

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Student-Based Transition Mentorship for Middle School Latino Youth

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Science in Counseling,

School Counseling

By

Christopher Gordon Gimber

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The graduate project of Christopher Gordon Gimber is approved:

_____	_____
Timmy E. Lee	Date

_____	_____
Marcile Vadell-Strickland	Date

_____	_____
Tovah Sands, Chair	Date

California State University, Northridge

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## ABSTRACT

### STUDENT-BASED TRANSITION MENTORSHIP FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL LATINO YOUTH

By

Christopher Gordon Gimber

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This graduate project represents the development of a transition intervention that middle school counselors may utilize. It will be a mentorship program that addresses the needs of Latino youth during transition into middle school. This proposed mentorship program would be implemented for the duration of middle school, to be peer-driven, to be set up utilizing a one-to-multiple mentor-to-mentee ratio, and will be adaptive. This proposed mentorship program will address cultural concerns, program structure, program duration, and developmental effectiveness. This mentorship program will be school based and allows for implementation in the absence of community or career based resources. This project will be adaptive by being based on student evaluations of its effectiveness and provide perception data on the effectiveness of certain mentorship strategies and techniques. As the population changes within a school, and/or specific program changes occur, changes can be tracked, compared, and contrasted.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

*To know the road ahead, ask those coming back (Chinese Proverb).*

Mentors for middle school students are those coming back and giving back. Mentorship programs provide academic, career, and/or social-emotional guidance that some students do not always receive from family or school staff. The Latino population in Los Angeles based middle schools has such needs and represents one of many groups of young people who could use the help of mentors. Focus on the Latino population comes from considering this group's growing size in many California schools and the state itself. According to the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)(2010), Latino populations in Los Angeles Schools have risen to over 73%. In the state of California, the Latino population has risen over 27% since the year 2000 to over 37% of the total state population (U.S. Census, 2010). However, higher population numbers have not correlated to higher graduation rates; this may be due in part to the California school system needing to align some responses to transition that is sensitive to the needs of the Latino students.

#### **Statement of Need**

The high school dropout rate of Latino students has been growing. According to the Los Angeles (L.A.) Times (5/2009), the dropout rate for the LAUSD is over 34%. Los Angeles Times in the previous year had stated that the drop-out rate for LAUSD was

about one-third with the specific Latino population at a 35.4% drop-out rate (LA Times, 7/2008). According to Stanard (2003), Latino students were graduating at less than 50% in 21 out of 36 school districts that were surveyed across the United States. An issue that may be linked with dropout rate is the transition from primary to secondary school without a real effort to incorporate Latino culture into the overall school culture.

There is a need to align programs to respond to the growing number of Latino students, whose key tenets are respect for the diversity of Latino culture in Los Angeles schools. According to the LAUSD (2010), Latino populations in Los Angeles schools to have risen to over 73%. A mentorship program that respects Latino culture and assists Latinos in Los Angeles with the transition from elementary school to middle school, could promote the academic success of this growing population. According to a survey of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students from varying ethnic backgrounds by Akos and Galassi (2004), the transition to middle school has been associated with declines in achievement, motivation, and self-esteem. These effects are also felt at the high school level, including further achievement loss and dropping out (Akos and Galassi, 2004). School-based mentoring could be an appropriate response for helping Latinos in this community. However, a generalized program for all students may not be appropriate. School based mentoring has been found to have significant effects on attendance, truancy, peer acceptance, and academic self-efficacy (Karcher, 2010; Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011). In a random assignment impact study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring, involving 1,139 9- to 16 year old students in 10 cities nationwide, youth randomly separated into a treatment group (receiving mentoring) and a control group (receiving no mentoring) were followed over 1.5 school years (Herrera et

al., 2011). According to Herrera et al. (2011), students receiving mentoring had a positive perception of their academic abilities, and performed better academically at the end of the first school year. However, Herrera et al. (2011) reported no improvements in classroom effort, global self-worth, relationships with parents, teachers or peers, or rates of problem behavior. In addition, Herrera et al. (2011) also reported that academic improvements were not sustained into the following year. Perhaps a program that can be sensitive to the differences within Latino culture could allow for a welcoming atmosphere that fosters the success of Latino students.

## **Purpose**

The Purpose of this graduate project is to develop an intervention for school counselors to present to their staff and implement at their school sites. The exact intervention is a mentorship program that addresses the needs of Latino youth prior to the transition to middle school, and again from the middle school to the high school, with a focus on articulation. This proposed mentorship program would be implemented for the duration of middle school (3 years), to be peer-driven, and adaptive. Developing a project of this kind necessitates the examination of cultural concerns, program structure, program duration, developmental effectiveness, and cost- effectiveness (in relation to structure and duration).

This mentorship program is also school-based and allows for implementation in the absence of community resources. This project is also adaptive, and students that experienced the program will be required to critique its effectiveness for future improvements. Allowing students to evaluate the program will provide perception



data on the effectiveness of certain mentorship strategies and techniques, remaining adaptive to shifts in culture as the population changes over time. As school or district specific program changes occur, changes can be tracked, compared, and contrasted.

