Evaluating an Evidenced Based Program: Ruling Our Experiences (ROX) for 9/10-year-old girls in the Yough School District

Lisa Mumau

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EVALUATING AN EVIDENCED BASED PROGRAM: RULING OUR EXPERIENCES (ROX) FOR 9/10-YEAR OLD GIRLS IN THE YOUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

By

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Approved March 11, 2020

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ABSTRACT

EVALUATING AN EVIDENCED BASED PROGRAM: RULING OUR EXPERIENCES (ROX) FOR 9/10-YEAR OLD GIRLS IN THE YOUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

By
Lisa Marie Mumau

May 2020

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Launcelot Brown, Ph.D.

During elementary school years, girls experience social, emotional, and physical changes that affect their abilities to manage relationships and establish positive images of themselves. Given the aforementioned issues, girls need effective elementary school programming to support positive self-esteem and the development of girls’ Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies. The purpose of this mixed-method study focused on evaluating the Ruling Our Experiences (ROX) program for 9/10-year-old girls. The methods used were designed to address the three research questions: Based on the implementation of the ROX program in Yough elementary schools, to what extent do participants exhibit a greater level of positive self-esteem? How do the participants of the ROX program demonstrate Social-Emotional Learning Competencies? To what extent do the participants view the ROX program as creating a safe space for support in their daily lives? Thirty-six fourth grade girls participated in the study.
Participants completed a pretest and posttest of ten Likert-Scale items in the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE Scale). Eighteen girls participated in two focus groups that sought their perception of the effectiveness of the program. The results of a paired-samples t-test demonstrated a statistically significant increase in the participants’ RSES scores following the study. Data from focus group 1 and focus group 2 indicated participants’ growth in their knowledge and understanding of SEL and their abilities to apply skills from the ROX program into their everyday lives. The results suggest a need for girls to have specific programs in elementary school to support their self-esteem and SEL.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my father, Robert J. Bonder, whom I sadly
lost in November 2017 and who did not get to see me complete this process. An additional
dedication is given to my son Anthony, my brother John, my mother Linda, and my boyfriend
Dave. I extend a sincere and heartfelt thanks for all of your constant encouragement, inspiration,
and steadfast faith in me. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all of my students that I have
been privileged to work with, past and present. All of you have had an extraordinary impact
upon my professional journey.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Anthony, you are my cherished and beloved son. Your love, commitment to our family, and your support have been truly exceptional as I walked forward in this journey. You have taught me the true essence of hard work, patience, and compassion as a 14-year-old adolescent, and often reminded me to laugh and “chill out” when the moments of life became intense. Because God blessed me when I became your mother, I learned from motherhood that the day to day sacrifices are only temporary, and the moments of our lives are best demonstrated in the love we share serving God, serving others, and loving one another.

I am grateful to work at the Yough School District. Without the support of the elementary staff and faculty, administration, school board, students, and families, this work would not be possible. I extend a sincere thank you to Dr. Amy Larcinese and Dr. Jenifer Skorvan for being daily mentors in my life. Both of you have taught me by evidenced examples of your excellence the importance and value of community relationships and collaboration, both of which are significant and meaningful daily as a leader. Under your leadership, I have grown to lead by example serving our students and staff to the best of my personal and professional abilities. Your belief in me and your support will forever be cherished in my life. To Dr. Janet Sardon, my superintendent and mentor, thank you for steadfast support and encouragement that has been a catalyst to my professional growth and development. Not only did you demonstrate consistent belief in my growth process, ability, and personal transformation as a leader and scholar, but you encouraged me to focus on clear and measurable goals, one day at a time. Your patience, compassion, knowledge, and fortitude are key examples of your excellence in leadership that have been guiding lights on my professional journey. It has been an honor and a true privilege working with you and becoming a leader that thinks with her mind, heart, and
spirit in all that I do. I am truly grateful for the learning opportunities you have shared with me. You are the epitome of leading with your mind, heart, and spirit in a moment of action. I am a better person because of your investment in my journey.

Special thanks to my dear and close friends and mentors: Dr. Stephanie A. McHugh, Dr. Eva Allen, Dr. Marguerite Haldin, Dr. Fran Serenka, Ms. Shannon Small, Kelly, Amanda, Jeri, Jenn, Dana, Nicole, Barb, Jackie, Roger, Rebecca, and Becca. All of you have provided friendship, life inspiration, work inspiration, and have been ideal examples of leadership within my life. I love all of you.

Also, I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Dr. Launcelot Brown, chair of my dissertation committee for believing in me, guiding me, and having patience with me. Every email, every conversation, and in every meeting, you had a clear set of expectations and goals for me. Your leadership philosophy allowed me to continually move forward and gain vast amounts of momentum. Thank you for choosing to be my chair and for developing me into a scholar practitioner. A sincere thank you to Dr. Gretchen Generett, for being an active and valued member of my committee. Your encouragement and commitment to my process have been greatly appreciated.
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Chapter 1: Moving from a Problem to a Problem of Practice

Social, cultural, and historical perspective on the problem

In today’s society, when comparing the expectations for boys and girls, girls have different expectations than boys regarding gender achievement, classwork and courses, and sports (Swain, 2005). The later elementary school years (grades 4 and 5) prove to be challenging for girls. Among these challenges are physical and emotional changes during puberty that alter their moods, perceptions, and thoughts (Saunders & Frazier, 2017). The effect of these changes can negatively impact how girls manage relationships and establish individual identities. One of the results of these challenges is girls struggle to build positive self-esteem, which is a cause for concern. During these years, positive self-esteem can fluctuate based on a person’s thoughts of himself/herself, his/her attitudes, and relationships with peers, family members, and the school. Positive self-esteem is associated with academic achievement, career success, well-being, and healthy relationships (Saunders & Frazier, 2017). Due to the greater propensity of girls lacking positive self-esteem often there is less expected of girls’ achievement socially, emotionally, and academically. Specific interventions that support Social Emotional Learning skills for girls seek to address this issue of a lack of positive self-esteem by teaching girls about personal development, communication skills, feeling identification and conflict resolution, and how to make healthy choices.

Like boys, girls are a diverse population, made up of individuals from various social, cultural, socio-economic, racial, and interpersonal contexts (American Psychological Association, 2007). However, to date, the literature supports that girls experience life, situations, and relationships very differently from their male counterparts. While girls are presented with more opportunities today than in the past, girls are still struggling with creating a healthy sense
of self. Instead, too many of them internalize the negative messages from the media, Internet, music, advertisements, and videos. Girls demonstrate the willingness to express their thoughts and feelings, and to create meaningful relationships when given a space, opportunity, and voice to be heard (Hinkelman, 2013). Through a variety of research interventions, girls have participated in girl groups to explore their healthy self and to create healthy relationships, friendships, and to live safe and successful lives (Hinkelman, 2013).

Through student observation, personal counseling sessions, classroom lessons, and the body of research focused on pre-teen girls, I have concluded that there are multiple factors that contribute to the way young girls develop a sense of themselves. Girls utilize peer relationships, adult influences and external factors that are available to them to judge themselves against others. These external factors can influence their image of self, and this becomes more evident during the vulnerable transition from elementary to middle school.

My experiences as both an elementary and middle school counselor have allowed me to recognize the social deficits girls face when compared to boys their same age as they transition from elementary to middle school. Girls experience a decrease in self-esteem from elementary school to middle school and demonstrate a level of discomfort with themselves. When girls become “uncomfortable and lack confidence within themselves they become less-confident and disconnect from the world around them” (Hinkelman, 2013, p. 3). These transitions are often characterized by psychological needs of belonging to a group or creating an identity, which girls consider their main social agenda. According to Hinkelman (2013), “During the childhood and adolescent years, girls are inundated with negative messages about unrealistic images of females” (p. 6) that can constitute lowered self-esteem and expectations. Female students often share with their school counselors that they think a perfect woman is tall, light skinned, thin, and
beautiful enough to be in a magazine, on TV, or on a billboard (Hinkelman, 2013). However, these images are artificially created and do not represent the majority of girls and women. With society’s enhanced marketing tools and technology, young girls are experiencing increased and unrealistic pressure to belong and to look a certain way. Developing an understanding of social and emotional development through learning will empower girls to question the messages from TV, the Internet, and social sites regarding how they should be or how they should look.

Despite the myriad challenges facing pre-teen girls, there is not a current emphasis placed on effective elementary educational and supportive programming to help fourth grade girls develop an awareness and positive image of themselves, thus helping to build their self-esteem. While there has been interventions specifically focusing on middle school and high school girls, interventions for fourth grade girls have not been the focus of many studies. Negative self-esteem has been linked to psychological and behavioral problems that manifest in elementary years (Kutob, Senf, Crago & Shisslak, 2010). As stated by Yousaf (2015) “self-esteem is how we value or think of ourselves” (p. 140). Additionally, “self-esteem affects our trust in others, our relationships, and our work—nearly every part of our lives” (Yousaf, 2015, p.140). The importance of positive self-esteem awareness is integral for fourth grade girls as they begin to develop and journey through relationships at home and in school. Positive self-esteem awareness becomes even more important as girls enter school and begin to build relationships with their teachers, peers, and the school system. It is during elementary school years that girls define their image and what they want to be as they transition to the middle school years.

Rosenberg (1965) states that “self-esteem refers most generally to an individual’s favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the self” (p. 15). According to research literature, it is possible that girls may also seek to enhance their self-esteem through opportunity structures or
positive social relationships with others who verify their own personal strong identity (Swann, 1983). This particularly happens in elementary school years, when girls gather together based on similarities in personalities, friends, classes, and community sports. This creates a nurturing environment for girls’ positive personal self-esteem and growth.

Given the aforementioned developmental issues, the evolving technology and media sources, and the sensitivity involved within a rural culture and climate, girls, specifically in rural cultures and climates are not given opportunities in a structured group setting to develop an authentic understanding of what creates one’s self-esteem and what can impact self-esteem (Choate, 2014). Today, currently, rural communities have more diversity within the culture that exists as compared to the past, and in addition to changes in family structure, there is less support to be had (Adams, 2003). These changes in the structure of rural families result in hardships; such as: “higher poverty rates, higher unemployment, and are more frequently comprised of single or divorced parents” (Yang & Fetsch, 2007, p.1). As a matter of fact, “census data indicate that in comparison to Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), rural areas have lower median family-household and per-capita incomes” (Yang & Fetsch, 2007, p. 1). The impact of these changes has caused the rural family system to reorganize the responsibilities of the family. Due to the rural culture change, support systems need to be developed within the public-school system to address the issue of self-esteem for elementary age girls (MacTavish, & Salmon, 2003).

**Theoretical Frameworks of the Study**

A theoretical framework for understanding self-esteem and its importance for young girls is Maslow’s (1943/1987) Hierarchy of Needs pyramid. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs relates to concepts of motivational psychology and is comprised of a five-tier model for human needs. The
human needs are defined and depicted in hierarchical levels within a pyramid. When people begin to meet their psychological needs, safety needs, belongingness needs, and personal esteem needs, they begin to better understand themselves. Maslow suggests that as people begin to understand and develop deficiency needs and growth needs, they move through the stages of the pyramid. Personal needs that are on the lower levels in the pyramid hierarchy such as: Physiological needs, Safety needs, and Belongingness and Love needs must be satisfied before individuals can attend to personal needs of Esteem and Self-actualization which are located toward the top of the pyramid hierarchy. As Maslow states, as girls consciously or subconsciously move through the pyramid levels, based on their inner and outer satisfaction fulfillment they achieve a healthy sense of self. This theory supports that girls have a variety of life experiences that can either support or decrease deficiency and growth needs as they develop and journey throughout the various developmental stages. Appropriate development through stages matter as individuals interact socially with each other in groups.

When people develop a strong sense of healthy self-esteem in a supporting environment, they are able to test their limits and increase their social learning (Bandura, 1977). Bandura’s theory of social cognition helps explain the development of girl’s self-esteem. Bandura’s theory discusses how the environment affects girls’ cognition and behavior. The theory introduces the concept of reciprocal determination, behavioral capability, observational learning, reinforcements, expectations, and self-efficacy. In explaining the concept of observational learning, he posits that people learn from others and then can demonstrate similar behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Girls experience observational learning developmentally in schools as they seek approval from peers within a social group. So, girls can observe either healthy or unhealthy behaviors from others and then choose to mimic other girls’ negative or positive behaviors,
despite the consequences. These observations and choices are impacted by levels of individual competency in perception and emotionality. For this reason, Social Emotional Learning Competencies have utility in unpacking individual choice.

Social Emotional Learning theory and their competencies equips students to make decisions, demonstrate empathy, manage emotions, and establish and sustain positive relationships in all avenues of their life. In order to balance this theory, which is so focused on individual growth, a return from the individual to the group dynamic is vital. Thus, a systemic perspective provides balance and is helpful in understanding healthy self-esteem for girls. Bronfenbrenner’s Systems Theory is such a perspective.

Bronfenbrenner’s Systems Theory comprises five inter-related systems. These are: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The systems relate to the quality and context of a child’s environment (Addison, 1992). Each of the five systems has an impact on a child’s development depending on how the child’s interaction with the system progresses. A positive interaction in the system can support a child’s healthy maturation to a successful adult (Addison, 1992). Overall, this model explains the five inter-related systems that support a healthy sense of self by addressing the biological, social, cultural, and economic factors that are weaved within these factors of development.

These aforementioned theories support the importance of educational programs to support students’ Social Emotional Learning and self-esteem. When schools partner educational programs such as counseling groups with afterschool programs which both educate and empower students, students’ relationships and self-esteem increase (Global Partnership for Education, 2015). When learning is negatively impacted, students have difficulty acquiring the skills and knowledge to effectively manage emotions, show empathy, and establish healthy relationships
Increased awareness and understanding increase girls’ sense of self which then influences their relationships, self-efficacy, and decision making. It is essential that schools provide fair and equal education opportunities and social activities for girls and boys. Without equal education opportunities, girls’ lack of independence and their poor quality of learning will not support their skills for success in the 21st century (Global Partnership for Education, 2015).

Gender plays a powerful role in girls’ attitudes toward learning and these gender norms appear to be particularly restricting for girls in the areas of science and math (Global Partnership for Education, 2015). Many educators have hypothesized that girls experience more anxiety and self-doubt over their ability to be successful in science and math (Hinkelman, 2013). Due to their lack of confidence in their ability to be successful in science and math, girls are holding themselves back, and therefore, under participating and not taking advantage of classes for which, they are qualified (Desy, Peterson, & Brockman, 2011).

Despite high school girls expressing high interest in working in health-related fields, many of them are not pursuing the high school classes needed to enter into or be successful in the field. (Desy, Peterson, & Brockman, 2011). Even as they earn science and math credits in advanced classes they are more anxious in general, have less motivation, and lack an overall enjoyment of science and math (Desy, Peterson, & Brockman, 2011). Positive attitudes and esteem are essential for girls to bridge the gender and equality gap when accomplishing a task or career goal (Hinkelman, 2013). Subsequently, to support career goals for post-secondary attainment for girls in health-related fields, research indicates that interventions focusing on relationships, self-esteem, and self-confidence need to be woven into a developmental curriculum that focuses primarily on science, math, and career teachings (Hinkelman, 2013). Hinkelman further suggests creating special places in elementary schools for girls to become
empowered so that by the middle years, they would have developed a better sense of awareness, and increase their self-esteem and confidence. These “special places” can include: activities for girls, classroom lessons, and girl groups facilitated by the school counselor. Furthermore, in acknowledging the research about girls and attainment of academic and social success, adults and teachers, especially educators, need to receive proper professional development. Adults play a powerful key in teaching and modeling life lessons to girls (Hinkelman, 2013).

There has been consistent documentation of the positive and healthy benefits for young girls and adolescents who are involved in sports and extracurricular activities. For example, social and emotional outcomes increase (Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005). While research shows that there are an equal number of girls and boys participating in sports, the difference between girl’s and boy’s self-confidence or self-esteem decreases when girls enter middle school (Mahoney, Larson & Eccles, 2005). Boys tend to display a greater sense of self-confidence and are able to cope with the stresses that are prevalent for the middle-level learner (Bandura, 1977). The fact that girls want to engage in sports and activities is exciting; however, the fact that they feel less capable must be addressed. Bandura (1977) asserts that boys in middle and high school have a higher level of confidence which allows them to excel quicker at formal sports than girls.

Research by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning (2005) suggests that girls need to develop Social Emotional Learning skills (SEL) as they enter into the middle school years. SEL is the process by which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to recognize their emotions, demonstrate care for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make healthy decisions, and create a way to handle interpersonal situations effectively (Weissberg, Dymnicki, Schellinger & Pachan, 2008). The above critical Social Emotional Learning skills enable children to resolve conflicts, create positive
relationships and friendships, and make safe choices to support their communities (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2005; Elias et al., 1997). Girls develop Social Emotional Learning in elementary schools through developing self-esteem, exploring healthy choices, understanding themselves, and respecting others. When students’ social and emotional learning is negatively impacted, they have difficulty acquiring the skills and knowledge to effectively manage emotions, show empathy, and establish healthy relationships (Cribb & Haase, 2015). The personal learning and self-awareness that girls acquire through self-esteem development are best seen in their cognitive understanding, affective awareness, and acceptable behavior (Reason, 2010).

Elementary-aged girls need to be taught what healthy self-esteem is and what constitutes unhealthy self-esteem through a variety of interventions that are rooted in awareness and self-monitoring. Current research states that young children gain realistic self-esteem from accurate self-appraisal, meaningful accomplishments, overcoming adversaries, and being able to develop a support system to assume responsibility (Reasoner, 2010). The practice of social and emotional learning which encourages and promotes social learning helps girls acquire the skills and knowledge to manage emotions, show empathy, and establish healthy relationships. A positive outcome of SEL is improvement in building student achievement (Bandura, 1977). Based on my experiences as a counselor, I recommend a formal and developmental group approach for elementary girls to develop their self-esteem and a personal understanding of themselves.

Developing self-esteem in elementary school is critical to developing Social Emotional Learning skills and strategies necessary for success in middle and high school. Simmons and Blythe (1987) postulated that a primary task of early and middle adolescence is to achieve a
positive sense of self in response to the changes that occur during this time. Unfortunately, this does not always occur for pre-adolescent girls. More significantly, longitudinal research (Simmons & Blythe, 1987; Eccles et al., 1993) has shown that girls who transition from elementary to middle school show a drop-in self-esteem and self-confidence. So therefore, early preventive interventions need to be implemented within elementary schools to support a positive sense of self as girls’ transition through developmental levels of growth.

Local Contextual Perspectives on the Problem

Current educational literature on rural schools attest that remote family locations, increasing rates of poverty, declining populations, and limited growth through economic opportunities cause substantial challenges for students and their families (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005). Rural schools, by definition, are geographically small and remote (Redding & Walberg, 2012). Rural school districts are often taxed with the challenge of supporting student and community needs by heavily relying on their schools embedded resources (Redding & Walberg, 2012). Due to the lack of community support services providers, demographic challenges that are based on family location, and limited to no transportation in some households, students in rural communities struggle to access viable support services outside of the school system.

Yough School District, a rural district south of the City of Pittsburgh, has a student enrollment of 2,062 students. (Pennsylvania School Performance Profile, 2017). Yough is “nestled in the hills of Westmoreland County, spanning 77 square miles of rural land” which borders the Youghiogheny River (Sardon, 2019). There are several small towns within the Yough Community, including West Newton and Herminie. The community consists of mostly of young families and senior citizens. Many senior citizens are on fixed incomes and prefer a
consistent tax base. Due to the lack of business opportunities within our community, most parents work outside of Yough in the cities of Greensburg and Pittsburgh. Average annual income in the Yough community is approximately $49,000 (Personal Interview J. Sardon, July 10, 2019).

The district consists of three elementary schools (grades K-4), one intermediate middle school (grades 5-8), and one senior high school (grades 9-12). The composition of students in Yough School District lacks diversity. To date, 94.52% of the student body is white, 1.5% of students are black, 3.3% of students are multi-racial, 0.58% of students are Hispanic, and 0.1% of students are Asian. The district has an economically disadvantaged percentage of 46.84. The total percentage of students with special needs that are enrolled within a special education program is 16.34% (Personal Interview J. Sardon, July 12, 2019). The Director of Special Education and multiple special education teachers and support staff created a leveled special education program comprising of instruction through academics, behavior, and social emotional programming from staff. Currently, the elementary school counselors in Yough School District rotate between the three elementary buildings and share over 700 students.

**Challenges in Rural Yough School District**

Social challenges that affect students’ educational success in the Yough community include: single parent families, multigenerational families, divorced families, parents that lack a post-secondary education or skill set, parents working more than one job to support their families, and an increase in drug and alcohol use and abuse. Parent involvement can be a barometer measuring rural challenges and it is lacking in Yough Intermediate Middle School starting in 5th grade, according to Dr. Janet Sardon, District Superintendent of Schools at Yough. She has observed a decrease of parents attending school meetings, limited parent-teacher
conferences being attended, and a decrease in attendance by parents in school and evening events. However, parental support of sporting events after school is valued due to community perception, while attendance to sporting events has not decreased (Personal Interview J. Sardon, July 10, 2019). Research states that parental involvement declines as children finish their elementary school years (Zill & Nord, 1994: Epstein, 1990). As, Dr. Sardon stated, there is a disconnect between district parents’ perception of the importance of education and the value it plays in the students’ long-term success. Rural educators often openly share that there is a “dampening effect on student aspirations where families do not see education” as a valuable asset to achieving personal success and goals (Redding & Walberg, 2012).

