skills and help the student feel a sense of belonging. Mr. Brown stated, "Extracurricular activities bond students to staff and peers," preventing feelings of isolation. Mr. Nash observed that interest in extracurricular activities at the zoned school impacted recidivism; students were motivated to stay at their zoned school in order to participate. Finally, Mr. Smith noted students often go home to an empty house; activities can occupy students who otherwise might get into trouble.

Stressing the importance of an education. Teachers also exercise consistency with their message of the importance of an education. Mr. Brown stated,

> I constantly remind students the value of education, strive for the best. However, it is sometimes beyond my control. As I said earlier, only choice we have is to stay consistent and every day just remind them the importance of an education.

Dr. Scott referenced the importance of engaging students in the classroom lessons. This involves changing student perceptions of their role:

> They're expected to comply with classroom expectations and take an active role in their learning by being engaged in the lesson. The role, as far as they're concerned, for a majority of them, seems to be that they want to put on a show. Building teacher support helps control classroom disruptions and shows new students how to conform within a classroom setting.

Providing adult mentors. The use of adult mentors was mentioned by all interviewees as a successful strategy. Mentors help students learn to trust adults or authority figures. They give students a resource for decision-making, coping skills, social skills, and more. Mentors and teachers provide positive adult models needed by most at-risk students. Mr. Brown noted, "[Students] seldom have the chance to see success among their peers, family, or community. Providing them with successful adult role models who truly care about them could inspire them beyond the classroom." Mr. Nash specified having adult mentors who were once considered at risk to "show students the meaning of perseverance. Students could see the importance of an education and how making right decisions could lead them on a positive path." Mr. Simmons noted that adult mentors could teach students accountability. "Giving them a supportive

nonjudgmental adult that requires success from student could help the student overcome environmental struggles over time."

Creating a transition plan. All participants described the need for a transition plan to help students transition back to the zoned school. Students lack awareness of educational options or even the communication skills to describe their needs. Their parents may be uninvolved or similarly unaware of options. Thus, a transition plan is necessary, involving all stakeholders. Mr. Smith said, "Sending students back to their zoned school without a plan is senseless." Mr. Brown indicated the transition plan should take into account job-skills or vocational training available at the zoned school.

Research Question 3. What challenges do experienced alternative high school teachers have when helping transition students back to their zoned schools? Many of the challenges interviewees noted related to the strategies they recommended. These included lack of social skills among students and parents, challenges related to mentoring, lack of parental involvement, and lack of communication with the zoned school staff.

Lack of social skills. A major challenge the teachers noted were lack of social skills among students as well as their parents. As Mr. Nash explained, "I can teach them math everyday, but if they are not able to interview for a job, then math is not the issue." Dr. Scott mentioned wanting to implement a community service program to teach social skills to adults as well. Mr. Simmons noted the increased disrespect from students, who seem to say whatever they think.

A challenge to alternative school educators is to maintain an academic focus as well as teach social components. Teachers noted the school did not offer job-skills training or vocational training. These are offered at the traditional high schools, however.

Mentoring challenges. Teachers noted the importance of a mentoring program but also mentioned challenges. Mr. Smith noted a challenge was the lack of time for teachers to participate in the mentoring program due to the alternative school schedule. He stated, "Having community leaders step up as mentors would be beneficial to our students." Mr. Nash noted the challenges of working as a mentor to at-risk youth. "Some students will repeat behaviors, and most are learned behaviors from their home environment. Change would not happen overnight." Dr. Scott described his experience as a mentor as "mentally draining but so rewarding." He also explained that many students have abandonment issues and may resent successful male figures, adding a challenge to the mentoring process and effort to provide a positive role model.

Lack of parental involvement. Lack of parental involvement or communication was mentioned as a challenge. Mr. Smith explained students had no plans for the immediate future and "little interest in extracurricular activities, or anything. There's hardly any parental support or communication with the parents." He noted parents attended orientation, "but other than that, you're not going to get much response from them." Mr. Brown stated, "Honestly I believe that it's up to the parents to show some interest in their own child's schooling for them to be successful." Mr. Nash stated, "I think the biggest factor that contributes to their success is the involvement of their parent."