## **Terms**

**mentorship program.** Karcher (2007) describes mentorships as providing at risk youth with supportive relationships.

**cross-age mentoring.** Garringer and MacRae (2008) describe Cross-age peer mentoring refers as a program in which an older youth (mentor) is matched with a younger student (mentee) for the purpose of guiding and supporting the mentee in many areas of her academic, social, and emotional development.

**transition(ing).** Espinoza and Jovonen (2011) describe transitioning with the term adjustment (p.749-750). Both terms are also related to relationships with peers, teachers, and school administrators (Espinoza & Juvonen, 2011). Akos and Galassi (2004b) describe example of psychosocial adjustment as perceptions of difficulty of transition and connectedness to school (p. 102). Transition and adjustment will be adopted as interchangeable terms in this project.

**self-efficacy.** Papalia, Olds, and Feldman (2009) describe self-efficacy as the sense of one's capability to master challenges and achieve goals.

**Latino/Hispanic.** Comas-Diaz (2001) defines Latino (male)/Latina (female) as recognizing the diversity of a minority group originating from or having heritage in Latin America. Hispanic carries connections with Spain and identifying with a European

culture, but it will be used interchangeably to include Latino populations that were differentiated under this term from Caucasian populations in the United States Census.

**Latino personalism.** According to Mcgoldrick, Giordano, and Garcia-Preto (2005), Latinos value the inner qualities of people that make them unique and give them a sense of self-worth.

**American individualism.** According to Mcgoldrick, Giordano, and Garcia-Preto (2005), Americans value a sense of self-worth from achievements earned through self-sufficiency.

**one-to-one interaction.** One-to-one will be described here as a dyadic relationship: where there are two people only, and one student is the mentor.

**one-to-multiple interaction.** One-to-multiple will be described as more than two in a group with one being the mentor.

**maturity.** The definition of maturity is based on the context of psychological maturity. Papalia, Olds, and Feldman (2009) describe psychological maturity as being concerned with the internal indicators like a sense of autonomy, self-control, and personal responsibility.

## **Bridge**

Properly structuring and developing the initial first phases of this program will require a review of research regarding middle school student maturity/development, cultural concerns, academic mentoring, career mentoring, cross-age mentoring, and the structure of other kinds of effective mentorship programs.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

#### **Early Adolescent Physical/Cognitive Development**

Adolescence is a developmental transition that involves physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes and takes varying forms in different social, cultural, and economic situations (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2009). Adolescence is described as a time for growth, not only in physical dimensions, but also in cognitive and social competence, autonomy, and self-esteem (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2009). However, this growth is met with a caveat where youth who have supportive connections with parents, school, and community tend to develop in a positive, healthy way (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2009). Therefore, it is important to foster supportive connections with peers, teachers, and the overall school environment within that context of supportive school connections.

**physical development.** Early adolescence is marked by rapid growth in height, weight, body proportions and form, as well as the attainment of sexual maturity (Papalia, Feldman, Olds, 2009). According to Papalia, Feldman, and Olds (2009), the observation of several generations in the United States has shown a trend toward earlier attainment of sexual maturity. Girls can begin to show signs of puberty by the age of six, and boys can begin to show signs of puberty by the age of 9 (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2009). Although a higher standard of living in developing countries attributes to this trend, individual differences can be attributed to a combination of genetic, physical, emotional, and contextual influences (SES, environmental toxins, diet, exercise, prepubescent fat, body weight, chronic illness, and stress) (2009). Family conflict, as well as cold and distant family relationships can also lead to early menarche in girls (2009). Physical

development, and the changes that occur between the ages of 11 and 14, can have an effect on psychological well being. Depending on how the adolescent and his/her peers view physical changes, the effects of early or late maturation could be perceived as negative when adolescents are more or less developed than their peers (2009).

Added challenges during adolescence involve the fact that the adolescent brain is still developing, contrary to older views that the brain was fully mature by puberty (Papalia, Feldman, Olds, 2009). One key feature of adolescent development is an increase in risk-taking, which is a result of two brain networks: the socioemotional network that is sensitive to social and emotional stimuli (peer influence), and the cognitive-control network that regulates those responses (2009). The socio-emotional network becomes more active at puberty, while the cognitive control network matures more gradually as the adolescent ages into early adulthood (2009). Bidirectional processes in adolescence make the brain sensitive to activities and experiences, as well as which neuronal connections will be retained and strengthened (2009). The critical conclusion to be made is that those adolescents who exercise their brains by learning, and thus, put order to their thoughts, understand abstract concepts, and control their impulses, are laying down a foundation that will serve them for the rest of their lives (2009).