Given Yough School District’s lower socio-economic population, students and parents alike struggle to identify direct causes of problems that relate to girls within a school and community context. This often leads to alienation for girls within our schools as parents may be unaware of the developmental issues that are present for girls throughout the later elementary and early middle school years. This issue presents even greater concern as parents’ resources are limited and school budgets are being decreased. Yough School District K-12 school counseling model currently places some emphasis on group interventions for promoting healthy self-esteem for fourth grade girls. However, low self-esteem can persist throughout middle school and high school years (Gruber, James & Fineran, 2016).

As a certified school counselor in Yough School District Elementary Schools, I have grown increasingly more concerned about fourth grade girls’ development, and I believe early interventions are needed to support their healthy emotional and social development. As an elementary/middle school counselor of 13 years providing prior and present direct service, individually and in groups, to fourth grade girls in a rural school setting, I have observed girls’
lack of opportunity to effectively develop the interpersonal, academic, social, and coping skills they need to reach their potential in middle school and high school. Girls’ inability to realize their own potential is compounded by the messages they receive from society and the media. Both society and media impact girls’ attitudes, values, and conception of the ideal appearance for girls through a negative sexualization of young girls and women through music, music videos, video games, and the Internet (American Psychological Association, 2007). The lack of uplifting and positive imagery from media sources has a negative impact on girls’ self-esteem and can also serve to impact girls’ academic achievement and post-secondary options (Dalgas-Pelish, 2006).

I have noticed that there is a drop-in girls’ self-esteem as they transition from fourth grade in the elementary school to fifth grade in the middle school. This awareness of the decrease in self-esteem is based on my own observation and interaction with the girls and discussions with parents. Specifically, within my role as a school counselor I have observed girls struggle with issues that include: divorce of their parents, stress with sibling relationships, death of a parent, friendship conflicts, (e.g. name calling, excluding a peer from sitting at the lunch table, excluding a peer during recess time, and miscommunications) academic struggles, lowered motivation, cyber bullying, and social conflicts related to accessing social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, and ROBLOX) such as posting messages that lack empathy and viewing and processing messages that show a lack of regard for themselves and their peers. Often when fourth grade girls access social media websites and post messages about a specific peer or group of peers, these messages are discussed on the school bus ride in the morning on the way to school or on the bus ride home. Based on these before and after school bus ride conversations,
Fourth grade girls quickly become involved with girl drama (relational aggression) and bullying behaviors.

Fourth grade girls in Yough School District elementary schools are experiencing an increase in mental health needs and home and family issues that transfer into their school lives. Girls experience these issues which often leads to a decrease in their personal motivation, a lack of effort in the classroom and in their extracurricular activities. This can lead to a decrease in their self-esteem. Fourth grade girls at Yough often request to see the school counselor to discuss relational aggression issues that occur on the bus, at lunch, or at recess. Furthermore, social and emotional issues affect girls in elementary and middle school as they begin to change in appearance and as they develop beliefs about the self and others.

Communicating with parents at Yough has been a process of building rapport and trust that have ultimately led to effective professional relationships with respect as a solid foundation. Parents can face challenges related to their personal belief system regarding the appropriateness of counseling for their daughters or the notion that it is unnecessary. Additional challenges parents face in Yough are a lack of personal resources such as time for active parenting and transportation to and from appointments and activities. In addition, some groups of parents lack the financial means to provide their children with additional support and outside resources. Due to rural nature of the Yough community, parents’ awareness of the latest educational resources and trends may be limited (Personal Interview J. Sardon, July 10, 2019).

Girls begin to develop a sense of academic achievement and confidence throughout elementary school; however, it is most notable that decision-making skills, communication skills, life skills, and beliefs about personal character emerge in the later elementary years (“The Essential Role”, 2017). Specifically, girls in grades 3 and 4 develop individual attitudes toward
the self, peer groups, social groups, their communities, their families, and school. These newfound attitudes that girls developmentally achieve can be both a form of independence, or opportunities for new problems to gain control such as: relational aggression with peers, ineffective communication with peers and adults, and an inconsistency to develop coping skills to support a positive self-esteem and Social Emotional Learning skills. The implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program that supports the child’s overall development through teaching skills of self-knowledge, and skills of maintaining positive and healthy attitudes, and career awareness are building blocks of a healthy sense of self for students in elementary school (American School Counselor Association, 2017). The Yough School District has supported facilitation of a girls’ group in the three elementary schools; however, these groups operate inconsistently based on scheduling of programs and academic needs of students. For instance, middle school and high school counselors in the Yough School District provide as needed counseling and services to specific students. One cannot just implement a program; the correct supportive environment must be created. For as Hinkelman (2013) states, girls demonstrate a willingness to learn and grow in a fun environment which supports their social and emotional wellness.

The significance of facilitating a program to support girls, like ROX in the Yough School District, will enhance the school culture by creating opportunities for girls to meet in a group setting with the school counselor. Through these shared opportunities, girls will learn strategies to develop their friendship skills and relationship skills through healthy communication and gaining a personal understanding of self that will transfer to school and relationships outside of elementary school. Providing school opportunities for girls to grow in their understanding of self and others will be essential to removing social barriers (e.g. lack of family support and limited
perception to support new ways of thinking by ignoring new information) to support services for girls in rural communities.

**Leadership Perspective on the Problem: The ROX Program in Yough Elementary Schools**

Ruling Our Experiences (ROX) has been a part of the Yough School District at HW Good Elementary School, Mendon Elementary School, and West Newton Elementary school since January 2012 through a grant opportunity. ROX is led by one Elementary School Counselor. The sustainability of the ROX program—group resources, budgeting, and program management—has been supported financially 100% by The Yough School District Board of Education and Administration since 2016. ROX, a nonprofit organization, is committed to equipping all girls with the skills they need to navigate the challenges of friendships, pressure, body image, fitting in, and social media. In the Girl’s Index, which includes a large-scale national survey, girls’ levels of confidence between 5th through 12th grade decreases. This study found that girls “levels of confidence decreased from 86% to 60% throughout middle school years.” It is because of these data that the implementation of a ROX program in the elementary years for girls can be fundamental to equipping girls with healthy communication skills, relationships skills, problem solving skills, developing support systems, and pro-social emotional decision-making techniques.

ROX trains and licenses school counselors, social workers, and licensed professional educators to deliver the evidenced-based program to girls in grades 4-12 in their school and community organizations. The cost per ROX participant is $75 and includes the curriculum and ROX swag such as: binders, water bottles, and sunglasses that are utilized as incentives for the girls to complete the various lessons within the program. According to Hinkelman, “ROX is a co-curricular experience with a 20-lesson curriculum that has been validated with more than
6,000 girls since 2006” and is continuing to grow and flourish in California and the Western part of the United States. The program has proven outcomes that support the following—increased confidence levels, greater acceptance of girls’ bodies, assertion when dealing with bullying issues, and knowledge of the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships. This program is aligned with the American School Counselors Association Mindsets and Behaviors for girls. ROX thematically differentiates the curriculum for elementary and secondary students by having similar but different topics based on grade level maturity of the girls within the groups. Both curricula focus on team building, healthy communication, dealing with girl drama/bullying, healthy relationships, navigating social media, body image, support systems, safety and violence prevention, stress and coping with academics, and leadership. However, the secondary curriculum is specifically designed for middle school and high school students by supporting more relational issues with partners, parents, friends, and discusses in detail violence prevention, harassment, and sexual identities.

The three elementary schools in the Yough School District provide the sample for this research. They are, HW Good Elementary School in Herminie, Mendon Elementary School in Ruffs Dale, and West Newton Elementary School in West Newton. The sample for this study comprised 4th grade girls participating in the ROX program. As stated earlier, there is a lack of diversity in the school district. As such, the vast majority of the girls were Caucasian. Their family structure consisted of nuclear families, single parent homes, or are being raised by a grandparent or other caregiver. These 4th grade girls volunteered to participate with parent permission. Each ROX program group received two ROX lessons a week within the allotted time period (student lunch and student recess) over a 10-week period that lasted for 45 minutes.
per ROX group session. The curriculum lessons from the ROX program were taught at a rate of one lesson for every ROX group session as stipulated by the ROX program guide.

The ROX program provides levels of support available for girls with permission from parents or guardians. As stated by the school district superintendent, the program can enhance many of the existing programs and student support services in schools that seek to provide emotional and behavioral resources to students. For example, the ROX program can complement the school counseling programs, the lunch time group meetings that comprise of teamwork activities, as well as a tiered Positive Support Program (PBIS) supported through the Pennsylvania Department of Education (J. Sardon, personal interview, October 17, 2018).

**Specific Problem in Yough Elementary Schools**

In order to effectively address the self-esteem challenges facing girls in elementary school, I plan to evaluate the ROX program, which, as previously stated, is an intervention curriculum designed to build girls’ self-esteem and impact their knowledge, skills, and personal awareness. The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the ROX program in addressing participants’ positive self-esteem, how the participants of this study demonstrate Social-Emotional Learning Competencies, and the extent to which participants view the ROX program as creating a safe space for support in their daily lives. The ROX intervention engages girls in various activities including small group lessons and projects that facilitate collaboration and mutual respect for each other, and homework support. This program works in collaboration with parents or guardians at home. This curriculum constitutes small groups discussion, class activities, and projects with the counselor as the lead facilitator.
In seeking to determine the extent to which the ROX program is effective, I ask the following research questions.

**Central Research Questions**

1. Based on the implementation of the ROX program in Yough elementary schools, to what extent do participants exhibit a greater level of positive self-esteem?
2. How do the participants of the ROX program demonstrate Social Emotional Learning Competencies?
3. To what extent do the participants view the ROX program as creating a safe space for support in their daily lives?

**Evaluation of The ROX Program**

The program evaluation of ROX utilized three measures consisting of a quantitative assessment (Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE Scale) measuring pre and post positive self-esteem, and two separate qualitative focus groups. The first focus group held during week 9 at all elementary schools sought to assess how the participants of the ROX program demonstrate Social Emotional Learning Competencies. The second focus group held during week 10 at all elementary schools assessed the extent to which participants view the ROX program as creating a safe space for support in their daily lives. This mixed methods approach allowed for the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data, thus making it possible for the researcher to answer the research questions.

Specifically, the first measure the ROX facilitator used was the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE Scale). The RSE is a ten items Likert-type scale with four response options ranging from 3—strongly agree to 0—strongly disagree. Some questions are reverse scored, with 0—
strongly agree to 3—strongly disagree. The RSE “provides a highly reliable and internally consistent measure of global self-esteem” (Gray-Little, Williams, & Hancock, 1997). Internal consistency for the RSE ranges from 0.77 to 0.88. Test-retest reliability for the RSE ranges from 0.82 to 0.85, while criterion validity =0.55 (Rosenberg, 1965). Research using Item Response Theory (IRT) reports that the “10 items of the RSE Scale are not equally discriminating, they define a unidimensional trait and provide information across the self-esteem continuum” (Gray-Little, Williams, & Hancock, 1997). This scale will be administered during week 1 as a pre-assessment and during week 10 as a post-assessment. This survey was administered in the room reserved for the ROX program to all participants at each of the elementary schools. Every effort was made to get 100% participation from all members of the group. Once the surveys were completed at all elementary buildings, the results were recorded by the facilitator and analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Program, using a t-test to compare the pre RSE test scores to the post RSE test scores. The focus group data delineated the strength of the program and areas for further research. During the surveys, students were not permitted to collaborate or have discussions regarding the survey.

This first round of focus groups sought to identify girls’ personal reflections and beliefs about Social Emotional Learning Competencies, through allowing them to share their personal voices and opinions. During the second focus group, the ROX facilitator sought to assess the extent to which the participants viewed the ROX program creating a safe space for support in their daily lives. Participants also worked on creating a picture collage to celebrate the ending of our ROX group and time together. This collage incorporated their personal understanding of how they have grown within this program, while empowering who they are. The girls presented their picture collage projects during the final group meeting. During this individual presentation
of their final picture collage, the girls had to demonstrate their understanding of self-esteem and share their personal interpretation of esteem, positive characteristics of their personality, aspirations and goals, problems they have learned to solve, and current successes both in and out of ROX. Participating girls are given the opportunity to showcase self-esteem growth through this program by sharing their voice and confidence in a culminating collage presentation.

The first focus group was held during week 9. The second focus group was held during week 10. Focus groups have become popular in social and behavioral science research as a group of individuals come together to help the “researcher discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research” (Sagoe, 2012., p. 1). Kitzinger (1995) shares that focus groups can support the exploration of people’s knowledge through experiences and can look deeply into how people think and why they think in a certain way about the researched topic. The focus group was utilized as a tool to help the evaluator not only evaluate the ROX program, but to develop new ideas and knowledge within the body of research (Barnett, 2002). There was a random sampling of approximately six students representing each ROX school group for each of the two focus groups. Students were placed in a round robin group setting in the room currently utilized for the program. The ROX facilitator read the focus group scripts to all participants. ROX sessions are constrained by a 45-minute time limit so therefore, the focus groups cannot be extended beyond that time constraint. Participants also were informed that it is okay to have a different feeling or opinion from other students in the group. Furthermore, the process of collaboration and confidentiality was discussed prior to the Focus Groups. Both focus groups were asked the same questions by the ROX facilitator. The facilitator had a 5-minute time limit for each focus group script and an 8-minute per question
time limit for each of the 5 questions which was monitored by a time watch to ensure fairness for all focus group members. The focus group questions for week 9 included:

1. What have you learned in ROX that you did not know about before becoming a part of ROX? (Assessing SEL Self-Awareness)

2. To what extent do you believe your self-esteem has increased, changed, or stayed the same due to the ROX program? (Assessing SEL Self-Management)

3. What other changes besides self-esteem have you noticed within you since being a part of the ROX program? (Assessing SEL Social-Awareness)

4. ROX is almost over; what new things have you learned now that will help you later in life? (Assessing SEL Relationship Skills).

5. How have you changed since being a part of the ROX program? (Assessing SEL Responsible Decision-Making)

The focus group questions for week 10 included:

1. What skills from the ROX program can you implement in your life outside of school?

2. How have your styles of communication changed with your friends and parents since being part of the ROX program?

3. Is dealing with girl drama easier, harder, or about the same since you have participated in the ROX program?

4. Since the start of the ROX program how has your personal support system increased, changed, or stayed the same?

5. What future goal(s) have you set to achieve after participating in the ROX program?
During the discussion with both focus groups, the facilitator recorded via voice memo application on an iPad and took notes with paper and pencil for analysis of comments to determine areas of consistency or outlying areas for further program evaluation. The facilitator analyzed the qualitative data, identified common categories, and generated themes of a specific interest and comments that were critically important or appeared to be outliers. Analysis was conducted using close reading procedures to identify themes via latent semantic analysis of responses. Data informed the research question and contributed to the researcher’s continued investigation regarding future implementation of the program.

In summary, this work is governed by a Problem of Practice and the research focus is an intervention that is especially meaningful to young girls. Participating girls were provided with a comprehensive, professionally delivered evidenced-based program, (ROX) equipping them with self-esteem knowledge, and awareness needed to live healthy, independent, successful lives. Hinkelman (2013) shares, “Specifically, through impacting the self-esteem, self-concept, and self-efficacy of girls, we can come together to provide elementary girls with early targeted skills to increase healthy decision-making and confidence that will provide them with lifelong skills” (p.5). Through delivery of a consistent, evidenced-based group curriculum, girls were provided with opportunities to support one another, in an effort to ensure a sense of self-esteem that should extend well beyond the elementary years. Chapter 2 the literature review, discusses Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Social Emotional Learning Competencies, Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, and Bronfenbrenner’s Social-Ecological Framework that provide the theoretical framework in support of using the ROX program as a vehicle for building and increasing the self-esteem of pre-adolescent and adolescent girls. Chapter 3 presents a design for action that has been supported by the literature review and empirical data that is presented
through the ROX program evaluation at Yough Elementary Schools. In Chapter 4 the results of the research evaluation from each line of inquiry and all data sources are presented. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings and implications, draws conclusions and makes recommendations. Also discussed are the limitations of the study.
Educational Research Literature: Theoretical Sources

The world is complex but especially so for girls. Girls struggle to feel strong, independent, and empowered which are all characteristics of self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined as a “positive or negative attitude toward the self” (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 30). Clay, Vignoles, and Dittmar (2005) have found in Western societies there is a difference in self-esteem based on one’s gender. Their findings indicate that females have a lower self-esteem than males during middle adolescence. Issues such as friendship troubles, lowered self-esteem, negative styles of communication, body image pressure, post-secondary expectations, and social media usage drastically affect girls’ overall wellness and social emotional development more so than boys.

Adolescence, and certainly early adolescence, is a period of multiple and profound changes for girls (LeCroy, 2004). It is noted that during these years, girls become confused with their gender roles, body image, and have a decrease in self-esteem. Within the last decade, there has been a growing concern amongst researchers, clinicians, and policy makers about the overall wellness of early adolescent girls due to high societal pressures and gendered expectations, developmental issues, and a more challenging world (LeCroy, 2004). Current research suggests that preadolescent years are the ideal age group for preventative interventions. These interventions would help prevent girls’ negative behaviors in adolescence (LeCroy, 2004). Due to the ever-changing issues that girls face, “empirical or evidenced-based prevention programs are needed to evaluate the potential of broad-based prevention efforts for preadolescence” (LeCroy, 2004, p. 429).
Simmons and Blythe (1987) postulated that a primary task of early and middle adolescence is to achieve a positive sense of self in response to the changes that occur during this time. Unfortunately, this does not always occur for pre-adolescent girls (Simmons & Blythe, 1987). More significantly, longitudinal research (Simmons & Blythe, 1987; Eccles et al., 1993) has shown that girls who transition from elementary to middle school show a drop-in self-esteem and self-confidence. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Technical Report (2005) Research conducted during the past few decades indicates that social and emotional learning (SEL) programming for elementary-and middle-school students is a very favorable approach to reducing problem behaviors, promoting positive adjustment, and increasing academic achievement (Payton, et al., 2008). Early preventive interventions with Social-Emotional Learning Competencies need to be facilitated within elementary schools to support a positive sense of self-esteem as girls’ transition through developmental levels of growth. Several theories underpin Social-Emotional Learning Competencies, providing a solid foundation for intervention in promoting positive self-esteem for elementary girls. This section overviews each theory in three parts: unpacking the theory, explaining the utility of the theory in the context of elementary school girls, and identifying deficiencies in the theory for the purposes of this study.

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid**

Maslow described the human experience as a journey of how people arrive at whom they choose to become. The theory is underscored by the human propensity to make choices in the service of meeting human needs. Maslow scaffolds human need by level of need from the basic to the complex. A variety of experiences and situations allow people to meet their needs for safety, belongingness, support, and esteem. This theory provides a schema with utility as one
differentiates needs and allows consideration of the human experience, its similarities and differences. Thus, according to Maslow, humans fulfill or realize their own expectations based upon their achievements in meeting their own needs. The scaffolded steps in Maslow’s Pyramid are: Physiological needs, Safety needs, Belongingness and Love, Esteem needs, and Self-actualization. As people grow in their understanding of personal needs, relationships, and feelings of esteem, they merge what Maslow compartmentalizes in theory to develop an overall healthy sense of self.

![Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs](Simplypsychology.org)

*Figure 2.1. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. This figure depicts Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Simplypsychology.org)*
The levels of need, in Figure 1, in ascending order as noted by Maslow (1954) are: Physiological needs, Safety & Security, Love & Belonging, Esteem, and Self-Actualization. The first four levels of the pyramid are referred to as deficiency needs, and the top level of the pyramid is known as growth needs or being needs (B-needs). Maslow (1987) posited in his Hierarchy of Needs that human needs are not “nearly as rigid” (p.68) as he implied in his earlier 1943 and 1962 descriptions. In summary, Maslow suggested that the order of the needs in the pyramid may become flexible to change as people have different external circumstances during their development. Also, he noted that “any behavior tends to be determined by several or all of the basic needs simultaneously rather than by only one of them” (p. 71).

In the context of elementary school-aged girls, as girls meet the needs explained in Maslow’s Hierarchy Pyramid, they grow in their understanding of personal needs, relationships, and self-understanding which becomes integral as they develop their own versions of a healthy self with positive self-esteem. In order for girls to move upwards in the hierarchy, they must make sure their lower needs at the first level are satisfied before they can secure their needs higher up in the pyramid. When elementary girls are a part of a trusted group, club, or activity promoting development of healthy self-esteem, agency, and self-efficacy, they can work together to learn sound decision-making, relationship-building, and self-awareness, and as a result, increase their self-esteem (Hinkelman, 2013). The ROX program and its curriculum help girls develop self-esteem and self-knowledge and directly relate to the process of Social Emotional Learning and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid.

Where Maslow’s theory falls short, however, is in the assumptions one must make based upon the choices humans make in meeting needs. For example, one might assume an elementary-aged girl is making a behavioral choice in order to meet her need for belonging (e.g.
wearing a popular shoe brand because her friends are). After unpacking the student’s choice, one might discover that the student is meeting a more foundational need (e.g. the shoes are hand-me-downs from her cousin and are the only shoes she has available to wear, thus meeting the basic physiological need of clothing). Maslow’s theory fails to fully reveal a reason or plan for behaviors through rationale or belief. Conversely, Albert Bandura’s Social-Cognitive Theory strives to focus on agency person-structured environment and behavioral outcomes. For this reason, this study pairs a consideration of Maslow’s theory with Bandura’s.