Lack of communication with zoned schools. Dr. Scott noted a lack of communication with the students' zoned schools as a challenge. He stated, "If we had more information from the previous teachers in regards to the student's past behavior and performance, it would help us be better prepared as their teachers to get them where they need to be." This type of communication is also vital for an appropriate transition plan.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Discussion

The problem addressed by this study is that alternative schools have a high rate of recidivism, as students find it difficult to transition back to their zoned schools. The purpose of this study was to identify practices that teachers perceived as having a positive impact on students transiting from the alternative school setting. Five highly qualified, experienced high schools teachers at a disciplinary alternative school were interviewed. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do experienced alternative high school teachers build positive relationships with students?
2. What practices do experienced alternative high school teachers implement to support students' successful transition back to zoned schools?
3. What challenges do experienced alternative high school teachers have when helping transition students back to their zoned schools?

Summary of Findings

Interview data from teachers identified six emergent themes: (a) need for social skills education, (b) positive support by teachers, (c) adult mentors, (d) transition plan, (e) extracurricular activities, and (f) communication between all stakeholders. These themes corresponded to the answers to the research questions. Findings are reviewed in the following sections based on research question.

Research Question 1. How do experienced alternative high school teachers build positive relationships with students? Participants stressed the importance of positive relationships and positive school climate but only offered a few specific strategies to build them.

Methods they mentioned were showing genuine caring, learning student interests, and sharing personal experience. They also emphasized the importance of patience and consistency.

Research Question 2. What practices do experienced alternative high school teachers implement to support students' successful transition back to zoned schools? Practices included modeling and teaching social skills, communicating with all stakeholders, building a positive relationship with students (as described for Research Question 1), encouraging extracurricular activities, stressing the importance of an education, providing adult mentors, and creating a transition plan. Teachers felt the transition plan was part of their responsibility to equip students for success once they entered the traditional high school environment.

Research Question 3. What challenges do experienced alternative high school teachers have when helping transition students back to their zoned schools? Many of the challenges interviewees noted related to the strategies they recommended. These included lack of social skills among students and parents, challenges related to mentoring, lack of parental involvement, and lack of communication with the zoned school staff. Mr. Smith stated, "There's hardly any parental support or communication with the parents." Mr. Nash noted the biggest factor in student success is parental involvement. Dr. Scott noted teachers needed more information from the students' teachers at the traditional schools. Teachers felt they lost communication with students returning to the zoned schools. They emphasized the importance of meeting with staff at the student's zoned school before and after the student's term at the alternative school.

Relation of Findings to the Literature

Practices to develop positive teacher–student relationships. Participants stressed the importance of positive relationships and positive school climate. Experts in the field suggest that positive adult support, such as in alternative settings, can be a useful tool in reaching students at

high risk of not completing high school (Carter, 2004; Daloz, 2004). Becker and Luthar (2002) described social support and belonging in the classroom as among the most important factors contributing to disadvantaged students' achievement, motivation, and engagement. Strategies proposed by study participants to develop positive student relationships included showing genuine caring; learning and cultivating student interests, both academic and extracurricular; sharing personal experiences; and having patience to communicate a consistent message of the importance of an education.

Showing genuine caring. The literature supports that caring teachers who feel a moral obligation and responsibility can develop students into becoming ethical and caring after high school (Bartley, 2007; Bongo, 2011; Buese, 2005; Cha, 2008; Martin, 2009; McCollum, 2014; Thompson, 2010). Caring and respectful teachers have been characterized by their willingness to listen attentively, provide encouragement, hold their students to high expectations, and simply enjoy the company of their students (Downey, 2008). Teachers in this study exhibited all those characteristics. Two interviewees in this study described a caring relationship that also included "tough love" and accountability. Researchers have demonstrated the positive impact of the interpersonal relationship between a positive adult role model and students who interact daily (Bartlett et al., 2005; Larson et al., 2002). Increasing teacher or adult support for struggling students could prevent negative classroom behavior, increase graduation rates, and motivate students to become emotionally and financially independent adults (Johnson & Lampley, 2010).