**cognitive development.** Much of the understanding in cognitive development comes from the work of Jean Piaget (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2009). Piaget developed cognitive-stage theory by observing children and responding to their answers with more questions (2009). Piaget suggests that children have an inborn method for handling experiences that grow more complex with age through organization, adaptation, and finding equilibrium (2009). At the beginning of adolescence, youth normally enter into

Piaget's formal operations stage of cognitive development (2009). Formal operations normally begins around age 11, and allows for understanding of historical time and extraterrestrial space, and youth are no longer bound to thinking only in the here and now (2009). There is also a marked increase in the social sphere of development. Adolescents become more skilled in the ability to understand another person's point of view (2009). The onset of early adolescence brings a language trend toward the use of a social dialect that serves to strengthen group identity and, as a result, shuts adults out (2009). There is also an increase in moral reasoning that is influenced by parents, peers, culture, and prosocial behavior (2009).

### **Early Adolescent Psychosocial Development**

A primary reason for the cultural focus in this thesis project was adopted from Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development in early adolescence. Erikson is described as having viewed turning points in life as establishing equilibrium between ourselves and our social world (Corey, 2009). This desired equilibrium in adolescence (12 – 18 years old) is reflected in the achievement of a clarified sense of identity, life goals, and life's meaning (Corey, 2009). Striving for identity can be chaotic since defenses against identity confusion can lead to testing one's limits, breaking dependent ties, cliquishness, and intolerance of differences (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2009; Corey, 2009). Adolescents can fall prey to risky behavior, often resulting in negative consequences, when they cannot find ways to use the skills that are needed for success in their culture, skills that they may not have learned in middle childhood (6 – 12 years of age) (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2009).

There is the risk of identity confusion in adolescence without the time to practice any culturally relevant skills. However, time for culturally relevant skills promotes psychosocial moratorium in adolescent children during this period of identity formation. Erickson describes the psychosocial moratorium as a time-out period where children can search for commitments to which they can be faithful (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2009). Faithful commitment is described by Erikson as fidelity, or sense of belonging to family, friends, values, ideology, political movements, creative pursuits, and ethnic groups (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2009).

The realm of values, friends, and ethnic identity are tied to the social world of a school. As a student resides part of the day within a school for approximately 13 years (kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade), and the remaining hours with friends and/or family, each realm is linked to experiences both at home and the school. Therefore, a school's social world can be another environment in which an adolescent will either succeed or struggle in seeking the equilibrium that will foster individual identity. Erikson's theory discusses the connection with ourselves and the social world for general psychosocial development, but the design of this thesis project will require more specified connections found in other theories that compliment Erikson, including Social Learning Theory, Sociocultural Theory, and Bioecological Theory.

### **The Middle School Environment**

A current description of what middle school is like for most students, Latino or otherwise, is necessary to set the stage before any changes in programming are proposed. As a backdrop for thinking about the student in the context of a school setting, the daily

conditions will be juxtaposed with the development of an early adolescent. Although these descriptions will be for comparisons of the student versus the school in later sections, it is not the mission of this thesis project to completely change the physical environment. It is the mission of this thesis project to enhance the middle school experience by the addition of this program. The description of these physical encounters of middle students is to bring about understanding from the theories selected for the framework.

**a brief history of middle school.** Faced with pressures of immigration and the need for skilled industrial workers in 1900, schools moved from an '8 to 4' configuration (primary grades 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>, secondary grades 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>) to a '6 to 6' configuration (1<sup>st</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade, then 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>) based on recommendations of the National Education Act (NEA) report of 1899 (Juvonen, Vi-Nhuan, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Constant, 2004). Additional points made for the structural change came from the calls of college presidents that urged the need for college preparatory courses to begin by 7<sup>th</sup> grade, from the need to handle the transition shock of multiple teachers upon entry into high school, and from the unique psychological period that adolescents enter (Juvonen et al., 2004). It was not until 1913 and 1918 that concrete recommendations were made to separate secondary schools into junior (grades 7 and 8) and senior levels (grades 9 through 12) (Juvonen et al., 2004).

The first junior high schools had to handle the societal pressures that stemmed from immigration fears and unsanitary living conditions in urbanized areas (Juvonen et al., 2004). Junior high school schools became part of 'Americanization programs' to help children assimilate culturally, and be the community centers that provided social services

for their families (including shower facilities) (Juvonen et al., 2004). Despite these efforts, only one third of students in public schools made it to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade from 1907 through 1911 due to abrupt transition, irrelevance of curriculum to everyday lives of youth, strict instruction, and the practice of retaining students when they did not meet rigid requirements (Juvonen et al., 2004). In spite of these failures, there was a six fold increase in the number of junior high schools from 1922 through 1938, partly from increased enrollment of students following World War I (Juvonen et al. 2004).

By the mid 1950's, grade configuration ideas subsided and consideration for the function of the junior high school emerged. In 1956, some goals emphasized included integration of skills with interests and attitudes, exploration of interests and abilities, differentiation of educational opportunities based on student interests and attitudes, socialization experiences and guidance that promoted decision making, and an articulation that assisted youth with transition from a program designed for preadolescents to a program designed for adolescents (Juvonen et al., 2004). Despite the theoretical discussions, dissatisfaction continued into the 1960's as junior highs began to resemble the senior high school with an agenda of content instead of exploration, departmentalization rather than integration, and an adherence to a rigid schedule (Juvonen et al., 2004). This same time period saw one last grade configuration with 6<sup>th</sup> grade getting pushed out of primary school ( creating 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade) due to overcrowding in the primary schools from an increased popularity in early education and a large birth cohort (Juvonen et al., 2004).