**Bandura’s Social-Cognitive Theory**

Bandura is known for his contributions to education and psychology. He supported the thinking of both behaviorists and cognitive psychologists when in 1986 he introduced us to social-cognitive theory. His theory included components of cognition, vicarious reinforcement, self-regulatory thought, and self-reflecting thinking that all support human functioning (Bandura, 2001). Bandura argued that social-cognitive theory focused on people’s overall human agency that encouraged adaptation and change. Human agency refers to one’s capability to influence the events caused by our own actions. He believed that people are contributors to their life and what happens within their life, not just products of it (Bandura, 2006). Bandura described human agency by using four core properties: Intentionality, Forethought, Self-Reactiveness, and Self-Reflectiveness. All four of these properties affect social agency, which includes one’s social influence, which is affected by personal and environmental factors.

Intentionality deals with the forming of intentions “that include action plans and strategies for realizing them” (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). Forethought involves “the temporal extension of agency” (p.164) through setting goals and anticipating future events:
Forethought includes more than future-directed plans. People set goals for themselves and foresee likely outcomes of prospective actions to guide and motivate their efforts anticipatorily. When projected over a long-term course on matters of value, a forethoughtful perspective provides direction, coherence, and meaning to one’s life (Bandura, 2006).

Self-reactiveness broadens the role of the agent to be more than just “planners and fore thinkers” (Bandura, 2006) and includes processes of self-management and self-motivation, as well as emotional states that can undermine self-regulation:

The translation of plans into successful courses of action requires the self-management of thought processes; motivation to stick with chosen courses in the face of difficulties, setbacks, and uncertainties; and emotional states that can undermine self-regulatory efforts (Bandura, 2006, p. 165).

Finally, self-reflection refers to self-examining of our human nature and our thoughts. Girls develop their self-examining skills and their personal reflections throughout their later elementary years. Self-awareness is a process that takes time and understanding for girls.

“Through self-awareness, they reflect on their personal efficacy, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, the meaning of the pursuits, and change existing life course patters” (Bandura, 2006, p. 165).

Bandura’s social-cognitive theory further proposed that human functioning is the direct result of personal interactions, behavioral, and environmental influences (MacCarthy, 2010, cited in Pappasergi, 2016). Furthermore, social-cognitive theory holds that both variables (human agency) and environmental factors (family, friends, schools, community centers, and experiences) determine human behavior and that human behavior also affects both the human
agency and the human environment (Oppong, 2014; Ryckman, 1997, cited in Pappasergi, 2016). As Figure 2 indicates, there is an ongoing relationship amongst people (agency), environment (community/life structure), and behavior (the chosen outcomes of relationships and environment). Therefore, when the person and environment work together it is expected that these factors will influence the behavior (Oppong, 2014; Ryckman, 1997, cited in Pappasergi, 2016). The environment, person, and the behavior affect all elementary-aged girls as they transition to middle school dealing with friendship issues, academic standards, decision making, support groups, and home problems. According to Pappasergi, Bandura’s theoretical analysis is captured as a threefold relationship. This relationship is between person, environment, and behavior. As shown in Figure 2, “there are recursive relationships among person (agency), environment (structure), and behavior (outcome)” (Pappasergi, p. 19).

Bandura’s theory of behaviorism, suggests that human social development is based on learning and is influenced by environmental factors, including people’s sense of personal agency. Social-Cognitive Theory suggests that behaviors, environments, and thought processes can all operate together to support people’s agency. When children are able to change the negative outcomes of their influences, their positive sense of self can increase allowing them to grow into healthy, happy, and responsible young adolescents and adults. During adolescence, girls struggle to develop a sense of self because they find themselves struggling with gender specific issues, which can lead to lowered self-esteem, friendship issues, and other struggles that can negatively impact post-secondary options. When their influences and environments change direction in a positive way, girls are more likely to be a catalyst for change and develop into healthy, well-adjusted, confident girls with positive self-esteem.
“Figure 2.2 Bandura’s Triadic relationship among agency/person, structure/environment, and behavior/outcomes” (Pappasergi, 2016, p. 19).

In order to evaluate the ROX Program at Yough Elementary Schools, it is necessary to understand Bandura’s social-cognitive theory that supports programming for girls and discusses their ability to develop self-esteem. Bandura (1999) argued that due to life’s transitions, the person and environment can be rooted within self-reflective capabilities that allow personal evaluation of self, personal thinking, and actions. This notion is extremely meaningful as fourth grade girls look toward peers, family, community, and social influences as they grow and develop. Self-reflective thinking directly relates to fourth grade girls’ self-esteem as they develop the skills, experiences, and relationships to develop from children to young adolescence. Brown et al. (1998) found that self-esteem began to decline at age 11 in white girls as they began to question their physical appearance and sense of self. Factors identified in the research that affect elementary-aged girls’ sense of self include: weight-related teasing, bullying, academic performance, physical symptoms of illness, poor relationships, and lack of motivation due to
depression and anxiety. Many factors present for an awkward stage for girls to develop throughout elementary and middle school years. These factors include: girls’ pre-occupation with self-beauty, gender role stereotypes, peer pressure, and friendship troubles, societal influences, and advertising, the media, social media, and the culture (Galeotti, 2015).

Girls’ participation in evidenced based programs and education during pre-adolescence and adolescence is necessary to build a strong sense of self which otherwise could lead to negative self-esteem. Research focusing on girl programs have expanded over the last decade. Primary goals of girl programs are to: promote healthy lifestyles, positive sense of self, develop friendships, understand girl bullying, engage girls in leadership opportunities, stabilize them to become strong women, and encourage these young girls to grow into women who will change the world (Barr-Wilson, 2012; Bruening, et al., 2009). When developmental and atmospheric changes are introduced to preadolescent girls’ development, self-esteem can be altered. Preadolescent girls feel lowered self-worth due to uncertain times and expectations. Programs that provide enhancement for self-esteem during childhood years have an important role in preventing poor behaviors (Daglas-Pelish, 2006). Subsequently, by creating a climate in school that supports programs for girls, Bandura’s theory of Social-Cognitive thinking can be applied when girls are faced with personal and environmental factors that directly relate to their behavior or the behaviors of others. Programs which foster positive behaviors through a variety of teaching interventions support a healthy sense of self for girls. These programs help girls to acknowledge who they are as individuals and all them to take charge of their lives and grow from the mistakes they have made without fear of rejection (Rosenberg, 1965).

Where Bandura’s theory is deficient in evaluating the ROX program is its failure to account for the developmental capacity of elementary school-aged girls to engage in higher-level
intention setting, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflection. The theory instead gravitates toward the reactiveness as a developmental fueling choice of elementary school-aged girls. However, Social-Emotional Learning Competencies take into account the appropriate developmental level of all age groups, including elementary students.

**Social Emotional Learning Competencies**

Social-Emotional Learning Competencies has a set of five interrelated theories consisting of cognitive, affective, and behavioral clusters that support girls as they grow and develop. Through social-emotional learning awareness, students are able to make responsible decisions, manage their emotions, demonstrate care and concern for others, and establish and maintain positive relationships (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified five interrelated competencies as central to social and emotional learning. The following is a glossary of these interrelated competencies.

**Self-Awareness:** Knowing what one feels; accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.

**Self-Management:** Regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, controlling impulses, and persevering in addressing challenges; expressing emotions appropriately; and setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals.

**Social-Awareness:** Being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; and recognizing and making best use of family, school, and community resources.
**Relationship Skills:** Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict, and seeking help when needed.

**Responsible-Decision Making:** Making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences for various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; and contributing to the well-being of one’s school and community (CASEL, 2005). Girls who are able to be self-aware and develop self-management through social awareness and positive relationship skills are more capable of making good decisions daily and are more likely to be headed on a journey toward success in school and beyond (CASEL, 2005).

The ROX program delivers lessons that are deeply rooted in Social Emotional Learning to support the skills and resources elementary girls need. Elementary-aged girls need to better equip themselves for middle school and high school years and life beyond a K-12 school setting. The ROX program curriculum for elementary-aged girls specifically supports Social Emotional Learning Competencies through an evidenced based framework with developmental group lessons and activities which focus on teamwork, self-esteem, empathy, decision making, styles of communication, creating positive friendships, career awareness and exploration, personal safety, empowerment, and an understanding of social media. These lessons are designed to be delivered in 20 group meeting sessions.

Two weaknesses in applying Social Emotional Learning Competencies to the ROX program exist in the developmental shortfalls of the girls and a focus of the competencies on a too-small context. Social Emotional Learning Competencies differ from person to person in their application and in the conclusions to be drawn. The developmental constraints of the
program participants are a factor. Elementary-aged girls struggle with consistency in how they assess their own feelings. In particular, they struggle with their reactions to certain internal stimuli which include thoughts and feelings, physiological responses, and age-appropriate coping strategies. In addition, girls are also sensitive to certain external stimuli that are precipitated by sensory factors such as: noise, sight, touch, smell, and temperature in their home and school environments. Hormones and other chemical variables can also skew their development and impact these students, compromising the utility of this theory. Social Emotional Learning Competencies also exhibit an inherent resistance to system scalability and generalization to groups beyond girls, instead applying to individuals with a laser focus on what makes one unique. Thus, in supporting this study with a comprehensive and sound theoretical framework, partnering Social Emotional Learning Competencies with a systems-based theoretical perspective may be more effective in evaluating the ROX program. Bronfenbrenner’s Social-Ecological Framework (Ecological Systems Theory) is such a perspective and thus, it has been included to underpin this study.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Social-Ecological Framework-Ecological Systems Theory**

Urie Bronfenbrenner is a developmental psychologist from Russia. He is best known for his Ecological Systems Theory of child development and is the founder of Head Start (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He saw the process of human development as interactions between individuals and their environments. The theory posits that ecological systems are the environmental influences that affect a child’s development through experiences, time, and changes in culture on a national level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He was able to demonstrate through theory that interpersonal relationships, even on the most minute level of the parent-child relationship, do not exist in a social vacuum but are instead embedded in a larger social structure.
within community, society, economics, and politics (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). This larger social structure also includes changes over time, as well.

The Ecological Systems Theory supports a framework that identifies five environmental systems in which children and adults interact on a daily basis (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The five systems are: Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem. These five systems focus on the child’s environment and the complexity of interactions at each system. These interactions can positively or negatively affect children’s levels of development, personal-social satisfaction, and future employment gains. This theory directly relates to the ROX program as girls between the ages of nine and 10 are constantly being influenced by their environments at school and at home, the culture they see on TV and on social media, that can either encourage or discourage a healthy personal development.

Figure 3 depicts Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory Framework as it relates to the systems that affect the interactions of children. According to this theory, the Microsystem is the layer closest to the child and contains the groups or institutions that directly encompass the child’s relationships. The structures in this layer would include: family, school, religious places of worship, peers, and the community. Bronfenbrenner (1990) notes that the relationships in his structure are bi-directional influences and move between systems. These bi-directional influences have the strongest impact upon the child. The second layer of the theory is
Mesosystem. It is within the mesosystem that interconnections are created between the family, teachers, peers, and the community (Berk, 2000).

In my experience as an elementary school counselor, if connections in the school and community are not made in a positive and healthy manner, students become disengaged and lack the self-esteem and confidence to create meaningful friendships especially with peers at school and in the community. The third layer of the theory is exosystem. In this layer, there is a separation between the larger social system and the child’s role within the social system (Berk, 2000). According to Berk, the child’s interactions within the exosystem is informed by his/her interactions in the microsystem. Examples within this layer would be parent workplace schedules or community-based family resource appointments. The child may not be directly involved with her parent’s work schedule or various appointments they have to attend; however, the child does feel the positive or negative force involved with the interaction of the system (Berk, 2000). The fourth layer of the theory is the macrosystem. This layer contains the cultural values, customs, and laws in which the child may live (Berk, 2000). Psychologists consider this to be the outermost layer in the child’s environment. This layer also contains socioeconomic status, poverty, and ethnicity. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states the macrosystem develops over time, because successive generations may play roles within it to cause its outcome to change. The fifth and final layer of the theory would be the chronosystem. In this layer, the system embraces the element of time as it impacts the child’s environments (Berk, 2000). The changing elements within this system can be external, such as death of a parent, or internal, such as the developmental and psychological changes that occur within an aging child. Children change as they grow and get older, and this change is impacted by their environments, peer groups, and other influences. Bronfenbrenner found that as children develop, their interactions between the
layers become more complex. So as children grow, their physical and cognitive (social-emotional) structures grow and mature within the layers.

Social Ecological Theory Framework by Bronfenbrenner suggests that children develop within a multi-layered system with five stages that naturally support their ability to bond and develop with their parents, then the family unit as a whole. According to this system, as children develop, they interact or grow into other layers of their social environments that include school, community, work, and cultural forces that factor into who they are. Children will be supported by the five layers based on their social-emotional development, cognitive abilities, and current and past experiences within their development. The ROX program directly relates to this theory by identifying the systems in which the girls will have opportunities to develop a positive sense of self and self-esteem throughout their development. According to this theory, the girls who bond together through relationships with their peers are able to develop healthy values and identities.

A positive aspect of applying Bronfenbrenner’s Social Ecological Framework is that a direct connection to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is evident. Maslow offers a tiered, systemic approach to the individual as defined by basic needs, psychological needs, and self-fulfillment needs (see Figure 1). Bronfenbrenner contrasts Maslow’s Hierarchy within a larger context, offering a systemic approach to understanding stimuli that impact both the individual and the system. It is this circular, connected theoretical framework that echoes throughout the empirical literature utilized to support this study.
Review of the Educational Research Literature: Empirical Sources

Girls need interventions such as group programs, athletics, and social skills opportunities to connect with one another in a safe space which allow them to be able to share their thoughts and feelings about growing up (Hinkelman, 2013). Interventions need to be responsive and relevant to support “a deeper understanding of their thoughts, experiences, perceptions, and beliefs” by understanding behaviors to support developing healthy esteem and an overall wellness for life (Hinkelman, L. 2017, personal communication October 17). As stated in the Girls’ Index, girls’ confidence in middle school shows a steady decrease, from 86% to 60% and then it levels off in 9th grade. Girls have shared that their confidence does not increase to the level it once was in middle school, and that this lack of confidence is still not fully established throughout high school. The struggle for girls in later elementary years begins with developmental issues, peer relational issues, and body dissatisfaction. They also struggle with gender differences in school and in sports and are influenced by the media that supports objectification of young girls and facilitates cyber bullying on one another (Curry & Choate, 2010). In a recent meta-analytic study, Grabe, Ward, and Hyde (2008) reviewed 77 studies from both the experimental and correlational literatures demonstrating that “media use is directly linked to women’s body dissatisfaction” and the idea to be thin (p. 460). Within specific girl directed interventions, girls can discuss what is positive in their lives and the negative challenges they face such as objectification (Hinkelman, 2013).

Citing the research literature, Hinkelman (2017) in The Girls’ Index stated that girls in 5th through 12th grade report that their current challenges with being a girl are: “drama, girls being mean, conflict between girls, and gossip and rumors” (p. 9). Many girls feel they do not have strong relationships with other girls, with whom they can talk when a serious problem or issue
arises (Hinkelman, 2017). The data from the Girls’ Index indicate that girls establish strong female friendships, having positive social engagements, providing at-risk interventions, and having conversations around girl drama through open and honest communication can decrease girls’ negative thoughts and feelings about themselves and their peers. Therefore, it is important for girls to have interventions within a supportive group that foster a sense of belonging and encourage or support healthy communication.

Programs to support confidence, self-esteem, and overall girl empowerment do exist for girls. We know that “adolescence and early adolescence is a period of multiple, rapid, and profound changes and transitions” for girls (LeCroy, 2004, p. 427). Because of these concerns and known factors, researchers, clinicians, and policy makers have had growing concerns with what to do to support these challenges girls face (LeCroy, 2004). Such concerns center around oppression, a media-saturated culture, gender, and safety issues that have researchers, clinicians, and policy makers finding it necessary to put in place programs to protect girls. These programs give girls skills to address conflict resolution, improve communication and advocacy by providing peer support through a group-based curriculum (LeCroy, 2004). On-going data and research are needed for “empirical or evidenced-based prevention programs” to support girls between elementary and middle school years (LeCroy, 2004, pg. 429).

Go Grrrls Program

In addition to the ROX program, there are other programs that seek to address girl’s self-esteem. One such program is the Go Grrrls Program. This program relates to my problem of practice because it is a middle school intervention that supports creating programs and safe spaces for girls within a developmentally appropriate curriculum. The curriculum in this program teaches healthy peer esteem, help endorsements (hotlines, help centers, peer support),
positive common beliefs about girls, positive body image, and depression awareness and prevention. In a program evaluation conducted by LeCroy, he explained that the study design included an intervention and control group and comprised both urban and rural participants. The major recommendation that emerged from the study was the need for ongoing studies and research over extended periods of time to support girls as they grow from adolescents to adults. Thus, a strength of LeCroy’s work exist in the urban and rural nature of the research. This work allowed the researcher to compare both urban and rural needs of girls as opposed to a homogenous rural context. With that said, one limitation to this study would be the lack of research conducted on girls within suburban communities. Information on this third group of girls would provide a fuller picture within a longitudinal study.

The Go Grrrls Program is a preventative intervention that has been specifically designed for early adolescent girls (LeCroy, 2004). The program documentation guide describes the sections of the program as “Method, Group Leader Section, Procedure, the Go Grrrls Curriculum, Measures, and Results” (LeCroy, 2004, p. 427). This program comprises a 12-session curriculum that was created to address “development tasks considered critical for healthy prosocial development within girls” (LeCroy, 2004, p.427). The program sought to support gender roles, self-image, forming peer relationships, becoming independent, creating support systems with adequate personal resources, and future leadership planning. The Go Grrrls Program method of recruitment was to speak to girls at lunchtime to glean an interest in group participation. Then, if girls indicated an interest, a formal informed-consent agreement would be sent home with each potential participant.

To further understand The Go Grrrls Program, it is important to understand the selection of group leaders, procedures of the program, and the specific curriculum utilized to support
developing girls’ healthy pro-social behaviors. The program instructors of The Go Grrrls Program delivered the intervention in small groups, 8 to 10 girls per group. In a study conducted by LeCroy, he discussed that the recruitment processes yielded 55 female volunteers from the school. The participants were located in a suburban school district in the southwest United States that included both rural and a more urban population. Data collected from the participants revealed a mean age of 12.7 years old. The sample was: 64.8% Caucasian, 18.5% mixed race, 11.1% Hispanic, 3.7% African American, and 1.9% Asian American. Additional statistical data indicated that one third of participants had a mother who attended college, half of the participants lived in single-parent homes, and one sixth received a free school lunch (LeCroy, 2004). For each group, two female leaders were assigned to facilitate the group and the lessons. The group leaders were graduate level social work or psychology students that were hired based on their experiences working with pre-adolescent girls, leadership skills, and an overall passion for the program (LeCroy, 2004). Group leaders were trained and had scripted manuals to follow as they facilitated the lessons within the approved Go Grrrls curriculum. The curriculum consisted of 12 developmental lessons: gender role identity, positive self-image, becoming independent, making and keeping friends, support systems, and future goals. The curriculum was designed to developmentally share skills with the participants, so they could resist when demands were being placed upon them by peers, family, and society. The lessons in the curriculum were created specifically for a female adolescent group. Each lesson was designed to be facilitated within a 2-week window over 2 group meetings. The lessons had specific tasks or activities that were taught to support the development of healthy skills for the girls (LeCroy, 2004).

The study of the Go Grrrl Program used a “quasi-experimental design”, with those who volunteered for the program being placed in the experimental group (LeCroy, 2004). The sample
size included 55 girls. Twenty-three of the girls were in a treatment group and 32 were in the control group. The analysis of the data was based on the responses of 48 to 54 girls (one girl dropped out of the program and some sections in the questionnaire were not properly completed, therefore not all of the individuals were included in the analysis). Fidelity was monitored through group leader supervision during the 12 session curriculum lessons. Matched participants in a physical education class were the comparison group. Participants were pretested and post tested, but otherwise engaged in their regular physical education class and its activities. The experimental group had seven to eight participants that were assigned to one of three groups. The method for data collection for the experimental group was through pre-and post-program questionnaires. All of the experimental group participants completed questionnaires before and after the intervention to assess performance on the dependent measures. To ensure consistency in both groups, the pre-and post-questionnaires were administered in classrooms to all girls by a trained research assistant. Participants were informed that their responses would not be shared and were confidential (LeCroy, 2004).

The measures of the Go Grrrl program are straightforward. Each participant is required to self-report information in a booklet. The measures to determine outcomes are selected by age and developmental appropriateness for all of the participants. The measurement scales are also selected due to time constraints of participants completing the assessments (Pre and Post) within the classroom setting. Due to the diversity of the curriculum content, “multiple measurement strategies were needed” (LeCroy, 2004, p. 431). Many of the “measures were based on previously standardized scales that have been subjected to reliability and validity testing” (LeCroy, 2004, p. 431). Overall due to school time limitations, “measurement model was shaped by pragmatic concerns” (LeCroy, 2004, p. 432).
The measurement model of The Go Grrrls Program as evaluated by LeCroy included 6 previously standardized scales used to measure specific areas of concerns: Concern with Body Image Scale, Gender Role Attitudes Scale, Peer Self-Esteem Scale, Common Beliefs Inventory, Depression Self-Rating Scale, and Help Endorsement Scale. These areas of concerns were deemed critical to the Go Grrrls Program and its curriculum. The measurement scales were taken from external sources from education scholars. The Help Endorsement Scale was specifically designed by LeCroy as a tool to support an evaluation of The Go Grrrls Program. Here is an example of the sort of questions asked: “How happy are you with your overall figure?”