Learning and cultivating student interests. Becker and Luthar (2002) maintained an effective curriculum for at-risk youth builds on the students' knowledge, culture, and experiences. Teachers must learn about students to build on their existing knowledge and interests. Further, the curriculum should provide activities related to students' individual interests and goals to

increase engagement (Becker & Luthar, 2002). Supporting students to succeed in areas they are interested in will help develop self-concept and feelings of competence (Manning, 2007). Students who are intrinsically motivated start to believe in their ability to succeed and continue to make improvements academically when they return their traditional zoned school (Levin & Nolan, 2010).

Sharing personal experiences. Teachers who do not focus solely on teaching state standards and daily rituals but develop positive relationships with students as individuals help the dynamics of the classroom (Rogoff et al., 2001). Teachers in this study connected with their students by sharing experiences. Interestingly, this theme was not widely represented in the literature.

Patience and consistency. Participants in this study recommended having patience to communicate a consistent message of the importance of an education. Conrath (1988) noted teachers can be effective by providing structure and predictability in the classroom, which many at-risk youth lack in their life.

Practices to support transition. Teachers in this study described practices to support students' successful transition back to zoned schools. Best practices included modeling and teaching social skills, communicating with all stakeholders, building a positive relationship with students, encouraging extracurricular activities, stressing the importance of an education, providing adult mentors, and creating a transition plan. These strategies are supported by literature on best practices (e.g., Griller Clark, 2016).

Transition plan involving all stakeholders. The transition plan and involvement of all stakeholders is supported by the literature. Burrus and Roberts (2012) emphasized that integrating the resources of family, schools, and communities is needed to meet the changing

needs of youth and help instill in them a sense of belonging and gain them self-worth. The plan should begin the day the youth enters an alternative school (Griller Clark, 2016). All stakeholders including guardians should be involved in the transition process (Feierman et al., 2010; Griller Clark, 2016; Müller, 2011; Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2010). Creating an understanding of student goals and discussing transcripts involve the students in monitoring and guiding their own success (Latham & Locke, 1979, 2007). Students should be prepped before entering the alternative school, during time at the alternative school, and when leaving the alternative school to transition back a traditional school setting (Griller Clark et al., 2016). Educators should consult with parents, teachers, school administrators, and a probation officer to help initiate a plan to transition students to an alternative setting (Sawyer & Borduin, 2011). The staff located at the home or zoned school should be prepped by alternative school personnel regarding any updated transcripts and student evaluations (Wojcik et al., 2008). Studies have shown most students still need monitoring after completion of an alternative school term (Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller, & Havel, 2002). After-care services are pertinent to create a positive change after release (Bullis et al., 2002).

The transition plan could include wraparound services or at least elements of successful wraparound practices. Wraparound services are comprehensive plans involving all stakeholders—parents, community, teachers—to help student with emotional or behavioral issues develop support networks at school and home (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2018). Wraparound services are flexible and based on the individual student. They are also strengths based and centered on the family. Wraparound services are based on 10 guiding principles (Bruns & Walker, 2008; Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2018): (a) strengths-based family leadership, (b) teamwork, (c) flexible funding and services, (d)

individualization, (e) perseverance, (f) an outcomes focus, (g) community context, (h) cultural competency, (i) natural supports (i.e., members of the youth's family and network outside of formal service providers), and (j) collaboration.

A critical role in wraparound services is the wraparound team facilitator, who is often a social worker, counselor, or psychologist (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2018). The facilitator guides the team through (a) the initial development of a trusting relationship with the family and student, (b) development of the plan, (c) ongoing plan implementation and refinement, and (d) transition from wraparound services (National Wraparound Initiative, 2018; Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2018). This role requires training, of course; the National Wraparound Initiative has recommended a three-phase training from orientation to apprenticeship to ongoing coaching and supervision (Walker et al., 2013). Currently, Georgia wraparound services seem oriented toward children in foster care; a list of 105 service providers did not include schools (Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, 2018).