More societal changes affected the efforts for reorganization of the middle school system. These societal changes stemmed from desegregation plans during the civil rights



movement, new research regarding young teens biological maturity supported earlier transfer out of elementary schools into middle schools, and surveys of principals that cited the need for relieving the crowded conditions in other schools (Juvonen et al., 2004). The 1980's saw new concepts that called for a focus on the 'here-and-now' problems of middle school students to a recycling of the early 1900's paradigm that transformed middle schools into full-service community centers (Juvonen et al., 2004). There was a revisit on the nature of the transition that discussed middle school being an environmentally poor fit for the developmental needs of young teens (Juvonen et al., 2004). By the 1990's, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development made eight recommendations to tackle the issues concerning middle schools, but with an endorsement for a core common knowledge:

- dividing large middle schools into smaller communities of learning
- teaching all students a core of common knowledge
- ensuring success for all students
- empowering teachers and administrators
- preparing teachers for the middle grades
- improving academic performance through better health and fitness
- re-engaging families in the education of young adolescents
- connecting schools with communities. (Juvonen et al., 2004, p. 14 – 15)

From advisory programs to developmental responsiveness that focused primarily on teacher-student relationships, the 1990's also saw research on motivation that suggested less cognitively demanding instructional strategies were not taking advantage of the

increased cognitive capabilities found in middle school students (11- 14) (Juvonen et al., 2004).

The history of middle school is wrought with transition concerns and how to solve them. According to Juvonen et al. (2004), recent debate as to how to solve these transition issues requires aligning the transitions both to and from middle school. Challenges in transitioning from elementary school are mostly social-emotional (an anonymous school environment, interruption in peer networks, and distant relationships with extra-familial adults), but challenges in transitioning into high school are considered academic (Juvonen et al., 2004). The latest efforts include a balance of experiences, since students actually benefit from a school environment that provides social support while emphasizing academic rigor (Juvonen et al., 2004).

**current concerns of middle school students.** A more socially focused mentorship transition program can be utilized to respond to some of the current issues still faced in middle schools. Akos and Galassi (2004) issued a questionnaire to 173 sixth grade students, 83 parents, and 12 teachers regarding the perceptions of transitioning into middle school. The middle school selected is located in a university town, is newly built, in its first year of operation, in a medium sized southern school district that is fed by eight elementary schools (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Akos and Galassi (2004) list getting lost, older students and bullies, too much homework, school rules, making friends, and lockers as commonly cited student concerns in the transition to middle school. However, these concerns were cited by students, teachers, and parents that are part of schools without transition programming or intervention (Akos & Galassi, 2004). A program designed to

assist Latino students through basic needs (familiarization of the school layout and locker usage) could help promote group membership with other 6<sup>th</sup> grade peers.

### **Theoretical Foundations for Thesis Project Design**

The main goal of this thesis project is to create a program that will assist Latino students with the transition into middle school. Different theoretical perspectives should be incorporated into the development of this program for maximum effectiveness and success. Since transition concerns adjustment with peers within the context of the school, learning, contextual and cognitive theoretical perspectives have been chosen as foundations for the project. The contextual perspective is based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory, learning will be based on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, and the cognitive perspective is based on Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory.

**social learning theory.** Bandura's (1989) theory maintains that people learn appropriate social behavior by observing and imitating models. The main set-up of the proposed mentoring program is to have a selected group of older 8<sup>th</sup> grade Latino students participating as the models for the younger transitioning Latino 6<sup>th</sup> graders. The older, most senior grade level in middle school also represents a student population with more experience, and are themselves preparing for their transition for high school. People tend to choose models who are prestigious, control resources, and are rewarded for what they do (Bandura, 1989). The 8<sup>th</sup> grade mentors will also be working closely with school counselors that oversee the program. The school counselors are the adults that will select, train, and guide the students who will eventually become mentors. Through feedback on their behavior, children gradually form standards for judging their actions and become

more selective in choosing models who exemplify those standards (Bandura, 1989); they also begin to develop a sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989). The goal is that the experiences of mentors, and the earned respect of educators, will convey a sense of shared values for Latino mentees who believe in personalism.

**sociocultural theory.** Vygotsky's (1978) theory suggests that adults or more advanced peers must help direct and organize a child's learning before the child can master and internalize it. This part of Vygotsky's (1978) theory is described as bridging the gap between what children are already able to do and what they are not quite ready to accomplish by themselves. In addition, this theory also suggests that cognitive growth is a collaborative process that involves active engagement with the social and physical environment (Vygotsky, 1978). This mentoring program will bridge the social needs of Latino middle school students in a similar means by focusing on the social concerns rather than completely on the academic concerns. As this mentorship program is a collaborative effort that stems from the school counselors down to the mentees, mentors play a role that facilitates the mentees' active engagement within the middle school environment.