Other measures used were the Gender Role Attitudes Scale, which measured participants’ personal attitudes toward being a girl (Simmons & Blythe, 1987). A sample question on this scale would be: Would you say you feel good about being a girl? The Peer Self-Esteem Scale which is a 10-item scaled used to measure self-esteem by asking about friendship (Hare, 1985). A sample item would be: “I have at least as many friends as other people my age” and “Other people think I am a lot of fun to be with.” These response items were scored on a four-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The Common Beliefs Inventory, a 44-item scale measuring common irrational beliefs (Hooper & Layne, 1983). However, for the purpose of this study, a shortened version of 24 items was administered. Sample items include: “If a person doesn’t have any friends, that means that nobody likes him” and “I believe I should be a better person.” The items are scored on a five-point scale, from never to always (LeCroy, 2004). The Depression Self-Rating Scale was an 18-item scale that measures extent and severity of depression in children between the ages of 7 and 13 (Birleson, 1981). Sample items include: “I feel like crying” and “I am easily cheered up.” The items are scored on a 3-point scale that
includes never, sometimes, and most of the time. The final measure that participants completed was the Help Endorsement Scale. The scale is a list of 15 possible sources of help (e.g., “hotlines and crisis centers” and “friends your age”). Participants were asked to circle all the sources they might use if they needed help.

Using the pretest scores as the covariate, an ANCOVA was conducted to compare the scores of the intervention and comparison groups on the various scales. Intervention and comparison groups had dependent measures of mean scores and were compared using a one-way ANCOVA. The intervention group reported greater increases in peer esteem, help endorsements, and beliefs compared to the control group in the Go Grrrls Program. Table 1 delineates the Pretest and Posttest, means and standard deviations of the five factors assessed in the Go Grrrls Program invention and comparison groups.

Table 1 depicts those girls who volunteered to be part of the program and those girls that were not involved in the program. The participants who volunteered for the program comprised the experimental group. Girls from a physical education class were the comparison group or control group (LeCroy, 2004). The girls in the comparison group received the pretest and the posttest but did not have any intervention activities besides their physical education lessons and activities (LeCroy, 2004). As noted in the Table 1, the girls in the intervention group after completing the 12 developmental curriculum lessons had an increase in their mean pretest and posttest scores for the categories of Peer Esteem, Seeking Help, and Common Beliefs.
Table 3.1. The Go Grrrls Program

Means and Standard Deviations for Each Assessment Variable at Pretest and Posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pretest M</th>
<th>Pretest SD</th>
<th>Posttest M</th>
<th>Posttest SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Group</td>
<td>24.88</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>29.64</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>29.09</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>30.10</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Group</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>7.08</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Beliefs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Group</td>
<td>23.38</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>24.50</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>26.81</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>27.04</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N=48 to 53.

Girls face unique challenges as they grow and develop. The culture surrounding girls is ever changing and their experiences are defined by personal thoughts, expression, the media, peers, and the community in which they live and attend school. Outcome data from the Go Grrrls Program show the potential need for additional research and preventative interventions for girls. The study found positive results and suggested that girls can benefit from prevention programs like the current one implemented. However, a notable limitation of the research for the intervention “is that the experimental and control conditions were implemented at the same site” (LeCroy, 2004, p. 437). Successful transition for girls into adolescence and then adulthood is a
major developmental task that can become very complex and therefore, is deserving of specific girl interventions. It would be recommended that an area or research examine a long-term girl intervention program with gender-specific interventions for overall skill transfer and effectiveness of a program.

**Girls on the Run (GOTR)**

GOTR is a multi-step program that supports girls at their existing developmental level and in a single-gender group. This program seeks to address the issues of gender stereotypes, beauty, esteem, friendship issues, peer pressure, and risky behaviors among pre-adolescent and adolescent girls (Galeotti, 2015). The GOTR structure and content support my problem of practice. This is because the program results in increased personal awareness, self-esteem, and confidence. As noted throughout the GOTR program, the time, engagement, and targeted curriculum help support girls and give them a reason to work toward personal goals. The 12-week after school program has a physical activity-base to support essential life skills. Lessons focus on “three categories: (a) lack of identity, (b) lack of connectedness, and (c) feelings of powerlessness over one’s own life (GOTR, 2015). At the end of the program, participants can run in a non-competitive 5K run. Participation in programs like GOTR have increased over the past two decades due to their targeted programming (GOTR, 2015). As previously stated, girls struggle more than their male counterparts; however, programs like this help increase a positive skill set as they transition into adulthood.

GOTR uses an exploratory, mixed-methods, non-causal, cross-sectional design to study long-term effects of the program on girls (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The study analyzed participants with previous program knowledge to ensure a fair sampling of feedback from girls in different age ranges, grade levels, ethnicities, and program year. Participants were recruited
from Washington State, and ranged from pre-adolescent girls to young adult women. Those who participated were from GOTR program years 2002, 2003, 2009, and 2011 (n=1,070). The purpose of selecting feedback across GOTR seasons was to triangulate the impact of data that concluded the GOTR experiences to be meaningful through skill transfer as the girls matured (Galeotti, 2015). Shortcomings of this study are many: limited recruitment only from Washington state; a wide age range prohibiting specific developmental level conclusions and instead yielding generalized conclusions; certain years were targeted while other years were omitted where data may have been either unavailable or unsupportive of the researcher’s conclusions; finally, a limited number of respondents make the study vulnerable to validity and reliability questions.

Survey instrumentation was varied for the GOTR program groups in 2002 and 2003 compared to those in 2009 and 2011. The 2002 and 2003 qualitative study involved interviews to determine the perception of long-term impact of the program among participants. Interview protocol included two demographic questions and eight open-ended questions. (Galeotti, 2015). Mean grade level was 4.3 while the mean number of sessions was 1.4 (Galeotti, 2015). Survey questions for both program groups were carefully crafted to ensure all participants could reflect and recall personal experiences gained from their program participation. In contrast, the participants in 2009 and 2011 completed both the quantitative and qualitative measures (Galeotti, 2015). In this survey, questions 1-31 were Likert-type scale items that supported healthy living choices and self-esteem. The last four questions were open-ended questions, looking at girls’ perceptions of home, oneself, decision making, and whether girls would recommend this program to others. Race and ethnicity were diverse, the mean age was 10.38 years and the mean grade level was 4.54.
Sixty-five respondents from GOTR seasons 2009 and 2011 completed the quantitative and qualitative measures. These 65 respondents were out of 520 and represents a response rate of only 12.6%. Out of those responses the majority were positive with participants selecting either sometimes or very much on the Likert-type scale. An examination of the results showed that 83% of respondents stated they would recommend GOTR to others (Galeotti, 2015). Other items on the survey that ranked high were: “respecting others, choosing friends with positive characteristics, and staying true to one’s own values” (Galeotti, 2015, p. 413). The study also suggested that girls felt less confident while at home employing skills and strategies from the GOTR program at a rate of 16.9% to 17.2% as they marked “not at all and very little” on the personal impact questions (Galeotti, 2015). Qualitative data was analyzed, and responses were categorized based on aligning themes. Outcome themes suggested that the girls who participated in the GOTR program felt positive connections in the program, long-term success, and lifestyle choices (Galeotti, 2015).

This study had a positive and significant effect on girls who participated long-term in the program (Galeotti, 2015). Also, girls who only participated once, also reported similar benefits through their data sharing. Both quantitative and qualitative data findings showed a strong relationship between personal self-perceptions and positive changes in behaviors since completing the GOTR program (Galeotti, 2015). The female adult participants stated the GOTR program lessons and curriculum helped them develop over time to support a healthy sense of self as they matured into adulthood. For all girls that participated long term and those girls who participated only one time the findings and data showed that there were benefits to after school programming for girls, that encouraged life skills, fitness, and building self-esteem (Galeotti, 2015). The findings from the study of the program while promising for young girls, would have
been more compelling had there been a component to have self-reflection throughout the 12-week program to better assess the daily learning from the curriculum. While positive data was shared, and curriculum lessons and self-perception were significant within both groups, limitations were present. Limitations were slow response rate, limited face-to-face interviews, and lack of observational data (Galeotti, 2015). The outcomes could have been strengthened by conducting surveys overtime.

**The REAL Girls program**

Throughout the research from the Go Grrrls Program and The Girls on the Run, it has been noted that girls struggle as they approach middle school and within their middle school years. Girls have stated that they feel overwhelmed and struggle with academic difficulties. Furthermore, girls demonstrate at-risk behaviors that are heightened during the middle school years (Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015). Absent interventions, girls are more likely than boys to develop patterns of underperformance in school and increased at-risk behaviors due to peer and academic issues (Chesney-Lind, 2001). The REAL Girls program is similar to The Go Grrrls Program and Girls on the Run as it offers a single-gendered intervention to support girls as they face challenges related to leaving elementary school and transitioning to middle school and beyond.

This program evaluation conducted by Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson (2015) examined the REAL Girls three-day intervention program includes a two-hour booster treatment session. Ten days after program implementation participants were surveyed on interpersonal characteristics of self-efficacy, school connectedness, and identity. The study analyzed two groups of girls from two different California Middle Schools (Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015). Shortcomings of the program evaluation exist in the small sample size, the too-specific population (only two
California middle schools), and the short term of the actual intervention. The REAL Girls program is only two days and two hours long, hardly qualifying as a program. Table 3 outlines the 12 Program Strategies for Promoting Resilience in Middle School Girls (Mann, 2012). These strategies are depicted in the program guide and curriculum of The REAL Girls program.

Table 3.2. Twelve Strategies for Promoting Resilience in Struggling Middle School Girls (Mann, 2012).

1. Choosing a private or special location
2. Intentionally choosing intensity and energy
3. Developing supportive and cohesive teams
4. Providing attentive adult women as role models
5. Using fun to create a climate of trust and rapport
6. Establishing and reestablishing relevance
7. Practicing actively evaluating situations and making decisions
8. Using preassessment to tailor a portion of the program
9. Providing time to reflect individually and collaboratively
10. Using culminating activities and ceremonies to debrief and consolidate learning
11. Providing take-home gifts that communicate care and reinforce community
12. Reconnecting through follow-up events and booster treatments
The study used a quasi-experimental crossover design to compare the effects of the program on participants’ levels of academic self-efficacy, school connectedness, and identity. This design compares the effects of a treatment group and a control group. Each group completed the 3-day intervention at different points in time. An outcome survey was administered at three different time points. The first survey was conducted prior to either group participating in the program. The second survey was conducted after Group 1 participated in the program and prior to Group 2 participating in the program. The third and final survey, was conducted after both groups participated in the program.

The sample comprised 48 girls aged 12 to 14 years of which 7 participants were 12 years of age, 37 were 13 years of age, and 4 were 14 years of age. With regard to race, 26 participants were White, 14 participants were Hispanic, and 8 participants were Black. All students were referred from two public middle schools in California. Participants were selected through a referral process by counselors, teachers, and principals, who nominated participants identified as at-risk—poor academics, behavior issues with peers, and truancy issues—to join this program. Informed consent slips were obtained for all 48 participants.

This program was developed based on Project Challenge (Mann, 2013), which is a gender-responsiveness wilderness program to support resilience and coping skills in middle school girls (Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015). Project Challenge, with its strengths and limitations, led to The REAL Girl program that utilized, the 12 core strategies of Project Challenge in a new and exciting way that would only be delivered within the context of a regular school setting, particularly a middle school. This program is closely rooted in the model of girls’ resilience that suggests young people who overcome the odds are able to retain reasonable levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, maintain relationships with others, and develop an authentic
sense of self that is both hopeful and pragmatic (Bernard, 1991). Alternatively, resiliency theory states that young girls with lower levels of esteem and development are at-risk for disappointment in life outcomes (Mann, 2013).

The instruments and measures used in the REAL Girl Program consisted of an: “outcome survey, program satisfaction survey, and a semi-structured focus group question guide” (Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015, p 121). Outcome survey data was derived by participant completion of:

1. The Academic Self-Efficacy subscale of the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Styles (Midgley et al., 2000) that used five items to measure student confidence in their ability to meet academic challenges and be successful.

2. The School Connectedness Scale (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002) that used five items to measure the extent to which students feel cared for and part of their school community.

3. Eight items from the Identity subscale of the Adolescent Personality Style Inventory and four items from the Hope Scale (Lounsbury, Huffstetler, Leong, & Gibson, 2005).

4. The REAL Girls program utilized the Pathways Subscale of the Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) to measure girls’ perceptions that they can achieve certain future goals.

The program satisfaction survey gave all participants an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about the overall quality of the program. The survey gauged personal perceptions, values, and the willingness of participants to recommend the program to other middle school girls (Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015). The focus group Questions were semi-structured to support the direction of the study. The overall design was to support participant autonomy regarding program expectations, elements, and personal identification of
what was a success of the program or what was a failure of the program (Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015).

The analysis for the REAL Girls program consisted of quantitative and qualitative data analytical procedures. The REAL Girls program evaluation by Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson (2015) involved collecting quantitative data from both middle school groups. The study examined both groups looking at the variables of: academic efficacy, connectedness, and identity. This occurred through a pre and posttest measure of the surveys for each of the participants during group sessions 1 and 3. When the data for group 1 and group 2 were compared it showed a “moderately larger increase in score for academic efficacy, connectedness, and identity for Group 2 across the categories” (Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015, p.123). The “tests for academic efficacy, t (24) = 2.41, p<.05; and identity, t (23) = 2.73, p = .05, were significant at the 95% confidence level, and the test for school connectedness was significant at the 99% level, t (24) =5.83, p <.01” (Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015, p.123). The results from the program “satisfaction survey demonstrated that all or most participants found the REAL Girls program to be helpful, engaging, and an experience they would recommend to other middle schoolgirls” (Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015, p. 123).

Qualitative results from the focus group supported the quantitative results of the study. The focus group survey data stated that REAL Girls “helped them reflect on their experiences, refine their sense of identity, develop new goals, and deepen their commitment to previously established goals” (Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015, p.123). Four emerging and positive themes were relevant from the focus group data amongst Group 1 and Group 2. The four themes were:
1. Attentive Role Models: Participants described the value of having a support system, advocate, or Big Sister extremely helpful and powerful.

2. The REAL Girls Community as a Point of Entry: REAL Girls provided a safe space for girls to come together, feel welcomed, and to build on relationships and common experiences together.

3. The Self-Esteem to Self-Efficacy Pathway: Girls in Group 1 and Group 2 both shared they developed a healthy self-esteem and began to value who they are, so they could build self-confidence. Participants also communicated the power behind being told “you are valuable” so they could be their selves and take risks to build their esteem and confidence.

4. Frank Discussion About Relevant Topics: Girls in Group1 and Group 2 discussed the importance of getting to know girl stuff, the important stuff, what’s going on in my life as extremely meaningful in the focus group data.

With regard to the positive short-term impacts of the REAL Girls program both quantitative and qualitative data from Group 1 and Group 2 promote a sense of positive importance with each participant. Participants cited numerous times that the program supported learning strategies that helped them feel supported by the community, promoted self-esteem, and helped them understand girl related issues with frank conversations. Ninety days after program completion, girls self-reported that they were still making efforts to participate in these communities of friendship and safety that were created within the REAL Girls program. Participants also reported that there was a positive influence on their grades and attitudes toward school. “This study suggested that struggling middle school girls are capable of engaging in and benefiting from frank discussions about the difficult and sensitive issues in their lives” (Mann,
Smith, & Kristjansson, 2015, p.124). While a major study limitation was the short time frame for the intervention and data collection, suggestions from the study recommended future analyses through a quantitative lens to look at program outcomes over additional time with embedded interventions. The REAL Girls program has positive outcomes regarding self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy in school and community settings that relate to all girls. Research has shown that girls develop self-esteem issues during later elementary years and without intervention, at-risk social-emotional behaviors can follow. With interventions, data and research demonstrate that girls are learning skills necessary to be successful and that these skills can be transferred outside of the intervention, group, or activity with success.

As noted in the research, self-esteem is an integral part of a child’s overall wellness that includes family, school, friendships, culture, and the changing environment. The studies cited: Go Grrrls program, GOTR, and the REAL Girls program suggested self-esteem education is critical to improve girls’ feelings about themselves. Dalgas-Pelish (2006) makes the argument that all parents, teachers and other important adults are in a “unique position to demonstrate and give the appropriate or relevant information that supports building in girls a positive self-esteem” (p. 347). Girls self-esteem drops as they enter middle school, which makes middle school a critical time to teach and expand their “understanding of what influences self-esteem” (Dalgas-Pelish, 2006, p. 347). Children learn through various lenses of social-cognition, and self-esteem intervention programs may better equip girls with the skills in elementary and middle school to make better life choices, to engage in healthy relationships, and to have a higher value for themselves (Dalgas-Pelish, 2006).
Chapter 3: Designs for Action

Introduction

Research on providing girl specific interventions for middle school and high school students is more available than research in elementary schools, primarily interventions in 4th grade for girls. This chapter reintroduces the purpose and context of the study. Additionally, it reminds the reader of the theoretical frameworks that ground the study. The chapter will discuss the methodology, the participants, and the role of the researcher using a mixed-methods approach. Furthermore, this chapter explains the process of data collection and data analysis for the study. At the close of the chapter, the details regarding the protection of the participants is provided. The researcher’s current position as a Yough Elementary School Counselor for the past ten years (and a school counselor for 14 years total) provides a close observational context for the study.

According to research in the National Middle School Association Journal, early adolescence begins a time of much self-appraisal and for girls, concerns about their self-image and the world around them (DuBois, Tevendale, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, & Hardesty, 2000; Harter, 1999; Rosenberg, 1965). Physical and emotional changes that occur, specifically for girls during early adolescence and the adolescent years, bring a sense of self-doubt and can negatively impact personal self-esteem (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994). The research suggests that self-esteem among junior high students has been shown to decrease from 6th to 8th Grade (DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, & Hardesty, 2002; Rhodes, Roffman, Reddy, & Fredriksen, 2004). As established, self-esteem is an important indicator of overall wellness that greatly affects people’s daily lives.
A child’s level of self-esteem greatly impacts current and future academic and social emotional development (Rouse, 2010). When children develop positive self-esteem and confidence, their futures are full of learning, discovering, and increased understanding of who they are. Additionally, children understand what they want in their future and are better equipped at building relationships and solving conflicts. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is beneficial to elementary girls to have intentional interventions in place before they transition to middle school to support the demanding physical, social, and emotional changes that will take place. These girl specific interventions help support their social, emotional, and academic developments. This research evaluated the ROX program on improving self-esteem and Social Emotional Learning Competencies for 4th grade girls in Yough School District. Yough School District is a rural school district that comprises three elementary schools, one intermediate middle school, and one high school. The district offers school counseling lessons that are evidenced based interventions to support increased confidence levels, greater acceptance of girls’ bodies, assertion when dealing with bullying issues, and knowledge of the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

The methods used in this study were derived from the literature review and specifically addressed the following three research questions:

1. Based on the implementation of the ROX program in Yough elementary schools, to what extent would participants exhibit a greater level of positive self-esteem?

2. How do the participants of the ROX program demonstrate Social Emotional Learning Competencies?
3. To what extent do the participants view the ROX program as creating a safe space for support in their daily lives?

The data collected from this evaluation study have the potential to help support and guide the direction of the Yough School District Administration and School Board when reviewing and deciding upon the school counseling/guidance budget, needs, and programming implementation on a yearly basis. The goal was to use this data from the participants to gain valuable insights into what social emotional strategies 4th grade girls learn in a girl specific program and how their levels of self-esteem can be influenced through the ROX program. Furthermore, the hope of this data collection will be to support developing a K-12 girl specific group intervention to enhance the self-esteem and Social Emotional Learning strategies of all girls in the Yough School District.

**Methodology**

**Identification and Selection of Participants**

This study examined 4th grade girls’ level of positive self-esteem, personal reflection and beliefs about Social Emotional Learning Competencies, and assessed the extent the participants view the ROX program as creating a safe space for support in their daily lives through the ROX program curriculum. A mixed methodology research design was implemented during this research study. The research study was designed to address each of the three research questions. The data presented herein will be collected through one survey: The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and one focus group held during week 9 of the program, and the second focus group held during week 10 of the program at all three elementary schools. All participants are 4th grade students in the Yough School District at either HW Good Elementary School, Mendon Elementary School, and West Newton Elementary School. Participants will be randomly
selected. Selected participants were called to a meeting with the facilitator to receive the ROX program permission form (to be signed by a parent or guardian) and the Informed Consent/Research purpose permission form/intent to video record (to be signed by a parent or guardian) (see Appendix A). (see Appendix B). Permission slips to participate in the ROX program and the research study were sent out to 40 interested 4th grade students at all three Yough elementary schools. Selected participants had three school days to return the ROX program permission forms and the Informed Consent/Research purpose permission forms to the facilitator. Only 36 (90%) signed permission slips were received back from parents and guardians, allowing their daughters to participate in both the ROX program and the research study. However, 4 girls (10%) did not provide signed permission slips within the allotted time frame to participate in the both the ROX program and the research study. Typical ROX group size at each school does not exceed 15 participants due to the nature of group curriculum and time constraints of the day and facilitator. The study was conducted at, HW Good Elementary School, Mendon Elementary, and West Newton Elementary School in the Yough School District. The participants are all students in the district and have volunteered with parental permission to be a part of the ROX program and the school counselor is also the ROX program facilitator. Participants were Caucasian, Bi-racial, and Black between the ages of 9 and 10 years old.