Modeling and teaching social skills. Study participants emphasized the need to teach and model social skills to their students. Social skills include ways to deal with emotional stress, coping strategies, attitudes, communication, and confrontations (Kamps et al., 2000). Effective communication is a skill learned through example and requires teaching and modeling effective ways to communicate (Richmond et al., 2013). Students considered at risk often are considered underdeveloped regarding positive communication skills (Richmond et al., 2013). A 2-year study by Kamps et al. (2000) concluded particular behaviors decreased when social skills were implemented in school. Compliance regarding adult and teacher direction significantly changed, allowing academic instruction to increase (Kamps et al., 2000). Charney (2002) described the

importance of meaningful conversations between teacher and student to develop student sense of belong and value as well as to help build respectful communication skills.

Extracurricular activities. Participants described learning their students' interests and encouraging extracurricular involvement in the zoned school. Participants emphasized that these interests in the zoned school decrease recidivism. Children going home after school with little supervision between 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. can lead to poor behavior (Howie et al., 2010). After-school activities offered to students with behavioral issues can help with a sense of belonging and foster positive behaviors in the classroom (Cosden et al., 2004; Howie et al., 2010). Students who participate in school activities tend to display a more positive attitude toward school (Cosden et al., 2004). Christenson et al. (2008) also supported that students engaged in meaningful school activities were more likely to graduate.

Adult mentors. Adult role models positively influence at-risk youth (Becker & Luthar, 2002). Adult mentors can lead to increased grades, behavior, and attendance among students (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Leone and Weinberg (2012) included collaboration with an adult role model as an important component of a successful transition back to a zoned school. Mentors offer encouragement, social skills, time, and presence (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Converse and Lignugaris-Kraft (2009) concluded mentoring of at-risk youth could help to improve attitudes about school and prevent behavior problems.

Challenges. Many of the challenges interviewees noted related to the strategies they recommended. These included lack of social skills among students and parents, challenges related to mentoring, lack of parental involvement, and lack of communication with the zoned school staff. Communication is also vital between teachers and parents or guardians. By the

time students reach high school, parental involvement declines, especially with students having chronic behaviors (Schlechty, 2002, 2011).

Another challenge mentioned in the literature is that daily interactions with teachers can be influenced by the student's relationships with caregivers (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Conflict with a caretaker at an early age can create insecurities regarding adults and cause power struggles in a school environment (Burt et al., 2008). One participant in this study mentioned the challenge of working through student resentment toward males and feelings of abandonment.

Teachers mentioned using culturally relevant instruction and the importance of mentors from similar life circumstances modeling success. They did not mention this as a challenge, however, but as a strategy. Cultural differences and language differences can form a great barrier within an alternative school setting (DeAngelis, 2012). Teachers without cultural understanding cannot relate to the different cultures and aspects that come with diverse at-risk students. Students with language issues are more likely to respond to peer pressure from same-language peers (DeAngelis, 2012). Teachers at the study school understand the importance of culturally relevant instruction, but it may be a problem at other schools, including zoned schools.

Recommendations for Practice

I make the following recommendations as suggestions for practices teachers at alternative schools can use to transition at-risk students back to their zoned school. Findings support the importance of caring adults as teachers and mentors in at-risk students' lives. Caring teachers should learn as much as they can about individual students' interests to help motivate them to succeed in school.

Mentor programs are a must with at-risk students. Community involvement by adult mentors can help students learn to trust adults. Teachers do not have the time to adequately mentor all students, so caring community adults can make a difference in at-risk students' lives.