**bioecological theory.** Bronfenbrenner's theory is based on the contextual perspective that the individual is not a separate entity interacting with the environment, but as an inseparable part of it (Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2009). There is a scale of connection that ranges from the personal/intimate to the most global/broader of connections (2009). There are five systems that surround the developing child: the chronosystem, the macrosystem (broad economic and political systems, dominant beliefs and ideologies), the exosystem (less broad connections to parents'-friends, parents'

workplaces, one's educational system, one's community, transit systems, religious hierarchy, and media), the mesosystem ( a more specific interaction of at least two areas that have more specific bidirectional influences on the developing child), and the microsystem (bidirectional influences of home, school, neighborhood, peer group, and local religious community) (2009). Part of the training for the mentors will emphasize Bronfenbrenner's contextual view of the mentor and the mentee. Although the mentors will be 8<sup>th</sup> graders and the mentees 6<sup>th</sup> graders, they equally take part in shaping the environment of which they are a part: the middle school. However, Bronfenbrenner's theory also stresses the effects of biological and psychological characteristics, talents and skills, disabilities, and temperament (2009). Mentors will be trained to view the student body in school as one of many systems of which a person can be a part, including viewing their own systems. The purpose of this foundation is to bring awareness to how we are all interconnected, yet remain individuals. Bringing awareness to each others' systems of development will help continued alignment to Latino personalism, but further encourage respect for the idea that not every student will think, feel, or act exactly the same.

### **Role of Culture for Ethnic Identity of Latino Students in the Context of Middle School**

Concerns about the intersection of home and school environments of Latino students will also need to be addressed. Literature reviewed in this section suggests the need to focus on the culture to bridge a possible cultural gap in school settings and to promote positive identity development. According to Espinosa (1995), there are

differences in the way Latino American children are socialized versus other American children. As Zuniga states (as cited in Espinosa, 1995, p.2):

“Hispanics, as a whole, have strong family ties, believe in family loyalty, and have a collective orientation that supports community life... Culturally this is represented by an emphasis on warm, personalized styles of interaction, a relaxed sense of time, and a need for an informal atmosphere for communication.”

Given these preferences, a culture clash may result when Latino students and parents are confronted with the typical task-oriented style of most American teachers. The United States, and many public schools, represents individualism in its culture that differs from the individualism of the Latino culture (McGoldrick, Giordano, and Garcia-Preto, 2005). According to McGoldrick, Giordano, and Garcia-Preto (2005), Latinos value a personalism that values the inner qualities of people that make them unique and give them a sense of self-worth, which contrasts with American individualism that finds value in achievement. In addition, Latinos may view the American way as cold and different from their values of family unity, personal warmth, respect for their elders, and their own and other people's dignity (McGoldrick, Giordano, Garcia-Preto, 2005).

When differences between Latino culture and American culture are not bridged the consequence may lead to efforts to protect oneself at the cost of possible assimilation. Latinos could make efforts to protect their culture as a response to this difference found in the traditional American way. McGoldrick, Giordano, and Garcia-Preto (2005) state that Latinos behave in a transnational manner where they do not consider themselves American, but try to maintain multiple relations (familial, economic, religious, organizational, and political) that span from their country of origin to their country of

settlement. In the middle school context, ethnic identity exploration for a Latino student could begin in early adolescence when attending a school setting that is heterogeneous (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006). Perhaps a program that is sensitive to the Latino culture could allow for a welcoming atmosphere that fosters the success of Latino students and exploration of their ethnic identity.

A mentorship program that incorporates Latino cultural values into its structure may be more successful for this group than mentorship programs that match a more mainstream American culture. However, there must be care not to generalize Latino cultural values. According to Espinosa (1995), there are differences among Latino subgroups including communication styles and socialization. Taylor (2008), studied one example of a mentorship program in Arizona, that supported the need to be sensitive to Mexican culture. Taylor's (2008) research of data was furnished by a school-based mentoring program developed from a collaborative effort between Luz Social Services, Inc., Luz Southside Coalition, and Wakefield Middle School (p.1). The program was called *Padrinos Barrios Mentoring Project*, and was based on the best practices of Big Brothers and Big Sisters while also including its own culturally relevant version of group mentoring (p. 2). Taylor's (2008) case study of this adult-to-student mentorship stated:

Most important, collaboration between mentors, parents, program staff, and school staff helps mentees succeed. Drawing on the Mexican tradition of *compadrazgo* both celebrates Mexican culture and mobilizes multiple sectors of the community to support youth. Incorporating Mexican cultural traditions is a key strategy for obtaining buy-in from mentees' parents, many of whom are immigrants from Mexico and speak only Spanish.(p.4)

Incorporating culture into the structure of a cross-age (middle school age student-to-student) mentorship program could allow for Latino student success and promote engagement or ‘buy-in’ to further the program itself. Taylor’s (2008) case study of this collaborative effort included a Luz Services measurement of school-related outcomes that reported improvement in grades for 43% of the mentees and fewer unexcused absences for 24% of the mentees. A focus on the cultural norms for the transitioning (elementary to middle school) Latino youth could counter the effects of a culture gap. Reducing a culture gap using methods found in Taylor’s (2008) case study may be a means to improve academic achievement and reduce dropouts of Latino youth in middle schools.