**Data Collection of Quantitative Measure: RSES**

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a measurement tool of self-esteem from the social sciences that can be widely administered to assess current levels of self-esteem. This scale is a ten-item Likert-type scale that participants completed by circling one of four options. Prior to passing out the RSES to all group participants, each participant was labeled, using the
This RSES was delivered by the facilitator reading the survey items out loud consistently to all participants during week 1 as a pretest and during week 10 as a posttest. The facilitator took approximately one minute to read each survey item to all participants during week 1 and week 10. Then all participants had approximately between one to two minutes to select with a pencil their answers during week 1 and week 10. The RSES was administered in the ROX room to all participants at each of the elementary school (see Appendix C). Every effort was made to gain 100% participation from all members of the group. Once the surveys were completed at all elementary buildings, the results were recorded by the facilitator and analyzed through the SPSS data program, using a paired sample t-test to determine areas of strength or areas of further research and evaluation.

**Data Collection of Qualitative Measures: Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2**

The focus groups were the final measures to collect data from all ROX group participants during week 9 and week 10 of the program. Focus groups included girls who were 9 and 10 years old, who demonstrated varying academic ability levels, of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and from varying home structures including: single parent households, two-parent households, and non-traditional family structures. For purposes of presentation, each focus group participant will be labeled, FG1/FG2 (Focus Group number 1/Focus Group number 2) and then the participants home school building and a number assigned between 1-6 (MN =Mendon Elementary School; HWG =HW Good Elementary School; WN =West Newton Elementary School). Therefore, FG1MN1 indicates the participant is in focus group one from Mendon Elementary with a randomly assigned number of 1. There was a random sampling of
approximately 6 students in Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2 representing each ROX school group in the Yough Elementary Schools.

The focus groups were conducted during week 9 and week 10 of the program at each elementary school, to gather participant feedback on ROX, participant knowledge of Social Emotional Learning Competencies, and the extent to which the participants view the ROX program creating a safe space for support in their daily lives. Students were placed in a round robin group setting in the room currently utilized for the program. The ROX facilitator read the focus group script week 9 and week 10 to all participants which took approximately 5- minutes by reading out loud the group overview and introduction (see Appendix D) (see Appendix E). The ROX facilitator utilized a voice memo application on an iPad to video record student responses and comments for accuracy. Participants were informed that it was okay to have a different feeling or opinions from other people in the group. Furthermore, the process of collaboration and confidentiality were discussed before the focus groups in week 9 and week 10. Focus group members were asked the same questions by the ROX facilitator at the close of each ROX focus group at all Yough Elementary Schools during week 9 and week 10. Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2 are each limited to 45-minute sessions during week 9 and week 10 so therefore the focus groups cannot be extended. The facilitator has a 5-minute time limit for each focus group script and an 8-minute per question time limit for each of the 5 questions that was monitored by a time watch to ensure fairness for all focus group members. The facilitator created a log format to confidentially identify participants through a seating chart and to support a structured way of recording participants’ comments to the focus group questions (see Appendix F).
Data Collection

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES)

During phase 1 of the data analysis process, students completed a pretest (Week 1) and a posttest (Week 10) with their confidential school name and student identification number on the top right-hand corner of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Students completed the RSES using a pencil and circled their responses for items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7, with 3—strongly agree to 0—strongly disagree. For items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 (which are reversed in valence), students circled 0—strongly agree to 3—strongly disagree. The RSES is a self-report instrument utilized for evaluating individual self-esteem. There are 10 items on the self-esteem scale. Because the RSES uses a Likert response scale, each item has a defined 4 or 5-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (Gray-Little, Williams & Hancock, 1997). The research examining the RSES scale “examined” the psychometric properties” of the scale and reported that it has “acceptable to high reliability” (Gray-Little, Williams & Hancock, 1997, p. 444). Researchers have reported coefficient alphas ranging from a low of .72 to a high of .88 depending on the assessment group (Gray-Little, Williams & Hancock, 1997). Data analysis included running descriptive statistics and reporting means and standard deviations, and frequency counts of the scored items for each participant’s pretest and posttest. Additional analysis included a paired samples t-test to compare scores from the pretest to the posttest and evaluate if an increase or decrease of girls’ self-esteem was present after the ROX program lessons were taught. The statistical significance was established at .05 level of significance. To test for practical significance of the change from pretest to posttest, I calculated the Cohen’s d effect size. As suggested by Cohen (1988), d=.2 represents a small effect, d=5 represents a
medium effect (mean difference approximately 0.5 Std Dev), and d=.8 or more represents a large to very large effect (mean difference .8 or greater Std Dev).

Focus groups are ideal for collecting data to support social and behavioral science research (Sagoe, 2012). Researchers define focus groups as in-depth interviews (Hughes & DuMonth, 1993) or group discussions with comparable participants to gather information around a specific topic of research (Sagoe, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the ROX program, I conducted two focus groups to gain participant thoughts and comments on how the ROX program supported Social Emotional Learning Competencies, and whether or not the ROX program empowered girls to create healthy relationship with self and others.

**Focus Group 1 (week 9)**

Participants comprised six randomly selected students from each of the three elementary schools yielding a total of 18 participants’ thoughts and comments. The data were organized and categorized by the ROX facilitator’s questions as stated:

1. What have you learned in ROX that you did not know about before becoming a part of ROX?
2. To what extent do you believe your self-esteem has increased, changed, or stayed the same due to the ROX program?
3. What other changes besides self-esteem have you noticed within you since being a part of the ROX program?
4. ROX is almost over, what new things have you learned now that will help you later in life?
5. How have you changed since being part of the ROX program?
Participants sat with the ROX facilitator during their scheduled ROX time to informally answer the above questions as they were eating their lunch. With the initial question being asked by the ROX facilitator, some wait time was needed to ease the participants into the process of a focus group by giving them non-verbal praise as they began to answer the questions and without offering discussion amongst one another. Once the initial question was asked, participants eagerly answered the remaining questions and were equally excited to talk and be video recorded. Average length of the focus group was approximately 22 minutes. Most participants did a great job actively participating and not talking over their peers. At the end of the focus group, the participants and the ROX facilitator debriefed about the process and then the participants were dismissed back to their respective classes.

**Focus Group 2 (week 10)**

During the final phase (week 10) of the analysis, the ROX facilitator conducted a focus group of six participants who were randomly selected at each of the three Yough elementary schools, yielding a total of 18 participants’ thoughts and comments. The data were organized and categorized by the ROX facilitator’s questions as stated:

1. What skills from the ROX program can you implement in your life outside of school?
2. How have your styles of communication changed with your friends and parents since being part of the ROX program?
3. Is dealing with girl drama easier, harder, or about the same since you have participated in the ROX program?
4. Since the start of ROX program how has your personal support system increased, changed, or stayed the same?
5. What future goal(s) have you set to achieve after participating in the ROX program?
Participants sat with the ROX facilitator during their scheduled ROX time to informally answer the above questions as they were eating their lunch. With the initial question being asked by the ROX facilitator, wait time was not an observed behavior by this group of girls on average as compared to the participants in Focus Group 1. Participants shared with the facilitator that this focus group was fun and easy. These comments were not shared by the participants with the facilitator during Focus Group 1. Participants talked on average longer with these set of questions and engaged the facilitator asking questions of the facilitator and of peers in the focus group. At the end of the focus group, the participants and the ROX facilitator debriefed about the process and then the participants were dismissed back to their respective classes.

**Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2 Data Analysis**

All recorded data were uploaded to REV.com and transcribed by REV.com, an on-line transcription service. Once the ROX facilitator received the transcription from REV.com via personal email, the ROX facilitator categorized all participant data utilizing detailed thematic headings for a deeper understanding of analysis. The facilitator analyzed the qualitative data, identified common categories, and generated themes of a specific interest and comments that were critically important or appeared to be outliers. Analysis was conducted using close reading procedures to identify themes via latent semantic analysis of responses. Data informed the research question and contributed to the researcher’s continued investigation regarding future implementation of the program. Data that emerged from all 18 Focus Group 1 participants were then coded and placed into an Excel spreadsheet. Categories and themes were then examined, and cross checked to the Social Emotional Learning competency they supported.

In the next chapter, quantitative measures are discussed through a two-pair t-test to provide data analysis of the pre-and post-tests. Also, Chapter 4 presents the qualitative data
results from Focus Groups 1 and 2. This data analysis allows the reader to draw conclusions about the qualitative data based on the evidence provided in response to the research questions. Furthermore, Chapter 5 presents and discusses emergent action plans from ROX program survey data and focus group data in the Yough Elementary Schools. It is important that the data be shared so that evidence-based decisions can be made with regard to creating programs to support pre-adolescent girls in the Yough School District.
Chapter 4 Description of Findings

Introduction

This action research study was designed to evaluate an evidenced-based program: Ruling Our Experiences (ROX) for 9/10-year-old girls in the Yough School District. This study examined the program as implemented in the Yough School District to determine whether it led to an increase in positive self-esteem awareness and the development of Social Emotional Learning skills and strategies necessary for girls to successfully transition to middle school from elementary school. Girls that engage in activities and that have developed a sense of “positive core values” are more likely to develop a “positive sense of self” that can support their emotional development from toddler years through adulthood years, according to Dr. Mary Rooney, Clinical Psychologist, The Child Mind Institute (Garey, 2013). What follows are the results and analyses of the participants’ responses to the pretest and posttest of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and thematic descriptions from two focus groups. These results support that the ROX program improves 9/10-year-old girls’ positive self-esteem and girls’ development of Social Emotional Learning skills and strategies.

This study occurred during the first 10 weeks of the 2019-20 school year. Since this is a mixed methods study, the presentation of the findings is split into two sections. The first section is the quantitative analysis of findings and the second section is the thematic description of the interpretation of the qualitative responses. The quantitative section will describe the demographics of the participants within the study, how the study was administered, and descriptive statistics and results of the paired-samples t-test. The qualitative section will be organized by focus group questions respectively for Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2. Each focus group question will be accompanied by a table delineating the thematic categories,
interpretation of the findings, and support from current literature as related to the research questions.

**Research Questions**

1. Based on the implementation of the ROX program in Yough elementary schools, to what extent would participants exhibit a greater level of positive self-esteem?

2. How do the participants of the ROX program demonstrate Social Emotional Learning Competencies?

3. To what extent do the participants view the ROX program as creating a safe space for support in their daily lives?

**Quantitative Demographics**

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was administered by the ROX facilitator and principal researcher to 36 female participants, that ranged in age from 9 to 10 years old. The female participants were all fourth-grade students that attended Yough Elementary Schools: Mendon, HW Good, and West Newton. There were fourteen participants from Mendon Elementary School, twelve participants from HW Good Elementary School, and 10 participants from West Newton Elementary School. Racial composition of all female participants included a diverse sample of girls. Participants identified with being a member of a nuclear family, of a single parent family, of an extended family, of a stepfamily, and of a grandparent family. The RSES is a ten-item Likert type scale to assess levels of self-esteem. Participants were instructed by the ROX facilitator and principal researcher to select one of the four response options ranging from 3—strongly agree to 0—strongly disagree for each question (Rosenberg, 1965). Some questions are reverse scored, with 3—strongly agree to 0—strongly disagree. Scores can range

**Quantitative Results**

*Table 4.1. Pretest and posttest RSES score by participant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>RSES Scores by Participant</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HW Good</td>
<td>West Newton</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student #</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
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The 36 participants’ scores are shown in Table 3. All participants who completed the pretest in week 1 were also present to take the posttest in week 10. The scores for the pretest ranged from 12 to 26. The scores for the posttest ranged from 18 to 26. In analyzing the data, frequency tables and box plots were generated to examine the range of pretest and posttest scores and check for outliers. The boxplot showed no outliers using the interquartile range (IQR) method. Over 85% of the scores showed improvement from the pretest to the posttest. Only 3
scores went down from the pretest and 2 scores stayed the same. Of those scores that went down 1, 2, and 4 points respectively.

Figure 4.1. Frequency Distribution of RSES Scores

Figure 4.1 shows the raw RSES scores for the pretest (blue) and posttest (red). The figure shows the posttest scores have more participants in the higher range of scores that are on the right of the bar graph. The data set is skewed to the right since many participants (over 85%) had an increase in their score from pretest to posttest.
Table 4.2. RSES Statistics by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>HW Good Pretest</th>
<th>HW Good Posttest</th>
<th>West Newton Pretest</th>
<th>West Newton Posttest</th>
<th>Mendon Pretest</th>
<th>Mendon Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>19.42</td>
<td>22.83</td>
<td>18.90</td>
<td>22.50</td>
<td>20.71</td>
<td>22.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each Elementary school varied in the number of participants that were included in the study. The average score for each elementary school increased from pretest to posttest. The average score increased from pretest to posttest were 3.4 points for HW Good Elementary School, 3.6 points for West Newton Elementary School, and 1.4 points for Mendon Elementary School. The Mendon pretest average was the highest of all schools. The Mendon posttest score was the lowest of all schools. All the schools, posttest average scores were in the 22-23-point range. The average pretest scores for the schools has a much wider range than the average posttest score by school.

Table 4.3. Overall RSES Pretest and Posttest scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary RSES Posttest and Pretest Scores</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students Posttest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students Pretest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest - Pretest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall average score of all participants from all elementary schools increased from the pretest to the posttest by 2.67. Also, the overall standard deviation decreased from 3.6 to 2.6 meaning the scores were much closer together. This can be seen by the range of the posttest
scores (18-26) is not as wide as the range of scores from the pretest (12-26). The overall maximum score didn’t increase between the pretest and posttest. As noted earlier, both pretest and posttest surveys have all 36 participants results included in the analysis.

Table 4.4. SPSS Output for Paired Samples t-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Dev.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error Mean</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Error Mean</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Posttest - Prettest</td>
<td>2.667</td>
<td>2.496</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A paired samples t-test was conducted to compare the RSES test scores of 36 girls before participating in the ROX program (pretest-week 1) and at the conclusion of the ROX program (posttest-week 10). There was a significant difference in pretest scores (Mean=19.78, Std Dev=3.618) and posttest scores (Mean=22.44, Std Dev=2.568); t (35) =6.411, p < .001. These results suggest that the ROX program significantly improved the self-esteem of girls. A calculation of the Cohen’s $d$ effect size confirms that the change from pretest to posttest also was of practical significance. Cohen’s $d$ =1.06 which indicates a 1 Std Dev change from pretest or posttest. The quantitative analysis provides evidence that the ROX program supports an increase in positive levels of self-esteem for 9/10-year-old girls in Yough elementary schools.

Qualitative Demographics

Participants for Focus Group 1 (week 9 of the program) and Focus Group 2 (week 10 of the program) were randomly selected at each elementary school by the researcher. There were a total of 6 participants chosen to participate in Focus Group 1, yielding 18 participants from all three elementary schools. Subsequently, there were a total of 6 participants chosen to participate in focus group 2, yielding 18 participants from all three elementary schools. There were some
participants who participated in both focus groups during week 9 and week 10 due to the randomized selection process. Participants were diverse in race and demonstrated their abilities to answer and contribute to the focus group conversations with varying levels of comfort. For instance, some participants were more socially outgoing, while others were more reserved, and sought peer approval before contributing to group discussion. The ROX program met during students’ lunch period which helped to establish an informal and conversational atmosphere where students were able to engage without a set structure. The ROX program instructor served as a facilitator while the students steered the conversation of the focus groups.

Each focus group consisted of 5 questions. The focus groups were conducted at each of the three schools in the ROX program designated classroom. On average, each focus group lasted approximately 19 minutes. The researcher read aloud the focus group script and questions. Participants’ responses were audio recorded by the researcher. Each participant was present for the duration of the focus group sessions. The audio recordings of participants’ responses for each focus group were uploaded to REV.com and then transcribed by the researcher. The researcher analyzed participants’ responses to each question and inferenced the themes. The themes were summarized and described in the analysis of findings in Figure 4.2 below.
There were five predominant themes that emerged based on what participants said they learned as part of the ROX program. The five themes were: Communication Skills, Self-Awareness, Healthy Relationships, Self-Esteem, and Social Media Awareness. As evidenced by the data comprising Figure 4.2, 83% of the girls self-assessed an increase in Communication Skills. Some participants described their understanding and assessment of Communication Skills in varying ways. Participants discussed, “using kind words,” “being assertive,” “talking about feelings,” “working with others,” “solving girl problems with other girls,” and “having good talking skills with friends and family” as components to support an increase in their Communication Skills. As an example, participant MN4 shared,

“We need to use kind words to fix girl problems.”
This participant also shared personal narratives about her own struggle combatting girl bullying in school and in the community setting. Participant MN4 shared her personal narrative and it was especially meaningful to several girls in the focus group. These girls also echoed a time when they felt other girls were using mean words and mean names to make fun of them. For instance, participant MN2 stated,

“Don’t listen to other people’s words and believe in your actions.”

These evidenced Communication Skills support that the participants are able to be assertive, talk about their feelings, and solve problems with other girls. As the focus group conversation developed, more participants began to eagerly share current thoughts and feelings about their own personal experiences of communicating with peers and family members. This is particularly noted when participant HWG5 stated,

“I don’t want to yell at my parents when I can’t go to Justice.” “I learned if I use kind words, that people will talk to me more.”

Overall, the participants at all three elementary schools, offered valuable insights, reflective thoughts, and personal narratives to connect to the theme of Communication Skills.

Similarly, 78% of the responses from participants in the focus group indicated an increase in both Self-Awareness and Healthy Relationships. Participants defined Self-Awareness as “everyone has different feelings,” “girls have problems like I do,” “I learned to be a better person,” “believe in yourself,” “don’t believe other people’s words,” “empathy,” “thinking about someone’s shoes and be them for a day, have their life, their home, their feelings,” “I learned girls can be strong and pretty,” and “I learned that girls can be strong, pretty, and smart if they have self-confidence.” Many of the participants discussed how they became more self-aware,
they openly discussed how they have changed from last year to this year. For instance, participant WN6 stated,

“I learned how to calm down and talk about my feelings, I am not mad like I was last year because I talk about my feelings with people at school and at home.”

The girls discussed their own personal experiences at school and in the community and their self-confidence when thinking about the things they have learned in ROX and in life. Their personal self-reflections related to Self-Awareness. Participant MN3 shared,

“I have self-confidence now because I have a real family now at home.”

It was evident to the researcher as participant MN3 discussed her family and the love and support they gave to her, that it made her noticeably happy and willing to discuss her feelings of growing through Self-Awareness appraisals. Participant HWG4 shared a personal narrative of how she “didn’t have friends last year” and often “felt alone” until she learned how to be a “good friend.” As evidenced in her Self-Awareness appraisal, participant HWG4 stated,

“I learned how I can think about someone’s feeling first, before I say something that is mean or a put down kind of word……those words cause hurt feelings.”

Through the conversations, several participants expressed a personal desire to be a better girl and to make “better choices with schoolwork” and “picking friends.” Self-Awareness appraisals from the participants’ responses included sub-themes of self-confidence, empathy, and empowerment that were all connected through the participant dialogue to Self-Awareness.

As can be discerned from participants’ feedback and dialogue during the focus group, they described Healthy Relationships as “being kind,” “being a friend,” “not being told to do
bad things against the rules,” “not screaming at friends or parents,” “listening to the rules of my teacher,” “not being a bully,” “not hurting friends,” “working together with a group of people,” “helping my friends solve a problem,” and “have people to talk to you.” Throughout the conversation amongst participants, many of them shared personal narratives of a time when they “had a best friend be mad or angry at them,” and when “my friend wouldn’t play with me at recess and sat with someone else at lunch.” While the girls discussed their struggles from time to time developing friendships, they also shared explicit encounters of what they called “bully behaviors” as girls called them names and made fun of their clothes on the bus and at soccer practice. Participant WN2 shared a detailed story of how she was “bullied at her old school,” and demonstrated an increase in Healthy Relationship Skills as stated,

“I learned about girl bullying and how to be a friend by being stand up or the assertive thing to other girls.” “Mean words hurt me; I don’t want to hurt you.”

When participant WN2 shared her personal narrative, participant WN3 shared a time when “someone in school helped her figure out a problem and make a better choice” as evidenced by her personal assertion,

“I now have a support system, and someone will always be there for me at home and at school.”

A sub-category that emerged from the focus group was that of Healthy Relationships. Specific to this sub-category were girls’ comments about friendship, support system, and teamwork as evidenced within their dialogue between one another and as they answered the focus group question.
With regard to Self-Esteem, 39% of girls indicated an increase in ability to express their feelings about themselves. Participants in this focus group expressed their personal understanding of self-esteem as, “be yourself,” “believe in you as a person,” “self-esteem is friendship,” “being my best,” “I like myself,” and “my best me.” Girls also shared what they learned from the program, including: “I learned girls can be anything with self-esteem.” As the participants discussed self-esteem with one another, many of them referred to situations that have happened before the ROX program and during the program that influenced their thoughts. Situations that were mentioned by numerous girls included: how to handle friendship issues on the playground when your best friend doesn’t want to be your best friend anymore, not liking the clothes parents make them wear to school and wanting to wear crop tops, and not being sure how many friends they will have next year in the middle school. Participants talked openly, and the ROX facilitator observed that girls had a greater understanding of their personal growth and the ROX curriculum. Participants used their own voices by sharing thoughts and opinions in respectful ways. For instance, participant MN1 shared,

“Be yourself; believe in yourself.”