A transition plan is vital for each student. Stakeholders including the parents, student, teacher, and staff at the zoned school should work as a team to create a transition plan for each student. Communication with the zoned school is necessary to determine students' histories and interests as well as resources, extracurricular activities, and job-skills programs available at the zoned school. An in-depth transition plan must be developed. The transition plan should include all stakeholders. The transition plan would need to include caring adults, mentors, contact between all stakeholders, roles for each stakeholder, and progress monitoring. The transition plan could involve the following steps or strategies to successfully transition students:

1. The transition plan should begin upon student enrollment into the alternative school (Griller Clark et al., 2016). Educators should consult with parents, teachers, school administrators, and a probation officer to help initiate a plan to transition students to an alternative setting (Sawyer & Borduin, 2011).
2. An alternative school transition coordinator should guide the process. This role is similar to that of a wraparound coordinator and requires training (Walker et al., 2013).
3. All stakeholders including guardians should be involved in the transition process (Feierman et al., 2010; Müller, 2011; Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2010). Students and families should be directly involved in the plan (Griller Clark et al., 2016). Teachers and students can discuss student goals and transcripts. Student interests can be gathered to communicate later to the zoned school to help in engagement.

4. During enrollment at the disciplinary alternative school, students should receive instruction and modeling from caring teachers in social skills and communication as well as academics.
5. The staff located at the home or zoned school should be prepped by alternative school personnel regarding any updated transcripts and student evaluations (Wojcik et al., 2008). Efficient, accurate records transfer is an element of a smooth transition (Griller Clark et al., 2016).
6. Individual student goals and interests should be communicated and included in the plan. Student involvement in extracurricular activities or any type of school activity should be encouraged.
7. Leone and Weinberg (2012) included collaboration with an adult role model as an important component of a successful transition back to a zoned school. The presence of adult role models at the zoned school could dramatically impact student recidivism. This may require collaboration with the community.
8. Most students still need monitoring after completion of an alternative school term, and after-care services are needed to promote positive behavioral change (Bullis et al., 2002; Griller Clark et al., 2016). Communication between zoned and alternative school should continue for at least a term following transition back to the zoned school.
9. Teachers at the alternative school stressed culturally relevant teaching. Teachers at the zoned school may benefit from related professional development.
10. Wraparound services may be useful at the school site to encourage family input. Even without formal wraparound funding or programming, teachers at the school could use the principles and techniques of family-oriented teamwork to develop successful

transition plans and overcome communication problems. A program of professional development could be created based on research.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations are made for future studies examining ways to successfully transition at-risk students to their zoned school. Action research studies could investigate the effectiveness of after-school programs, parent outreach programs, interventions to provide emotional support outside of the classroom, and community outreach to develop mentoring and service-learning projects. Additional research could be conducted similar to this study but over the long term. Additionally, this study did not include perceptions of students; perceptions of both students and teachers could be gathered to help determine successful strategies to transition students at alternative schools back to zoned schools. This study on teachers' perceptions looked at ways to successfully transition students to their traditional home school. Specific questions for future research include the following:

1. Additional research should be conducted to test strategies for successful transition following implementation.
2. A study could be done to consider the students' perceptions of ways to help them transition back to zoned school. It would be useful to know, for instance, if at-risk students deem teacher support, parental support, and a transition plan as important.
3. Additional study could include data from administrators, teachers at the zoned school, and parents on ways to successfully transition students.
4. A quantitative study could test themes and their effectiveness.
5. A research project could be conducted to compare different alternative schools and their recidivism rates.

6. Studies could include an analysis of effective transition plans.
7. Studies could be conducted to demonstrate the impact of extracurricular activities on at-risk students.
8. Further research could be conducted on adult role models and teacher mentors with at-risk students with behavioral issues.
9. A study including zoned school teachers could help analyze effective transition strategies.
10. Recent research outlining specific curricula or strategies to teach social skills was lacking. A teacher in the study also noted that students' social interactions had changed over the previous 4 years. Given the every-increasing impact of technology on student behavior and social interaction, new research is needed on teaching students social skills in the digital age.
11. Research on wraparound services is lacking (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2018), leading to inconsistency and a lack of guidelines. Schurer Coldiron, Bruns, and Quick (2017) conducted a comprehensive review of wraparound research and reported many gaps remain. Future research could determine best practices for wraparound services.