Support for the sensitivity to culture in a transition mentorship program is found in theoretical models of Latino youth development. According to Gil and Vega (as cited in Raffaelli, Carlo, Carranza, Gonzalez-Kruger, 2005, p. 28), adaptation of Latino families to the dominant culture is associated with family conflict and individual stress perceptions. However, some Latino families cope with adapting to mainstream culture by maintaining values supporting family, respecting authority, respecting elders, and collaborative behaviors that foster ethnic identity (Raffaelli, Carlo, Carranza, Gonzalez-Kruger, 2005, p. 29). Cross-age Mentorship Programs (CAMPS) in the middle school environment that are sensitive to Latino youth development through culture, like those in Taylor’s (2008) case study of Padrinos Barrios Mentorship Program, could provide another avenue for collaborative behaviors that match efforts of families to adapt to mainstream America.



## **The Role of Developmental Stages of Middle School Students and How it Affects Current Transition/Mentorship Program Structure**

Culture is an important consideration in the effectiveness of a mentorship program, and likewise, developmental stages that children enter into need to be investigated. Likewise, age appropriate mentorship/transition program structures also need to be incorporated. Eccles and Midgley (1989, as cited in Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine, and Constant, 2004) stated:

There was a poor fit between the developmental needs of young teens (for example, the need to have stable and close relationships) and the environmental changes related to the transition from elementary schools to middle school (new teachers and less-personal relationships with them) (p.13).

Many students in middle school find themselves wanting to become more autonomous as teachers are becoming more controlling (Eccles and Midgley, 1989, as cited in Juvonen, et al). Grading of middle school students becomes more competitive and strict, as teens become more self conscious (Eccles and Midgley, 1989, as cited in Juvonen, et al). The developmental need for autonomy and stable relationships increase during the middle school years, but a strict and impersonal environment of middle school is found to be a poor fit. This poor fit is an overall description of how some middle schools have been for students here in the United States, and is actually a concern that has been raised for the last one hundred years (Juvonen, et al., 2004). According to Juvonen, et al. (2004), comparisons with schools of different configurations suggest that kids from K-8 programs fair better when transitioning into high school. According to Juvonen, et al. (2004), students who felt supported and were in schools that emphasized academic rigor

showed the largest gains in achievement in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. A Balance of support means matching socio-emotional support to the rigor emphasized in academics.

According to Juvonen, et al. (2004), another promising solution for transition issues are advisory programs that aim to enhance student learning by improving the social climate. Advisory programs are described as arrangements in which adults meet regularly with groups of students to mentor, guide, and provide support ( Juvonen et al., 2004).

Although the proposed graduate project describes an advisory like role for the school counselors who train eighth grade students to be mentors to sixth grade students, this thesis project is more than a one-on-one relationship of school counselor to student. This graduate project recommends a comprehensive training program which will provide mentor training to 8<sup>th</sup> grade students to be in an advisor-like role for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students.

More specific strategies that work for this age group are found in a collaborative type of support. Brewster and Bowen (2004) discuss the implications and findings of surveys regarding teacher support and its effect on school engagement; the sample size of surveyed Latino middle school children (ages 11- 14) was 30% (189 students) of the total Latino student sample of 699 (p. 52). The measurements were done in four areas: problem behavior, perception of school meaningfulness, parental support, and teacher support (p. 53). According to Brewster and Bowen (2004), problem behaviors decreased and school meaningfulness increased as perception of teacher support increased. A transition program that includes support from teachers is developmentally appropriate and may need to be considered in this transition program.

Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) studied 213 sixth grade students for two years, in a mid-western, working-class community, to measure social and academic adjustment in

early adolescence. The average age was 11.87 years, the demographic make-up was 52% female, 48% male, 70% European American (some of mixed race), 23% African American, and 7% other minority groups (p. 1200). Topics that were measured included reciprocated friendship, group membership, peer acceptance, and academic achievement (Wentzel and Caldwell, 1997, p. 1200 – 01). According to Wentzel and Caldwell (1997), group membership (the peer group with which a student is most closely associated) was the most consistent predictor of Grade Point Average (GPA) versus friendships and peer acceptance. In a replicated study that followed 404 sixth grade students over the course of three years, in a mid-Atlantic school with 92% of the sample being European-American, group membership became less independent as a predictor of GPA (p. 1203 – 06). As students entered into eighth grade in study two, prosocial behavior and antisocial behavior had an influence along with the other measures (p. 1203 – 1206). In the discussion portion of these two studies, Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) stated that the social relationships at school are complex and uncertainly related to academic achievement.