While participant MN1 was talking, participant MN3 said aloud, “yep, if you can’t be real, you are fake.” It was evident that the participants in this focus group really owned their definitions of self-esteem and they were able to identify who they are and what self-esteem means to them. Several participants at Mendon Elementary School and West Newton Elementary School shared very similar views of their personal self-esteem appraisals when participant MN6 stated,

“Being my best.”

And participant WN5 shared,
“Being my best me today.”

While participants MN6 and WN5 were in the same focus group, they each attended different elementary schools and had similar developmental experiences prior to ROX. They maintained a very uplifting conversation about their self-love and their desires to be the best versions of who they are. Through participants’ combined dialogue, they were able to discuss opportunities for personal growth and real-life situations. These participant conversations related back to the theme of Self-Esteem.

As evidenced by the data, 28% of participant responses indicated an increase in Social Media Awareness. Participants discussed their thoughts and the major concepts they learned about Social Media Awareness after the ROX program. Responses relevant to conversational topics—such as girl-to-girl bullying, what to post, what not to post, kid-friendly sites, and guidelines for posting—were included within the final categorical theme of Social Media Awareness. These thoughts and concepts included: “social media rules,” “social media is all around us,” “ROBLOX,” “chatrooms,” “mean people take kids,” “be safe,” “what social media is,” and social media bullying.” During the social media conversation, the participants actively discussed the forms of social media they were allowed to use. Often the girls expressed a great desire to have a Snapchat account and communicate with their friends. Several focus group participants openly shared that they were not permitted to have Instagram accounts or play ROBLOX because of rules at home and fear of meeting strangers. During the ROX group meetings, girls learned more about these social media platforms and the associated risks, along with how to use these platforms responsibly in the future, as permitted by parents. An evidenced account came from participant HWG3 who shared,

“I found out more about ROBLOX and that there are chatrooms on there, mean people
take kids, I want to be safe.”

Several girls shared they had limited access to social media and wanted to learn more about it. For instance, participant WN1 shared,

“I learned what social media is today.”

Participant WN1 did ask peers in the group to explain how to use Snapchat and inquired about when someone should use Snapchat. While several participants were under the age restriction to use certain social media platforms, they admitted to having social media accounts that were created by an older sibling, which makes social media awareness even more important for this age group. As evidenced by participant MN4 as stated,

“Social media is all around us.”

The data from the girls regarding their experiences in the ROX program have implications when reconciled with the tenets of Social-Emotional Learning. The first tenet of Social Emotional Learning Competencies is Self-Awareness, which is comprised of knowing what one feels, accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths, and maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence (CASEL, 2005). As these data demonstrate through thematic analysis, participants engaged in their own metacognitive assessments resulting in an increase in Social-Emotional Learning Capacity and specifically the self-awareness competency of Social-Emotional Learning. As measured by changes in Self-Esteem, participant values, strength, and sense of self-confidence were clearly impacted by the ROX program.
Analysis of Findings from Focus Group 1 (week 9) Question 2: Degree of Change in Self-Esteem

Figure 4.3. Focus Group 1 (week 9) Question 2

Earlier in Chapter 4 the quantitative data, and specifically the increase in test scores, indicated that the ROX program elicited an increase in self-esteem. The focus group results will determine whether the ROX program impacts Social-Emotional Learning Competencies in the participants. The researcher wanted to understand firsthand how the participants demonstrated Social Emotional Learning Competencies. This question in particular was designed to assess how the girls in the ROX program demonstrate the Social Emotional Learning Competency of self-management. Self-Management comprises regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, controlling impulses, persevering in addressing challenges, expressing emotions appropriately, and setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals (CASEL, 2005). All 18 girls in FG1 responded to this question. Many of the girls were excited to answer and
confidently discussed their changes in Self-Esteem. Consistent with the increase in RSES test scores the majority of the girls discussed improvement in their self-esteem as seen in Figure 4.3 above. Of the 18 girls who responded, 11 (61%) stated their self-esteem improved, by sharing such comments as: “my self-esteem went up,” “increased a lot,” “I like myself better,” I’m more self-confident,” “it got bigger,” “upgraded,” “got happier,” “it increased because I have more friends,” “I am happy and have fun,” and “not sad.” It was evident to the researcher that as the participants discussed what self-esteem means to them, they were excited and responded genuinely to peers and within their personal reflections. Participants demonstrated self-esteem by talking confidently and being accepting about their feelings and changes in self. The researcher also noted through observation that participants demonstrated positive attitudes while patiently waiting to share their experiences during discussion. As an example, participant WN1 shared,

“I feel better about myself because now I have more friends and I talked about my problems and some girls have the same problems.”

Participant WN2 expressed similar feelings regarding how the ROX program impacted her self-esteem. She shared that,

“It increased because I am happy, and I have something fun to do in my day. Mrs. Mumau cares about me and wants me to have fun.”

The ROX program included several lessons on developing and keeping healthy relationships, as well as lessons on discussing their problems with a support system. Those participants’ responses connected directly back to the ROX program lessons and reflected their personal
evaluation of their own self-esteem. Participant MN1 responded with conviction about her
improved self-esteem with the following statement,

“My self-esteem got tanked up, charged up, I learned that I care about myself, ROX
showed us that all girls are beautiful.”

In the Teamwork Lesson, the girls embarked on a fictional expedition where the ROX
facilitator gets “injured” in an imagined camping scenario. By utilizing their communication,
empathy, and relationship-building skills, the girls joined forces and behaved as a team. In order
to assist the ROX facilitator, the girls had to cooperate together to find clues and to cross the
Chocolate River together to get to safety. The inherent critical thinking, problem-solving,
emotion-regulation, and goal-attainment skills embedded in this activity empowered the girls to
recognize strengths in themselves and others. By attending to strengths in self and others, girls
experienced an increase in their feelings of self-esteem. Subsequently, 7 (39%) participants
stated that their self-esteem stayed the same, while no participants stated that their self-esteem
decreased. Participants understood that the exercise in the lesson is a metaphor; they are not
alone, and many other girls are on the same journey, fraught with the same problems as them.
Analysis of findings from Focus Group 1 (week 9) Question 2 (Part 2): Quality of Change in Self-Esteem

As addressed in Question 1 (Part 1), the degree of change in Self-Esteem, participants indicated an increase (61%) in their Self-Esteem. In order to fully understand the quality of these changes and how they impact Social Emotional Learning Competencies like self-management, the researcher provides a thematic analysis of question 2 (Part 2) responses, in Figure 4.4. Six (33%) participants indicated an increase in Similar Experiences. Within the scope of this study, Similar Experiences refers to girls’ ability to recognize that their problems and difficulties are not unique to themselves, but rather that they can find comfort and support from girls who struggle with similar issues. More specifically, participants explained that they shared Similar Experiences with their peers because: “some girls have the same problems as
“ROX showed us that all girls are beautiful,” “people care about me,” “girls got bullied at lunch,” “girls don’t get invited to all the parties,” and “girls get sad and let down.”

During this focus group dialogue, participants became very chatty and started singing songs from their TikTok (video sharing application) accounts and talking about the friends and adults they have that care about them. Some participants also made positive comments about who they sit with at lunch and play with during recess time. The theme of Similar Experiences was shared by participant HWG5 as stated,

“I don’t call myself fat anymore, because everyone outgrows their clothes and my body is changing too.”

While participant HWG5 shared a personal reflection with her peers about her past experiences with bullying because of how she dressed and where she shopped, other girls nodded in agreement with her reflection.

Four (22%) participants stated an increase in Healthy Relationships. As defined by this study, Healthy Relationships include a deeper understanding of how to make and keep friends, and improving current relationships with peers, family members, and school staff. Particularly, participants identified an increase in Healthy Relationships by stating: “I made friends,” “I talk to more people at lunch,” “I sit by someone new in library class now,” and “when a new student comes to Mr. Kasic’s homeroom, I say “hi, I can be your friend.”

Similarly, four (22%) participants noted an increase in their Self-Awareness. Self-Awareness consisted of self-confidence, empathy, decision making, and self-esteem. Participants identified with the category of Self-Awareness through stating that: “I like myself,”
“I am happy to be here with my friends,” “I am happy to have a class for girls,” and “I learned something new.”

Two (11%) participants self-assessed that their Coping Skills improved. Participants discussed the sub-themes of problem solving, critical thinking skills, and calming strategies in the area of Coping Skills. For instance, participant HWG3 shared,

“I take deep breaths when I get mad.”

Furthermore, one (6%) participant cited that her Communication Skills increased. Communication Skills were the introduction of understanding verbal and non-verbal communication, and the types of communication girls can have with other girls and family members. In conclusion, participant HWG2 stated,

“My self-esteem got bigger.” However, she did not explicitly explain what caused her self-esteem to increase.

The qualitative data outcomes through thematic analysis support the Social Emotional Learning competency of Self-Management. Participants demonstrated an increase in Self-Management skills as they discussed their feelings toward self and others. They also discussed their desires to improve and monitor their personal growth as it relates to Healthy Relationships and Coping Skill development. Through the ROX program, participants demonstrated an increase in emotional regulation, creating and sustaining relationships, and setting personal goals for success, all of which aligns with the Social Emotional Learning competency of Self-management (CASEL, 2005).
Focus group 1, Question 3 produced four significant learning outcomes. These learning outcomes were: Healthy Relationships, Coping Skills, Self-Awareness, and Communication Skills. As demonstrated by data in Figure 4.5, 56% of girls in the focus group indicated a self-appraisal increase in Healthy Relationship Skills. Healthy Relationship Skills included teamwork and people caring about one another (home, school, and within the community) as subthemes. More specifically, participants described Healthy Relationship Skills as: “more friends,” “better friends,” “learned about friendship,” “teamwork,” “friends for their positive qualities,” “friendship skills,” “listening to Mom,” and “doing what I am told in school.”

As evidenced by participant HWG3’s personal reflection on her Healthy Relationship Skills,

“I made more friends at school and I listen more to my mom and teacher and when I have a problem I don't spread a rumor I ask for help from others.”
Subsequently, 50% of the responses from the participants indicated positive changes in Coping Skills. Coping Skills, they learned from the ROX program include asking for help when problems arise with girl bullying and refraining from spreading rumors or gossip. Participant WN4 shared an example of a Coping Skill she learned by stating,

“I noticed that I am kinder and that I am not going to be a bully by spreading rumors and girl gossip. I learned more about teamwork and what happens on social media with girls being mean. I learned to treat people fairly and to have goals.”

Participants freely shared that when they become upset at home from school events, many they listen to music, play on their iPads, and find comfort in spending time with family pets. Overall, the participants seemed to really understand and utilize their coping skills and personal interests when calming down from an unfavorable situation or feeling.

In considering the theme of Self-Awareness, 44% of the participants indicated an increase in Self-Awareness. Self-Awareness included responses pertaining to the subthemes of empathy and self-confidence. Following the program, participants described their Self-Awareness as: “I know I can do more things now,” “I try more things in class,” “I’m not shy now,” “I have a voice,” “I think I am pretty and smart,” and “good at sports.”

Similarly, in the theme of Communication Skills, 44% of participants indicated an increase in Communication Skills. Participants defined their Communication Skills following the program as: “listening,” “personal safety,” “not saying hurtful words,” “not yelling as much,” and “talking about feelings.” Participant HWG4 explained,

“I do my homework now because if I don’t, I can’t come to ROX and talk with my friends.”
Throughout this focus group dialogue, the participants outwardly shared their personal voices and stories of growing up. Furthermore, participants shared how their learning has developed, including how they navigate being a girl and deal with their feelings, friendship issues, and developmental pressures.

These data demonstrate that participants have gained an understanding of Social-Awareness and Social Emotional Learning Competency. Furthermore, participant responses indicated a growth in understanding perspectives, as well as an increase in empathetic understanding of self and others. Through girls’ increased Social-Awareness, their perspectives increased and they continued to build Social Emotional Learning Competencies. In particular, participants were able to recognize and appreciate the similarities and differences between individuals and groups by recognizing the best use of family, school, and community (CASEL, 2005).
There were five major themes identified by the participants that they noted to be helpful for life beyond ROX. Themes included were: Healthy Relationships, Communication Skills, Coping Skills, Self-Awareness, and Similar Experiences. As evidenced by the data comprising Figure 4.6, 78% of the responses from participants indicated a self-assessed increase in the area of Healthy Relationships. Participants defined Healthy Relationships as: “a better friend,” “my friends have feelings,” “friends help you,” “teamwork,” “making new friends when you are scared to meet them,” and “how to not cause girl drama.” Participants recalled moments when they first entered Kindergarten of being “not played with” at “recess time” and “sitting alone at the quiet table for being a bad friend” during this focus group. For instance, participant WN3 shared a personal account related to her growth in Healthy Relationships with peers and her family. She reported,
“I learned to be a good friend, and not cause drama. I listen to my Dad and Grannie more now.”

*In the Drama! Dealing with Mean Girls* Lesson, of the ROX program curriculum, girls learned about girl bullying (relational aggression) and worked in small groups to complete an activity that had participants think about what they would do if a girl was getting bullied online or at the lunch table. Through problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, and personal reflections, this activity empowered the participants to share ways they would help and intervene when girl bullying happens around them. Participants were engaged and recognized that developing strong friendships by including other girls at recess or by extending invitations to sit with someone at lunch can create healthy relationships amongst friends. Participant MN3 shared a relevant reflection and example of how she created Healthy Relationships. She stated,

“I learned how to be a better friend and how to listen to my friends. I also don’t yell at Mom anymore because she has feelings too.”

Similarly, 56% of the responses from this question indicated an increase in girls’ Communication Skills. Participants explained Communication Skills as: “talk to solve problems,” “Internet,” “not to yell,” “be assertive not that aggressive thing,” and “talk to an adult about a problem before it gets big.” Sub-themes included in the Communication Skills theme were conflict resolution, tone of voice, and self-defense of verbal and nonverbal strategies.

For instance, participant HWG5 shared,

“I am shy, and I can’t do math but if I don’t tell you, you can’t help me. I know girls sometimes don’t like math, but we need to tell someone so we can be smart and get help.”
When Participant HWG5 disclosed to the group that she had a personal weakness in math concepts and class, other participants began to talk about their personal struggles with classwork and how they needed to “study more,” and “go to tutoring.” It was evident that participants connected with one another regarding their current and past struggles by offering encouraging support and motivation to one another.

In considering the theme of Coping Skills, 39% of focus group responses indicated an increase in how they cope with conflicts with their friends and family members. Participants defined Coping Skills as: “talk skills,” “walking away,” “solve problems together,” “ask people,” “be safe on the Internet with bullying,” “find a friend to talk to,” and “ask Mrs. Mumau and Dr. Larcinese for help.” Participants in the focus group shared that bullying in school happens at “lunch,” “recess,” “bus,” and sometimes “at home,” at “the pool,” and “in the yard.”

As evidenced example from participant MN2 stated,

“I know how to handle girl bullies, that RA thing, and problems with my little sisters, how to protect myself and why not to post stupid things on social media, because if I think first, I may change my mind and not cause a problem.”

The theme of Self-Awareness consisted of 28% of focus group responses indicating an increase in girls’ personal knowledge. In the Self-Awareness category, participants discussed ideas related to “self-confidence,” “empathy,” “knowing what kind of girl I am,” and “personal responsibility.” Participant MN4 shared how she was able to engage in metacognitive assessment of her own Self-Awareness. She explained,
“I got more confident. I feel better about myself and my grades now. I can do more things because I am good at writing in my planner book and practicing my work.”

The theme of Similar Experiences had a total of 6% of focus group responses, which indicated that participants understood that they can all have different “homework problems,” “friendship problems,” and “stepparent problems” while in fourth grade. Girls recognized that they do not need to be isolated in their experiences, but rather that they can share their struggles through an environment that supports collective communication, connections, and respect.

Relationships skills are a Social Emotional Learning Competency that support establishing and maintaining relationships that are both healthy and rewarding in a collaborative model by resisting peer pressure, preventing and managing conflicts, and seeking help when situations arise (CASEL, 2005). As these data demonstrated through thematic analysis, participants grew in their understanding of relationship skills, thus strengthening their Social Emotional Learning capacity of building and maintaining healthy and socially appropriate relationships.
Figure 4.7. Focus Group 1 (week 9) Question 5

As demonstrated by the data comprising Figure 4.7, 67% of the participants expressed improvement in Self-Awareness. Participants described Self-Awareness as: “I’m growing up,” “my body is changing,” “I need to wear different clothes,” “it’s okay to be different,” “I can be just me,” “I need things,” and “I am learning more about myself.” The sub themes included in the Self-Awareness category were self-confidence, empathy, and self-esteem. Several of the girls admitted to being happier from being in the ROX program and recognizing “a greater need to learn about who they are.” Participant MN2 shared a response related to Self-Awareness,

“I'm happier and more self-confident now. I like my freckles, and my house is a good house. Even though it is small, I don't care.”

Furthermore, 33% of the participants indicated improvement in Coping Skills. Participants defined Coping Skills as: “I can talk to my support system,” “feelings,” “I think about other
people now before I get angry,” “girls have similar problems, so we need to talk to them,” and “I can talk to my teacher.” Participant MN3 shared her experience of growth within the Coping Skills category by sharing,

“I believe in me, and I believe that I am a strong girl. I love my life more, and I don't want to fight and be mean at lunch, because if I have a problem, I will ask the teacher or my Principal for help.”

This participant response can be related back to the Social Emotional Learning competency of Responsible Decision Making. From the response, it is evident that the participant is thinking through her actions prior to making a decision. The participant is very conscious to take a moment to think about what she does in peer related situations and how her peers may respond to her actions. This response connected very clearly to the concept of Responsible Decision Making. Responsible Decision Making is a Social Emotional Learning competency, defined as making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences for various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic or social situations; and contributing to the well-being of one’s school and community (CASEL 2005).

Another emerging theme from the data in Figure 4.7 is that 33% of the responses indicated that girls experienced an increase in their knowledge of Similar Experiences. Girls described their understanding of Similar Experiences as: “more alike than different,” “girls have the same problems in fourth grade,” “everyone has bad days,” and “girls experience life differently than boys.” As an example, participant WN3 shared,
“I am a lot happier with myself and know other friends in this group learned from me, and that we all have the same problems in this grade, and when we leave here we will still have problems, but I will talk to someone now about them.”

As evidenced by the qualitative data, the girls in the ROX program are understanding that others are like them, and they are not alone in their feelings. They are able to realize that most female peers have similar problems with their friends.

Another emergent theme from the focus group data analysis was that 17% of the respondents indicated an improvement in Healthy Relationships. Participants described Healthy Relationships as: “meeting friends,” “time with other girls,” and “working with others.” Sub-themes that were prevalent within this category included teamwork, making more friends, and getting to know friends on a more private level in the ROX group. Overall the participants were eager to share and talk about these newly formed friendships. Finally, 6% of the participants indicated an improvement in their Communication Skills. Participants defined Communication Skills as: “confidence to participate in group and small group activities without fear of being laughed at or wrong.” The emergent themes from this focus group question show actionable data that girls have committed to their personal growth and development through learning new ideas and practicing skills introduced by the ROX program. Girls also expressed that they feel confident in their ability to make better decisions based off what they have learned, including self-management skills. Girls growth in the area of positive relationships aligns directly with the Responsible Decision-Making competency within Social-Emotional Learning.
As evidenced by the data comprising Figure 4.8, 94% of the girls self-assessed an increase in Self-Awareness. Participants described their understanding and assessment of Self-Awareness Skills in similar ways. Participants discussed, “I can be a better friend,” “Think about what others say,” “I am different, different is okay now,” “I don’t talk over people now,” “I like myself more,” “Girls and parents are different, work with them,” “I believe I can read like my friends if I try harder and practice,” “Girls need extra time for feelings,” and “I care about me, so I should care about my friends.” Sub-categories that emerged were empathy, self-esteem, self-confidence, and similar experiences. As an example, participant MN1 shared,

“I can be a better friend, listen to my parents, and think about what other people say and feel. I also feel better today than I did on the first day of this program. I am not so nervous.”
In addition, participant WN5 shared a personal thought with the group,

“How to be a better sister, don’t be mean to her anymore.”

The girls at all three elementary schools connected the theme of Healthy Relationships to include both friends and family. They shared times when they were not kind or considerate of others’ feelings and thoughts. While the girls were talking, the facilitator observed that the girls spoke with honesty and genuine intent as they demonstrated patience through maintaining eye-contact and other non-verbal cues. After Participant MN1 and WN5 shared their personal reflections, other participants began sharing times when “they didn’t think about their parent’s feelings or “how when they don’t listen it causes problems.” These personal reflections helped the participants to understand their past thoughts and behaviors and gain self-aware.

The ROX program delivered lessons that were strong in empathy. The girls determined empathy as a sub-category of Self-Awareness. For instance, the participants enjoyed the Shoe Game Board where participants rolled a die and “took a walk” amongst the curvy shoe path and landed on a designated shoe picture with a real-life scenario on the back of the shoe picture. All participants were challenged to put themselves in “someone else’s shoes” and answer the scenarios on each of the shoe pictures. This action-packed lesson allowed girls to self-reflect as they talked out loud regarding the scenarios and also supported their personal reflection on empathy, self-esteem, self-confidence, and the similar experiences they shared not only with girls in the ROX group but with scenarios that girls would deal with in the Shoe Game Board.