Summary

Students at a behavioral alternative school need additional resources to be successful when they transition back to their zoned school. The literature studied revealed several themes on how to help students transition. Alternative school teachers want to see their students exceed expectations once they return. Teachers working with at-risk students see the needs of their

students and understand the importance of monitoring students when they return to their home school.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Are you female or male?
2. How old are you?
3. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?
4. How many years of work experience do you have?
5. Ethnicity?
6. How many years of teaching experience at an alternative school do you have?
7. Tell me about your professional background as a teacher, starting with your first position.
8. Why did you start teaching at this alternative school?
9. How are you informed of a student returning from the alternative high school?
10. Do you feel that the alternative high school adequately prepares students to return to their base school? If not what suggestions would you make?
11. What is your role in helping students make a smooth transition back into their base school from an alternative setting?
12. What do you see as the most important factors that help students make the transition back to their base school from an alternative program?
13. What steps do you take to create your relationship with your students?
14. How do you prepare them to return to a traditional school?

Appendix B: Qualitative Interview Questions

1. What is the best part about your job? Do you have a favorite moment that you could describe to me?

2. How is teaching chronic behavior students different from students in a traditional school?

3. What are nonacademic services or supports does your school offer students?

4. Describe the culture of your school.

5. What does a student transitioning back to their zoned school mean to you?

6. What does it take for alternative school students to be successful after transitioning back to their zoned school?

7. What factors contribute to the success of at-risk students?

8. What challenges do at-risk students experience?

9. How would you change an alternative school to help students succeed after transitioning back to their zoned school?

10. How do you think you could help students become more invested in their learning? Or is this beyond your control?

11. Can you tell me more about the school you currently work in (size, demographics, program priorities)?

12. What are impacts of recidivism on your students' educational progress, and do you feel recidivist students face issues transitioning?

13. Would it be helpful if teachers received additional support regarding at-risk students from home school before attending alternative school? If so, please explain.

14. Has the self-awareness of the typical alternative student changed over the years in which you have worked with this population? If so, please explain. If not, why do you think it has not changed?

15. In the past, have the alternative sites in which you have worked provided, offered, or assigned counseling support? If so, how did it affect your students' educational progress?

Appendix C: Thematic Coding

Six initial themes from literature & interview data	Subthemes from interview data	Related research question (RQ)
1. Need for social skills education		RQ2: Practices
	Lack of vocational training at alternative school	RQ3: Challenges
	Lack of communication skills	RQ3: Challenges
	Social skills education needed for parents as well as students	RQ3: Challenges
	Hold students accountable for their actions	
2. Positive support by teachers		RQ1: Build relationships
	Show genuine caring	RQ1: Build relationships
	Give students a positive view of an authoritative figure	
	Culturally relevant instruction	
	Learn student interests	RQ1: Build relationships
	Cultivating student interest in extracurricular activities	RQ1: Build relationships RQ2: Practices
	Communication with parents	RQ1: Build relationships RQ2: Practices RQ3: Challenges
	Share personal experiences and mistakes to connect with and motivate students.	RQ1: Build relationships
	"Tough love" and discipline	
3. Adult mentors		RQ2: Practices
	Help students learn to trust adults who are authority figures	
	Community members as mentors	
	Students lack positive role models	RQ3: Challenges
	Mentors and role models who share similar backgrounds with the students	
	Show students the importance of an education	RQ1: Build relationships RQ2: Practices

Six initial themes from literature & interview data	Subthemes from interview data	Related research question (RQ)
	Adult mentors provide accountability to students, although in a supportive, nonjudgmental manner	RQ3: Challenges
	Patience	RQ1: Build relationships
4. Transition plan		RQ2: Practices
	Students do not have a plan for their life or even near future	
	Vocational or job skill training unavailable at alternative school but should be emphasized at regular school	
	Involve all stakeholders	
	Help students make their own goals	
5. Extracurricular activities		RQ2: Practices
	Extracurricular activities develop sense of belonging, motivation	
	Extracurricular activites are not provided at alternative school, so students who enjoy them may be less prone to recidivism	
6. Communication between all stakeholders		
	Parent	RQ2: Practices RQ3: Challenges
	Zoned school staff	RQ2: Practices RQ3: Challenges
	Student	RQ2: Practices