The weak relation of social relationships to academic achievement may be the way students in middle school already utilize their peers to cope. Akos and Galassi (2004) studied responses to a questionnaire from 173 sixth grade students, 83 parents, and 12 teachers in a medium sized southern school district that is located in a university community (p. 212 - 14). The student sample was broken down to 48% boys, 49.7% girls, 57.2% Caucasian, 19.7% African-american, 8.7% Asian, 8.1% Hispanic, 4% multiracial, and the remaining 2.3% declined to respond (2004, p. 213). According to Akos and Galassi (2004), students identified classes, homework, getting lost, time it took to get to

each class, and teachers as being the most difficult part of the transition into middle school. Although the academic or procedural rigors of middle school (getting lost, and time in between classes) are considered the most difficult, middle school students are found to use the social aspect of school to adjust. Akos and Galassi (2004) also stated that middle school students would hang out with friends (47% of sample), try to fit in (14% of sample), or ignore people that pick on them (13% of sample) as ways to adjust.

Rather than a program that focuses on making friends, children in middle school can benefit from gaining membership in a group that also expands on skill sets that can help other peers. Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) studied 213 sixth grade students to gather information on a possible relationship between academics and group membership. This group was followed for two years with 52% of the sample being female and 48% male, with 70% of the sample European American, 23% African American, and 7% members of other minority groups (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997, p. 1200) . According to Wentzel and Caldwell (1997), group membership is a small self-selected group of peers who interact with each other on a frequent basis, including reciprocated friendships and peer acceptance within a small clique or group. There was significant relationship with group membership and its influence on GPA (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). A second study was performed on 404 sixth grade students who were followed for three years, in an effort to examine the possible relationship between antisocial/prosocial behavior with academics (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). As stated by Wentzel and Caldwell (1997):

...results of this study also extend understanding of links between peer relationships and academic achievement. Our findings support a conclusion that over time, these links are indirect and perhaps different for boys and girls. In

general, however, prosocial behavior appears to explain significant associations between sixth-grade peer relationships and eighthgrade achievement, providing additional evidence that underlying behavioral skills link social and academic competence at school (p.1207).

Focusing on being a group and maintaining its cohesion through pro-social behavior could allow for more positive results, but it seems that social/emotional aspects of middle school change over time and between genders as children develop. It is also important to consider developmentally appropriate pro-social techniques as they may allow students to practice helping each other. Quigley (2004) states:

Teaching young people to help other human beings is to equip them with a practical set of social skills that will assist them throughout life. Showing concern for others teaches empathy and understanding and encourages a host of positive behavioral traits. Instead of working on the elimination of negative behavior, peer group practitioners encourage and support the practice of new social strengths and skills.(p.136)

Intervention topics and duration of efforts should also be considered carefully.

According to Karcher and Herrera (2007), goals in the intervention/mentorship prescribed by the mentor could work against mentorship success. What has been suggested is to allow the students to develop the goals or activities together in an effort to establish a balance between mentor and mentee goals. It was also discussed by Legum (2004) that increased duration of the intervention may produce more significant results. Although the school calendar and limited instructional time, provides less opportunity, “Practices that help to create longer matches (e.g., more support and training) are

important in both Career Based Mentorship (CBM) and School Based Mentorship (SBM) because longer matches are associated with stronger benefits (Karcher and Herrera, 2007, p.11). It seems that it will be important that this middle school based program be scheduled for all three years of middle school and for the students to have some control over the activities they deem appropriate for their personal/social development.

### **Effective Mentorship and Intervention Structures Outside of the School Setting**

The focus of this review is to investigate other mentorship techniques that are used outside the school setting. Finding ways to adapt to adolescents' needs is important for developing programs that can sustain themselves. Applying some outside techniques in a school context may allow for on-going change and maintenance for later generations of the Latino population.

Some of the mentoring programs outside the school setting resemble what has been reviewed up to this point. The United States Army developed a soldier transition system called The Total Army Sponsorship Program and is for a new incoming soldier to be used by any unit receiving any new soldiers. The Total Army Sponsorship Program has similar requirements to that which were described earlier and make for a successful sponsorship program. Matching sponsors with the incoming soldiers is also important. According the Department of the Army (DOA) (2006), sponsors have to be the same rank (or higher), same gender, and from the same working background. Screening for sponsors that will follow best practices is also supported in this sponsorship program. Since sponsors will be the first person greeted by the arriving soldier, screening involves seeking soldiers that represent the unit in a positive manner (DOA, 2006). Extensive

support and training is also needed for the sponsor to be effective for incoming soldiers needs during transition. The selected sponsor assists the new soldier to get acclimated to the new environment, providing information on services offered in the community, with a focus on the individual's needs (DOA, 2006). If the incoming soldier is new to the unit, sponsorship relationships are to be maintained throughout the first year or terminated upon request of the new soldier (DOA, 2006). This maintenance of the relationship is to further emphasize the concern for personal needs that may arise while adjusting. It is also important to request surveys from the new soldiers regarding their sponsors and the overall transition assistance (DOA, 2006). The last point is important for making policy changes that anticipate the needs of incoming soldiers and tailoring the training programs for future sponsors.