In considering the theme of Healthy Relationships, 61% of girls indicated an increase in understanding and building Healthy Relationships. Some participants described Healthy Relationships as: “kind friend,” “taking turns,” “listening,” how to talk to them,” “work with the
girls on projects,” “don’t bully,” “use nice words,” “play with the girls at recess,” “you shouldn’t be the boss all the time,” “don’t disrespect my parents,” “if I get grounded at home, don’t yell,” and “don’t cause girl drama.” The girls derived a sub-category of teamwork as they discussed the necessary skills of building healthy relationships. The girls related “taking turns,” “sharing voices” throughout the group, and “helping get the project done” to teamwork. This was specifically noted when participant HWG2 stated,

“I worked on the Chocolate River with all my friends, we created a plan, didn’t boss anyone else around.”

Participant WN 3 made a similar connection to Healthy Relationships and teamwork when she shared,

“I learned to be a better friend and not spread rumors…I won’t exclude them no more because girls stand together.”

By employing the skills necessary to build healthy relationships, the participants of the ROX program demonstrated an understanding of one another in the group. Participants also showed how to transition healthy relationship skills outside of the ROX group to girls and boys alike as reported to the ROX facilitator by numerous teachers and principals throughout the 10-week program.

Approximately, 22% of the girls reported an increase in their Communication Skills. Some participants described their Communications Skills as: “how to talk to my friend,” “assertive talk,” “share the conversation,” “use manners,” “ask for help,” “stranger protection,” and “self-defense.” A few of the girls discussed the importance of “being safe at the park if a
stranger comes” and “how to protect myself.” It was clear that the participants linked Communication Skills to both verbal and non-verbal communication skills and self-defense.

Similarly, 17% of the responses from the focus group indicated an increase in both Coping Skills and Social Media Awareness. Participants defined Coping Skills as: “talk about problems,” “work it out,” and “ask a teacher for help.” Participants also discussed times when they “had a big problem” and how “scared they were to ask for help.” Some participants mentioned particular “teachers to help them” and “family members” when they need support. The participants supported one another as they worked together to share solutions for being stronger together. These ideas were echoed by participant HWG6, when she shared,

“When I get mad, I take a break to walk away from the problem or from the drama.”

Participants in the HWG focus group began nodding their heads and sharing comments such as, “I take deep breaths all the time” and “walking away is a good thing” to go from “red feelings to green feelings,” as they listened to participant HWG6 talk.

The final theme, Social Media Awareness, consisted of participants describing “cyber bullying,” “understanding what to post online and what to not post online,” and “not talking to strangers online.” Many of the participants in all three focus groups shared personal stories of using on-line applications and social media at home. For instance, participant WN1 stated,

“I learned more about Social Media and now I have to be careful.”

It was interesting to the facilitator that the girls did not have real life experiences with social media cyber bullying, but knew it existed and expressed strategies to stop it.
Analysis of findings from Focus Group 2 (week 10) Question 2 (Part 1): Degree of Change in Communication

![Figure 4.9. Focus Group 2 (week 10) Question 2 (Part 1)](image)

Focus Group 2 Question 2 pursued the understanding of participants’ changes in their communication styles. As indicated in Figure 4.9, 11 girls (61%) stated their Communication had a positive change with friends and parents and 7 girls (39%) stated that it stayed the same, while no participants stated that it decreased. Participant WN5 shared,

“I feel better about myself because now. I have more friends and I talked about my problems. Some girls have the same problems.”

The participants echoed similar sentiments to participant WN5 by nodding in agreement during the discussion and offering positive encouragement. Participant MN1 reflected by sharing “talk to a trusted adult before problems get really, really big.”
The ROX program had several lessons on developing and sustaining healthy forms of communication, especially with girls when there are conflicts and hurt feelings involved. Specific lessons taught girls that many girls have difficulty speaking their minds in assertive ways, and at times can become very aggressive with their words to other girls. Communication lessons also taught the importance of “I Statements” in developing and sustaining healthy forms of communication.
Analysis of findings from Focus Group 2 (week 10) Question 2 (Part 2): Quality of Change in Communication

As noted by the data comprising Figure 4.10, 22% of the girls self-assessed an increase in Healthy Relationships. Participants described their understanding and assessment of Healthy Relationships as: “becoming friendlier”, “I don’t yell when I am mad right away,” “talk first before getting mad,” “I use more kind words,” and “think about the words from my mouth.” Several participants then discussed, “listening to my parents more” and “not getting mad at all the teachers when I am in Quiet Room for not doing my homework.” It was interesting to watch participants connect their Healthy Relationships to the meaningful people in their lives as they shared in respectful dialogue.

Participant WN2 shared and discussed her growth in Healthy Relationships. She stated, “I am nice now, I care about other people, and I don’t want to hurt them.”
Approximately, 17% of the girls reported an increase in their Self-Awareness. Participants described their Self-Awareness as: “understanding girls,” “getting what I am about now,” and “not spreading rumors on the bus, because they talk about me too.” The girls really talked passionately about stopping “rumors on the bus” and “thinking about other people too.” Sub-themes that participants derived from Self-Awareness would include: self-esteem, self-confidence, and empathy. ROX curriculum lessons supported areas of Self-Awareness with lesson topics: Who I Am, Being Committed, Strong and Worth Defending, and Seeing Yourself Win. Participants actively discussed the lessons and encouraged one another to “not be a girl bully” by making “good choices with kind words.” Participant HWG5 made a connection to the ROX lessons when she shared,

“A lot of times I said things behind my friends back. I think I was in the middle of the drama and I did not like it. My mom said Cheerleaders should not do that stuff. I’m trying to not be around the drama now.”

Similarly, 11% of the responses from the girls indicated an increase in both Communication Skills and Coping Skills. Participants defined Communication Skills as: “being nicer to my family and school friends” and “not yelling.” These ideas were echoed by participant MN1, when she stated,

“I am nice more and don’t yell.”

The final theme, Coping Skills, consisted of participants describing things they find comfort in, to feel better. Those things were: “playing with dogs” and “I like to ride my horse to feel better and escape.” Several participants categorized Coping Skills as: “talking to adults” and “ask a friend for help.” Participants discussed through dialogue ways they “solve problems” and
how important it is to “find people you trust to help you.” The dialogue was very helpful and encouraging to everyone in the group. The participants shared real experiences and demonstrated respect as others were talking.
Analysis of findings from Focus Group 2 (week 10) Question 3 (Part 1): Degree of Change with Girl Drama

Figure 4.11. Focus Group 2 (week 10) Question 3 (Part 1)

As indicated in Figure 4.11, 13 girls (72%) stated that dealing with girl drama became easier since participating in the ROX program. While 5 girls (28%) stated that dealing with girl drama is about the same for them since participating in the ROX program. The ROX program curriculum has lessons to support the decrease in girl drama by teaching about girl drama (relational aggression), empathy, and healthy relationships with other girls. Participant MN6 shared a reflective connection to understanding her personal growth. She shared,

“It got easier, I don’t want to be a girl bully today or tomorrow.”

Several participants said, “girl bullying is about the same now and in the school,” and “ROX will help. The problems will still happen, you know.” For instance, participant WN2 shared,
“It’s the same. I don’t know what to do on the bus. There are cameras my principal said, but girls don’t listen still.”

While the majority of participants self-reported that dealing with the drama became easier, there are still doubts amongst participants as they discussed girl drama completely going away. In conclusion, no participants identified dealing with girl drama to be harder after the ROX program.
Analysis of findings from Focus Group 2 (week 10) Question 3 (Part 2): Quality of Change in Girl Drama

![Figure 4.12. Focus Group 2 (week 10) Question 3 (Part 2)](image)

As demonstrated by data in Figure 4.12, 33% of girls indicated an increase in Coping Skills when dealing with girl drama. Coping Skills as defined in this focus group include problem solving skills and asking an adult for help. Participants defined Coping Skills as: “work to solve problems together,” “ways to not cause drama,” “if I don’t see it, don’t spread it,” “talk to the counselor,” and “report for help.” The girls demonstrated a concrete understanding of how to deal with issues that arise with friendship. Overall, the positive tone in voice of the participants, when discussing personal examples of girl drama came from a caring place in the girls’ hearts, filled with hope. Participant MN6 shared,
"I think it is easier because now I know girls can be mean. I know I have to work to understand them. I won’t be a bully because being a bully causes drama and gets people in trouble."

It was insightful that several participants often linked girl bullying to “getting in trouble” or a “punishment.”

In the Healthy Relationships category, 28% of participants indicated that there was a positive increase in how participants dealt with girl drama. Participant WN2 shared an example of her increase in Healthy Relationships as,

“I now don’t spread rumors or gossip on the bus anymore because it’s unkind. My bus driver wrote me up last month and my mom yelled at me a lot.”

Under the Self-Awareness category, 11% of participants reported a self-rated increase in their Self-Awareness. Participants described Self-Awareness as “learning not be a bully” and “not liking how I feel.” As an example, participant MN5 shared,

“I don’t want to be a bully or mean to girls. So, I got better at not being a bully.”

As participant MN5 shared her personal reflection, several other participants raised their hands and said, “me too.” Sub-categories of this theme were generated by the participants as: empathy, self-confidence, and decision-making skills.

In the category of Communication Skills, 6% of participants reported an increase in their Communication Skills when dealing with girl drama. Participants defined Communication Skills as: “talking about it.” It was observed by the facilitator that the girls talked more about their thoughts and feelings as the ROX group ended. In the beginning of the group, the girls did not talk as openly about issues dealing with girl bullying.
Finally, 6% of participants reported an increase in their Social Media Awareness when dealing with girl drama. Participants defined Social Medial Awareness as: “posting pictures on Instagram”, “playing games and entering into chat conversations on ROBLOX,” and “understanding how to stay safe online.” Many of the participants referred to situations they knew of or heard about in the middle school setting regarding Social Media bullying. Several participants said, “girls in the middle school roast one another on IMMessage” and “they send nasty pictures of the not pretty girls.”
Focus Group 2 (week 10) Question 4 (Part 1)

As indicated in Figure 4.13, 15 girls (83%) stated their personal support system has increased since the start of the ROX program. Subsequently, 3 girls (17%) stated that their personal support system has stayed the same since the start of the ROX program. Participant MN2 shared,

“There are teachers in school that help me solve my problems and listen to me when I am in a bad mood and care about me. Teachers and counselors that care and tell us to talk to someone at school and at home.”

Many participants demonstrated a deeper understanding of what a personal support system is. They were able to identify specific teachers at school and adults at home they could confide in...
when they needed support. As the girls shared their experiences, other girls replied, “yeah I get that” and “yep, that happened with me this year and in second grade.”

A few participants discussed that their support system stayed the same by explaining: “had no change in that,” “I have the same people in my life that care about me,” and “maybe next year I will meet someone new to help me too.” Many of the girls demonstrated through their response that they have a deeper understanding of what a personal support system is and now have a better developmental ability to utilize their personal support system moving forward. None of the girls stated that the ROX program decreased their personal support system.
Analysis of findings from Focus Group 2 (week 10) Question 4 (Part 2): Quality of Change in Support System

Figure 4.14. Focus Group 2 (week 10) Question 4 (Part 2)

Over 70% of the participants, as shown in Figure 4.14, identified Healthy Relationships as the main reason for personal improvement in their support systems. For the purpose of this focus group, personal support systems encompass important people in the participant’s lives—family members, friends, teachers, community members, and clergy that are trusted individuals whom will provide safe spaces for conversations, emotional support, and reflections of wisdom. Participants described their Healthy Relationships as supporting their support systems as: “more friends to talk to,” “teachers care about me,” “made different friends,” “my counselor cares about me,” “people at school say hi to me,” “friends like me,” and, I have friends over to my house to plan now.” Participants were eager to talk about their newly formed relationships and how much
fun they were having with their friends throughout the discussion. Participant WN2 shared her addition into her support system as she stated,

“I talked to my bus driver more when I have a problem. And she is a nice lady that watches over all the bullies on the bus and then tells people like the counselors to help us.”

Participant HWG2 reflected on her willingness to open up to new friends and accept new friends into her life, as she stated,

“It got better. I have more friends that I never knew really a lot about and now I can talk to them more.”

The ROX program curriculum taught the girls how to recognize and define a support system. This specific activity directed the girls to work individually and in small groups to identify people in their lives who listen to them, have confidence in them, allow them to talk about their innermost thoughts and feelings in a safe space, love them, give them good advice, and help them with daily living challenges.

Subsequently, 22% of the participants voiced an improvement in their personal support systems driven by Similar Experiences. Participants defined Similar Experiences as: “other girls like me have problems,” “girls need to learn to talk about their problems,” “learned about what girls do for fun,” “I see not everyone has their real mom,” and “I think more.” Participant WN3 discussed her willingness to make new friends and understood that making new friends is something all girls will need to do when they go “to the middle school and high school.” She shared,
“There are some friends that I didn't know I had until ROX, and I like to play with them at recess too.

In considering the theme of Coping Skills, 17% of girls indicated an increase in understanding how Coping Skills support them in their personal support system. Participants described Coping Skills as: “talk to my sister,” “talk to my teacher,” and “listen to music.” Many participants also shared that if they have a bad day they like to “play outside, walk my dog,” “paint pictures, and “go to swim practice.”

Approximately, 17% of the participant’s identified an increase in Self-Awareness. Some participants described Self-Awareness as: “same family problems,” “we all have chores to do,” “I learned girls play soccer in this group,” and “girls change a lot.” Participant MN4 made a very personal connection to Self-Awareness when she discussed the unique family dynamic she is part of. She shared,

“I have more friends in 4th grade because of this program. I learned that I am not the only girl not living with her mom, that has problems and that other girls need to talk about things, and that we have school people and counselor people that care about us at home.”

Participant WN1 began talking about the family in her life that she misses and how other people in ROX miss family members too. She connected to the theme of Self-Awareness by sharing,

“I get sad when I don’t see “them,” but I know other girls miss their family members too. I have to do my homework and sometimes I don’t want to. But I don’t want to sit out at recess when we play kickball.”
The girls were very caring and patient as they listened to the dialogue from participant WN1 and their peers. The facilitator noticed that the girls interrupted one another less as the focus group questions progressed.
The ROX program facilitated learning and discussions for the participants around their futures. Lessons discussed goal setting, career awareness and career exploration. The lessons were completed through individual activities, group activities, discussions, career and technology research, and guest speakers. Approximately 67% of participants identified personal development as their main future goal. Participants described their future goals as: “being a good student,” “getting good grades,” “be great in middle school,” “doing well on tests,” “finding a cure for cancer,” “passing math class,” and “doing good in dance competitions.” The participants had dialogue within the group about what they want to be when they grow up. A few participants took longer time to think about their responses before they answered the question. It was noticeable that with their additional thought time, their answers were more authentic than their peers.
Participant HWG1 shared her thoughts about current future goals and more long-term future goals with the group. She stated,

“I want to be a nice girl and help my friends. I may want to be a teacher like my homeroom teacher.”

Alternatively, 50% of the participants identified improved Coping Skills as goals they wanted to achieve in the future. Participants described their Coping Skills as: “not bullying other girls,” “not worrying about tests,” “ask my teacher for help when I am confused,” “to talk nicer and not get mad,” and “be kind every day.” For instance, participant WN6 expressed,

“I want to do good on my science test and not cry at home when I don’t understand it. I need to ask for help during morning work.”

Several participants discussed the critical skills of making positive choices and decisions as they related to academic and personal successes. Girls were able to draw connections between asking for help (Healthy Relationships) and coping with the demands of life (Coping Skills). A few girls even offered helped to other girls that are struggling with homework and tests by stating, “we can all work together to study at recess” and “we can do flashcards on the bus.”

In considering the theme of, Healthy Relationships, 39% of the participants identified this category as a future goal. Participants defined Healthy Relationships as: “making more friends,” “helping friends,” and “being a kind friend.” Many participants desired enhanced friendships as they transition to Yough Intermediate Middle School. For instance, participant WN1 stated,

“I want to go to the middle school and not get lost and make good choices and make friends.”
In the category of Self Awareness, 28% of participants declared that self-confidence, self-esteem, and being true to personal beliefs were future focused goals. The discussion was particularly vocal when the girls talked about “liking myself” and “being confident that I can do good on a test.” This was exemplified by participant MN3, as she stated,

“I want to make more friends when I go to the middle school. Because I am a nice girl and I like myself and who I am. I don’t want to yell at my sister for wearing my clothes anymore.”

In conclusion, the implementation of the ROX program in Yough elementary schools, with fourth grade female participants demonstrated an increase in positive self-esteem from pretest scores to posttest scores on the RSES. The mean difference was 2.67 which indicated an increase in the average score between tests. This increase proved there is strong statistical evidence to believe the ROX program improved positive self-esteem of the participants. This notion is further supported by the qualitative responses from two separate focus groups. Participants in Focus Group 1 (FG1) demonstrated Social Emotional Learning Competencies through their self-assessed metacognitive understanding of Self-awareness, Self-management, Social-awareness, Relationship skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. In Focus Group 2 (FG2), participants provided evidence regarding transferable skills learned in the ROX program to everyday life. Participates also discussed positive communication skill increases with friends and parents through the ROX program lessons. Increased skills to deal with girl bullying, coupled with the development and understanding of positive support systems, and creating future goals were all areas reported of high increase and interest from the participants in FG2.

Given the quantitative and qualitative data results, it is evidenced that the ROX program has improved positive self-esteem through the understanding of Social-Emotional Learning.
Competencies that can be transferred to everyday living. Furthermore, in Chapter 5 a richer discussion of the Findings from Chapter 4 will be discussed as they relate to implications for Educational Leadership and the researcher’s agenda for growth.
Chapter 5: Recommended Actions

The purpose of this chapter begins with a discussion of the critical themes that have emerged from the evaluation of the researcher evaluated ROX program. Through thematic analysis of the data, the researcher determined a correlation between ROX and positive self-esteem, Social-Emotional Learning Competencies, and skill transfer between participants. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the research questions that sought to determine the effectiveness of the program in meeting the stated goals. Furthermore, this chapter will outline this study's contributions to the field of educational leadership, including creating group programs for elementary-aged girls in public school settings. The researcher will discuss, through a social justice lens, the implications of this action research in the Yough School District—a rural school setting in Western Pennsylvania. Through professional and personal reflections, the researcher will share specific lessons learned and the transformational agenda of leadership growth and development that emerged through her experiences leading this improvement research.

Discussion of the Findings

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, the ROX program demonstrated improvements in fourth grade girl's self-esteem and their understanding and application of Social-Emotional Learning Competencies. The program undoubtedly had a positive impact on the girls’ daily lives. The RSES data showed that overall, the participants had a statistically significant improvement in their self-esteem as measured by their pretest and posttest scores. RSES scores showed an average improvement of participants’ self-assessed self-esteem levels due to their participation in the ROX program. The ROX program taught participants how to develop positive communication skills, self-awareness, self-esteem, and healthy relationships at school.
and at home; how to effectively resolve personal and group conflicts; how to embrace personal differences and accept being who they are; teamwork skills and strategies; effectively utilizing different forms of communication through social interaction; and developing a sense of pride, self-worth, and belonging individually and collectively as a group of girls. The ROX program is an opportunity for girls to come together in a specific and intentional space that focuses on healthy girl development. This program is a structured curriculum that is often not an established component of the daily academic rigors of elementary school education. As referenced in this work and literature, “self-esteem is how we value or think of ourselves” (Yousaf, 2015, p. 140). Self-esteem supports girls’ healthy relationships as a whole and helps them build self-awareness through developing confidence and “favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the self” (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 15). Girls developmentally employ tools and resources through different opportunity structures in their homes, schools, and communities, as evidenced by participant feedback obtained during FG1 and FG2.

The journey girls experience from elementary school to middle school deeply influences their self-esteem. During this time, girls begin to experience the onset of puberty with its accompanying changes in hormonal levels in their bodies. They tend to become self-conscious and can be consumed with self-critical thoughts and behaviors. Also, it is important for girls in elementary school to develop an understanding of their ever-changing social environment. Girl-specific programs help them to develop tools and resources early in life to promote their problem-solving skills, healthy friendships, relationships, and academic goals. By providing girls with opportunities in elementary school which support their development and improvement—especially in building healthy friendships, relationships, communication skills,
problem solving skills, support systems, and future goals—girls will become more confident and increase their personal valuation.

**Analysis of findings from Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2: Critical Themes**

![Figure 5.1 Critical Themes Emergent from FG1 and FG2](image)

The combination of FG1 and FG2 data informed the researcher that four critical themes emerged from the girls’ participation in the ROX program. As referenced in *Figure 5.1*, the themes were: Healthy Relationships, Self-Awareness, Coping Skills, and Communication Skills. According to the participant data from FG1 and FG2, there were 85 positive comments regarding Healthy Relationships between FG1 and FG2 which was not surprising to the researcher, because a common issue amongst fourth grade girls is friendship disputes in the school and community setting. The qualitative data demonstrates that participants developed a deeper understanding of how to make and sustain friendships in school and at home. The data also shows that the girls improved their existing relationships with peers, family members, and school staff. The next
three themes of Self-Awareness, Coping Skills, and Communication Skills were consistent themes from participants in FG1 and FG2. Participant feedback around the theme of Self-Awareness included comments surrounding self-confidence, empathy, and self-esteem. In addition, participants shared that their Coping Skills improved, including their personal problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and self-calming strategies. The final theme of Communication Skills as shared by participants included talking with peers, family members, adults in authority, physical boundary setting, and conflict resolution.

The ROX program and its curriculum helped the girls develop self-esteem, self-knowledge, application of Social-Emotional Learning skills as shown with data received from the RSES scores, FG1 participant responses, and FG2 participant responses. Participant response data as demonstrated in Chapter 4 and Figure 5.1, clearly show that the participants of the ROX program displayed improved Social-Emotional Learning Competencies as detailed by their increase in Healthy Relationships, Self-Awareness, Coping Skills, and Communication Skills. Furthermore, the summary of critical themes in Figure 5.1, connects with Social-Emotional Learning Competencies and the five interrelated theories, which consist of cognitive, affective, and behavioral clusters that support girls as they develop and expand their experiences (CASEL, 2005). As girls broaden their thoughts, feelings, and actions, they become more mature with an understanding of Self-awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. The girls’ changes in development serve as evidence of the ROX curriculum’s effectiveness.

Contributions to the Field of Educational Leadership

Girls in general struggle with creating and maintaining a positive social environment. The challenge is supporting elementary-aged girls as they develop awareness and maturity to
embrace their physiological and psychological changes. These changes impair their abilities to engage with peers and family members, sustain healthy friendships and relationships, cope with girl drama and girl bullying, and make responsible decisions. Research has shown that positive self-esteem in the elementary years will have a positive impact on their adolescent and early adult years.

The ROX program provided evidence of positive self-esteem and a self-assessed improvement in Social Emotional Learning Competencies with fourth grade girls in Yough School District. Educational leaders should continue to support the healthy personal and social development of elementary-aged girls with opportunities to participate in girl-specific programs. Specifically, this study discussed the value of implementing the ROX program in a rural school district to 36 girls by a school counselor, the primary researcher. Prior to program implementation, the researcher had to attend ROX trainings, administrative meetings, facilitate staff and student meetings, and make parent contact. The researcher has facilitated the evidenced based ROX program lessons to fidelity by assessing their impact on girls through action implemented research. Educational leaders hold a significant seat at the table as they are able to create and implement programs for students’ overall successes: academically, socially, and emotionally.

Research is particularly limited in the area of providing interventions to support the development of self and Social Emotional Learning Competencies for elementary-aged girls. While there is a vast body of research currently published that supports the development and needs of girls in middle school and high school, this study has evidenced that elementary age girls benefit from a girl-specific program. The ROX program gives girls strategies to overcome their struggles and create positive social relationships in their lives through direct intervention
and, support, and girl-specific curriculum. When elementary-aged girls have positive self-esteem and self-confidence, they are more likely to demonstrate social, emotional, and physical wellness that will transfer from elementary school to their middle school years and beyond. Overall, once girls value themselves, they develop the confidence necessary to overcome challenges, as well as cope and solve problems within their environments.

**Recommendations and Implications for Educational Leadership and Social Justice**

Providing direct and indirect resources to support girls in a K-12 school setting socially, emotionally, and academically is not a new concept for educational leaders. However, a major challenge for educational leaders in rural, suburban, and urban school settings is procuring the financial means in school budgets to support girls’ ever-changing needs with program implementation, interventions, and additional staffing. More specifically, girls attending rural school districts are part of a culture and community that have become very diverse in respect to changes within the family structure, higher poverty rates, higher unemployment, and more single-parent homes. In order for girls to have access to community support providers, resources for girls to receive support services need to be available within the rural community. As research has stated within this study, rural families often struggle with limited to no personal transportation to support securing girls an opportunity for support services (e.g. counseling), as well as a lack of support providers within the rural community. Rural schools are a central resource for their communities to provide services to students and families due to the availability and access of the school.

In order for educational leaders to implement the ROX program within their elementary, middle, or high school setting, it would first be necessary for them to assess the needs of their female students. Educational leaders would then need to enter into conversations with
building/district level school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, or interested teachers to gain insights into the issues girls are experiencing within a rural, suburban, or urban setting and how these specific girl issues can be supported by the ROX program in their particular school settings. Educational leaders should be mindful when beginning an initiative such as the ROX program. Specifically, they need to consider the following program implementation questions:

1. How will the district fund the ROX program?
2. What criteria would be used to select the girls for the program?
3. Is the district able to identify district professional staff members that would be interested in program training and implementation?
4. Will this program provide a continuum of instruction and new lesson materials for girls at elementary, middle, and high school levels that are developmentally appropriate?
5. Can this program be adapted to meet the needs of all levels of learners?
6. What background or previous teaching do the students currently have on girl related issues?
7. How will this program not only fit into the existing school culture, but the community as a whole?

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, a needs assessment amplifying the voice of all stakeholders is integral to a successful implementation. Administrators, parents/guardians, community members, and students see educational programming through different lenses and, thus, bring different perspectives to the work Social-Emotional Learning programming.
This study was developed to evaluate the ROX program implemented in Yough School District. As the researcher, it was important from a school counseling programmatic sense to address self-esteem and Social-Emotional Learning through an evidenced based program for fourth grade girls before they transferred to the middle school setting in fifth grade. Criteria used to gauge the program success and impact on the girls were derived from the RSES scores, focus group findings, girls’ verbal conversations, and positive feedback received after the study concluded from parents, teachers, and educational leaders. For educational leaders who want to lead similar improvement efforts within their school settings, the researcher recommends reading topics such as self-esteem, self-confidence, Social-Emotional Learning Competencies, and gender and development differences of girls, as well as studying current programs that are available, including evidenced based and/or researched based programs for girls.

Limitations

Selection bias. The girls that were interested in the ROX program and learning at the beginning of the school year (August 2019) attended an informational meeting with the researcher, who is also the school counselor. Based on grant and school district funding, the researcher limited the number of participants per group to a maximum of 15 girls per elementary school. Therefore, the convenience sample was not a true global representation of all fourth-grade girls.

Additionally, the study was conducted within one specific school district in a rural context. Although the results have utility in similar districts, this selection bias might limit the utility of study results to specifically rural elementary contexts.
**Researcher bias.** The district where the study was completed is also the same district where the researcher has been employed for over nine years as a school counselor. The researcher was the only professional that led the study and facilitated the ROX program in the elementary schools. This study relies on the researcher’s interpretation of the participants comments within the focus groups. While the researcher spent ample time analyzing the qualitative data in both focus groups, it is difficult to ensure the researcher was always accurate with the interpretation of the participant responses. The researcher applied her judgement of specific counseling theory based of her understanding and practice of how theory related to this program implementation should be applied. It is possible that a different counselor could and would interpret the selected counseling theory through different lenses. It is important to state that the researcher designed the questions for both focus groups and analyzed the findings from the data.

**Time of Responses/Program Attendance.** Participants were given approximately one to two minutes to answer each question on the RSES form. If participants were given more time, alternative answers may have been produced. Both focus groups were allotted 45 minutes by the researcher to answer five questions. Both focus groups finished in under the 45-minute time frame. If the researcher would have used the full 45 minutes, additional thoughts and data could have been produced. The 20-lesson curriculum program was completed in 10 weeks, allowing the researcher to meet with each group of participants two times per week. Approximately, 90% of the participants attended all sessions, while the other 10% of the girls missed either one or two group meetings. If 100% of the participants would have attended all sessions, findings may have been different.
Implications for Leadership Agenda and Growth

Leading this improvement initiative has been both a humbling and challenging experience over the last three years for me as a researcher. From leading this improvement initiative, I have learned that the role of school counselor reaches beyond the everyday professional duties of working directly with children to solve immediate problems. My professional role requires looking to the future of a child’s development and not just the here and now. My leadership philosophy as a school counselor is that I am not only responsible for helping students solve problems now, but I am also responsible for equipping them with the Social Emotional Learning Competencies needed for their future success.

In my current role as a school counselor, it is commonplace for me to focus on the small school community within my counseling duties. This improvement project has opened my eyes to understanding a larger context and educational system, which is needed to fully support children, regardless of geography (location), social economic status, race, and age. My capacity to build relationships has deepened with students, parents, administrators, and colleagues. The personal pride I have gained throughout this improvement research has developed my capacity to capitalize on outside resources through building and enhancing community partnerships and relationships with organizations outside of Yough School District.

Based on this study, my professional agency in affecting elementary-aged girls has been impacted. My connection to my students has become stronger and more informed. I display a more at-ease affect and calm demeanor around students and professional staff. My confidence and competence have grown, along with my capacity to build relationships with students, staff, administrators, and my community. This work has allowed me to reboot and regenerate my own learning momentum that has resulted in new feelings of being “alive.” My knowledge of child
development has become more realistic because I have seen what the girls in my school district need, and I now understand how I can implement interventions to accommodate their needs. I am able to justify my sense of leadership and the decisions I make based off of my experiences and research.

I would like to expand my work on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies to include working with elementary aged boys in targeted group meetings with my co-counselor as they struggle with Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making Skills that are the Social Emotional Learning Competencies. As an educational leader, I have always believed in the importance of educators’ work with students. This study has helped me confirm that belief. Subsequently, I have gained insight into working with the school and community systems that have improved my leadership, counseling, and my own personal characteristics. Moving forward, I would like to follow up with the 36 girls that were part of the ROX program when they are in eighth or ninth grade. As a researcher, it would be interesting to assess how the girls from the ROX program are able to rate their levels of self-esteem in the future and to inquire into how they have applied Social Emotional Learning Competencies within their lives. I would like to learn more through researching and implementing an elementary SEL program (K-4) designed to support all students in elementary school at Yough School District. By researching, creating, and incorporating an SEL program into Yough elementary schools, students will learn to know themselves, manage their feelings behaviors, understand others’ feelings and perspectives, relate to others more effectively, and increase their healthy decision making, both personally and socially.
References


community. Portland, OR: Western Center for Drug-free Schools and Communities.


https://childmind.org


Gruber, J., & Fineran, S. (2016). Sexual Harassment, Bullying, and School Outcomes for High


Pappasergi, Jenifer R. (2016), "Kindergarten Through Fourth Grade Teacher Perception of Self-Efficacy in Educating Students Diagnosed with Emotional and/or Behavioral Disorders"

Retrieved from IUP Database [http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1379](http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1379)


Appendix A: ROX Program Permission Form

As the parent/guardian of _________________________________, I give permission for my student to participate in the Ruling Our Experiences (ROX) Program at her school during the academic year.

The ROX program is an opportunity for girls to come together with a trained and licensed facilitator at her school to explore some of the big issues impacting girls today like confidence, developing healthy friendships and relationships, body image and media pressure, navigating social media and cyberbullying, dealing with stress and pressure, safety and violence prevention, and career development and leadership. The ROX program operates at our school with support from ROX, Inc. ROX is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to equip girls with the knowledge and skills needed to live healthy, independent, productive and violence-free lives.

Girls who participate in ROX meet weekly in small groups for discussions, lessons and activities and will receive fun ROX materials including t-shirts, binders, and water bottles. Girls have the opportunity to learn new skills, gain support and have fun in a safe, all-girl space.

As an evidence-based program, we may ask ROX program participants to complete confidential and anonymous surveys that help us measure the program outcomes. Participation in the surveys is voluntary and girls will not be excluded from ROX if they choose not to participate. Girls may be asked to share how they feel about their experiences as girls and their perceptions around topics such as confidence, careers, friendships, safety, and leadership. This information helps us assess the impact of the program and ensure that we are providing relevant and responsive programming to girls. ROX participants may also have photos or video taken throughout the program that may be used in online and print media, promotional materials, and reports.

After having read the information, I acknowledge that it is my responsibility as the parent/guardian of this student to evaluate carefully the risks inherent in participation. While there are no adverse consequences anticipated based on participation in ROX, I acknowledge that I have fully considered those risks, including but not limited to dangers posed by willful or negligent conduct by the student and/or others. I understand and agree that during the course of the ROX program supervision of the students will be provided. I hereby release, discharge and otherwise agree to indemnify Ruling Our Experiences, Inc. and its board members, employees, agents, facilitators, and volunteers from any and all claims of injury and/or property damage arising out of or related to the student’s participation.

________________________________________________________________________

Full Name of Student

__________________________  ____________________________  ___________________________

Student Date of Birth  School Name & Grade

Race

____ American Indian or Alaskan Native  ____ Asian  ____ Black or African American  ____ Biracial

Ethnicity

____ Hispanic or Latino  ____ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander  ____ White or Caucasian  ____ Other (please specify)

Student T-Shirt Size:  S  M  L  XL  2X  (all t-shirts are adult sizes)

________________________________________________________________________

Name of Parent/Guardian  Today’s Date  Signature of Parent/Guardian

________________________________________________________________________

Parent/Guardian Email  Parent/Guardian Phone  Parent/Guardian Mailing Address

[optional] Student Cell Phone Number  [optional] Student Email Address

Permission slip must be returned to ROX Facilitator in order for student to participate in programming.
PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

TITLE: EVALUATING AN EVIDENCED BASED PROGRAM: RULING OUR EXPERIENCES (ROX)

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

Lisa M. Mumau
School Counselor, Yough School District
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate
Duquesne University
mumaul@duq.edu

ADVISOR: (if applicable)

Dr. Launcelot Brown
Department Chair, Educational Leadership Program, Department of Foundations & Leadership
Duquesne University
(412) 396-1046
brownli@duq.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT (if applicable):

This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH STUDY BEING DONE?

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study that seeks to understand more about The Ruling Our Experiences program (ROX) which is an evidenced based program for girls that could support positive self-esteem and Social Emotional Learning Competencies in 4th grade girls.

In order for your child to participate in this study, your child must be a female, 4th grade student enrolled in Mendon Elementary School, HW Good Elementary School, or West Newton Elementary School in Yough School District.

WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE ASKED TO DO?
The things your child will be asked to do in this study include participating in the ROX program, complete a pretest and posttest using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale during week 1 and week 10 of the ROX program, and participate in a focus group during week 9 and a focus group during week 10.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

There are minimal risks associated with this participation but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. The study will benefit the researcher that is also the school counselor in evaluating the ROX program to determine if the program’s curriculum is effective in supporting 4th grade girls in Yough School District.

WILL MY CHILD BE PAID FOR TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

There will be no compensation for your child’s participation in this study.

Participation in this study will require no monetary cost to you or your child.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your child’s participation in this study will be kept confidential at all times and to every extent possible. Your child’s name will never appear on any research instruments. No identifying data will be used in the data analysis. All written materials and consent forms will be stored in a file folder in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s office for three years after the completion of the research and then destroyed. Your child’s anonymous responses will only appear in summaries of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to give your permission for your child to participate in this study, and you may withdraw your consent at any time by notifying Lisa Mumau by written or verbal communication at mumaul@duq.edu. If you decide for your child to stop participating in this study, all data collected from your child will not be used in the study.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me and my child. I also understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my permission for my child at any time, for any reason.

On these terms, I agree that I am willing to allow my child to participate in this research project.
I understand that should I have any further questions about my child’s participation in this study, I may contact Lisa Mumau at email mumaul@duq.edu. I may also contact Dr. Launcelot Brown, chair of the study, at (412) 396-1046. Should I have questions regarding protection of human subject issues, I may contact Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at (412) 396-1886.

__________________________________________            __________________
Parent / Legal Guardian’s Signature                          Date

__________________________________________            __________________
Researcher’s Signature                                      Date

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CHILD’S AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Evaluating an Evidenced Based Program: Ruling Our Experiences (ROX) for 9/10-year-old-girls in the Yough School District

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

Lisa M. Mumau
School Counselor, Yough School District
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate
Duquesne University
mumaul@duq.edu

ADVISOR: (if applicable)

Dr. Launcelot Brown
Department Chair, Educational Leadership Program, Department of Foundations & Leadership
Duquesne University
(412) 396-1046
brownli@duq.edu

WHY IS THE RESEARCHER DOING THIS STUDY?

I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about The Ruling Our Experiences (ROX) program for girls that has a curriculum to support positive self-esteem and Social Emotional Learning Competencies in 4th grade girls.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO?

The things you will be asked to do in this study are:

1) Participate in the ROX program.
2) Complete the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale during week 1 and week 10 of the ROX program.
3) Participate in a focus group during week 9 and week 10 about the ROX program.
HOW LONG WILL YOU BE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY?

Participation in this study will take a total of about 45 minutes, two times weekly per ROX group meeting, or a total of 90 minutes a week. The ROX program will last approximately ten weeks in total.

IS THIS STUDY HARMFUL? HOW IS IT HELPFUL?

Your involvement in this study is not any more harmful than other things you do in your life. If there are any questions or steps that you do not feel comfortable answering or performing, you do not have to do so.

I do not know if you will be helped by being in this study. I may learn something that will help other girls with their self-esteem and their understanding of Social Emotional Learning Competencies through The ROX program.

If anything hurts or you are uncomfortable with some of the questions, please let me know and I will stop or do whatever I can to make you feel better.

WILL YOU GET PAID TO DO THIS STUDY?

There will be no more money given to you for participating in this study, but your participation will also not cost you anything.

ARE OTHER PEOPLE GOING TO KNOW WHAT YOU DID OR SAID?

We will keep anything you say and do confidential.

If I find useful information in my research, I will want to share it with others, either by writing a paper about it, or talking about it with other professionals. If I do this, I will never give out your name or talk about you in a way that someone could figure out who you are or what you said in the research. If there are other things during the research that have your name on them, I will keep them locked in a password protected computer file or a locked filing cabinet for three years, then I will shred them or delete them off my computer.

CAN YOU QUIT IF YOU WANT?

Yes. You don’t even have to start if you don’t want. If you do start, and decide you don’t want to do it anymore, just tell me, or tell your caregivers/parents so they can tell me. Don’t worry; no one will be mad at you if you decide to stop. If you decide to stop, all data collected from you will not be used in the study.

OK, WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO IT?

If you read and understood everything on this assent form, and you understand that you don’t have to participate if you don’t want to, and you can quit anytime you want, then please sign your name on the line below. This means you are ready to participate. If you still have
questions, you can ask them by emailing Lisa Mumau at \texttt{mumaul@youghsd.net}. You can also call Dr. Launcelot Brown at (412) 396-1046. If you have questions regarding how you are protected in the study, then the best person to contact would be Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at (412) 396-1886.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parent/Legal Guardian’s Signature</td>
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<td>Researcher’s Signature</td>
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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.</td>
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<td>3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.</td>
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<td>4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.</td>
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<td>5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.</td>
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<td>6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.</td>
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<td>7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.</td>
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<td>8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>9. I certainly feel useless at times.</td>
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<td>10. At times I think I am no good at all.</td>
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Scores are calculated as follows:

*For items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7:
Strongly agree = 3
Agree = 2
Disagree = 1
Strongly disagree = 0

*For items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 (which are reversed in valence)
Strongly agree = 0
Agree = 1
Disagree = 2
Strongly disagree = 3

The scale ranges from 0-30. Scores between 15 and 25 are within normal range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem.
Facilitator: Hi Ladies. I want to ask you some questions as ROX nears to an end, so we can come together and understand one another, what we have learned, and how we can help all girls in general moving forward. We are going to have a focus group discussion that will last about 30-35 minutes, depending on all of your responses. Once we begin, I am going to ask questions and you are going to share your thoughts and opinions. You will do most of the talking. I will be doing a lot of listening.

In this process, there are no right or wrong answers. It’s completely okay to have a different thought or opinion than someone else in our focus group. Please respect what other group members share and give everyone a fair turn at talking.

I will be video recording the session, so I don’t miss any of your comments. We will use each other’s first names however the names will not be in my report. I am also going to remind all of you to keep what we discuss confidential, so that everybody feels comfortable talking and knows what they say won’t be discussed outside of our focus group.

Please remember, you do not have to respond to any question(s) that make you feel uneasy.

We will begin.
1. What have you learned in ROX that you did not know about before becoming a part of ROX? (Assessing SEL self-awareness)

2. To what extent do you believe your self-esteem has increased, changed, or stayed the same due to the ROX program? (Assessing SEL self-management)

3. What other changes besides self-esteem have you noticed within you since being a part of the ROX program? (Assessing SEL social-awareness)

4. ROX is almost over; what new things have you learned now that will help you later in life? (Assessing SEL relationship skills)

5. How have you changed since being a part of the ROX program? (Assessing SEL Responsible decision making)
Facilitator: Hi Ladies. I want to ask you some questions as ROX nears to an end, so we can come together and understand one another, what we have learned, and how we can help all girls in general moving forward. We are going to have a focus group discussion that will last about 30-35 minutes, depending on all of your responses. Once we begin, I am going to ask questions and you are going to share your thoughts and opinions. You will do most of the talking. I will be doing a lot of listening.

In this process, there are no right or wrong answers. It’s completely okay to have a different thought or opinion than someone else in our focus group. Please respect what other group members share and give everyone a fair turn at talking.

I will be video recording the session, so I don’t miss any of your comments. We will use each other’s first names however the names will not be in my report. I am also going to remind all of you to keep what we discuss confidential, so that everybody feels comfortable talking and knows what they say won’t be discussed outside of our focus group.

Please remember, you do not have to respond to any question(s) that make you feel uneasy.

We will begin.
1. What skills from the ROX program can you implement in your life outside of school?

2. How have your styles of communication changed with your friends and parents since being part of the ROX program?

3. Is dealing with girl drama easier, harder, or about the same since you have participated in the ROX program?

4. Since the start of the ROX program how has your personal support system increased, changed, or stayed the same?

5. What future goal(s) have you set for yourself to achieve after participating in the ROX program?
### APPENDIX F: Research Log Template FG 1

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## APPENDIX G: Research Log Template FG 2

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