The structure of the Army Sponsorship program works on changing dynamics of the one-on-one relationship. Collaborative, or circuitous, communication seems to be one of the important aspects to a successful mentorship/intervention program. According to the Department of Justice (DOJ) (1999), constant evaluation from both the mentors and mentees regarding agreed-upon goals is important for the continuous development of a program. Monitoring success includes both long-term and short-term goals (DOJ, 1999). A key aspect to communication, and clear established goals, is developing and maintaining a consistent routine. According to the DOJ (1999), establishing routine meeting times between mentors and mentees is important for continuity of a program. Recurring themes for successful structures include: maintaining continuity in the program through clear guidelines, clear communication, mutually established goals, routine meetings, and routine evaluations. The DOJ (1999) also states the importance of

screening for mentors, training, and a large support network to maintain the overall structure.

Support is also found in other programs for longterm matches and/or program duration. Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) (2000) reported significant gains for mentor/mentee pairs that met three to four times a month for 12 months. According to BBBS (2000), children (10-16 years old) were 46% less likely to use drugs, 27% less likely to use alcohol, 52% less likely to miss a day of school, 37% less likely to skip a class, and 33% less likely to hit someone. A longer-term program helps to sustain outcomes for children as compared to school based mentorship outcomes that were not sustained due to the shorter duration of the program (Karcher and Herrera, 2007, p.8).

### **Cross-age Mentorship Programs**

Karcher (2007) examined the structure of different cross-age mentorship programs (CAMPS). Although different topics may be discussed in a mentorship, other distinguishing features is that CAMPS do not solely focus on goal-oriented efforts to improve academic skills, resolving interpersonal problems, or addressing interpersonal problems (Karcher, 2007, p. 6). CAMPS are also distinguished from tutoring programs by the duration of training, deep support from school staff, structure that allows changes, promotion of friendship, promotion for character development, and that mentors are at least two years older than mentees (p 5 – 6). Karcher's (2007) findings suggest the older, high school or adult, mentors are more effective than middle school age mentors, but most of the sample sizes in the CAMPS research are small and statistically invalid (p. 7).



For program planners interested in cross-age mentorship, Karcher's (2007) report offers suggestions for a mentorship program, starting with the structure. First, programs that have little to no adult support or supervision could possibly do harm to students (2007, p. 08). Second, peer influence is a double-edged sword in that there is potential for older high school mentors to inadvertently provide deviancy training through their own behavior (2007, p. 8). The second point suggests that mentors closer in age to their mentees, are less likely to unintentionally model deviant behavior. Third, positive peer matches can promote a mentee's feelings of worth, likeability, and attractiveness to others (2007, p. 9). This third point suggests that failed matches could have devastating effects on the mentee. In addition, one should consider the potential for loss of a mentoring relationship by planning for early termination through a 'ritual' or closure session that is facilitated by an adult (2007, p. 9). This fourth point suggests that relationships should be closely monitored in some fashion to effectively respond to a failed match. Finally, Karcher (2007) lists seven points of an effective mentorship program that can also support the design of a middle school transition based mentorship program:

1. Mentors are trained in a developmental approach to avoid becoming tutors or something other than their intended role.
2. Mentors who report greater social interest and less self-interested motivations are strategically recruited.
3. Mentors and mentees differ in age by at least two years, with the mentors being in high school (sophomores and juniors) and the mentees being in middle school.
4. Programs provide mentors sufficient structure to keep the matches actively engaged, but the mentors' focus is clearly on strengthening their relationship.
5. Mentoring interactions are monitored for signs of "deviancy training".

6. Mentees are taught how to best utilize their mentors for support.

7. Mentors are required to participate in formal termination processes. (p. 11 – 12)

Karcher's (2007) article also focused on results on CAMPS that allow for one-to-one interaction of older mentors and younger mentees (p. 3). There has not been much research on similar school based programs that involve a one-to-multiple interaction (p. 3). There is a need then to develop a program that is a one-to-multiple student structure that could still address the growing number of Latino students transitioning into California middle schools.

Karcher's (2007) article further suggest a need to develop a mentorship program that specifically responds to the needs of middle school students. Karcher's (2007) article mentions that the effects of middle school mentors and elementary school age mentors are small or non-significant when compared to the high school mentors (p.8). Perhaps previous training has been geared towards the developmental stage of a high school student. It is suggested from the research that school counselors of this proposed mentorship project should devise a structure that can make middle school mentors comparable in effectiveness to high school mentors. Karcher's (2007) research also suggests that males benefit more than females do as mentors (p.8). Perhaps adjusting the approach to be more gender-specific can make for more effective mentoring in both genders. An effective transition mentorship program for middle school Latino youth should respond to developmental stage, gender, and cultural background.

According to Karcher, Herrera, and Hansen (2010), children and preadolescents associated the quality of mentoring relationships mostly with relational interaction over more goal-oriented interactions. Instead of a providing a list of goals to be accomplished

and expecting results, the positive relationship with a mentor influenced the perceived quality. Santiago and Brown (2004) published a compendium of academic and career oriented programs in the United States that show positive results for Latino students that values the quality of the mentor relationship. Programs like Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project or Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program have been designed specifically to be sensitive to the needs of Latinos and have a structure that fosters their academic and personal/social success (Santiago & Brown, 2004). Therefore, the outcome of each program was due in part to having a shared value system that improved the quality of the relationships instead of just focusing on achievement.

### **Effective Mentorship and Intervention Programs that work for Latino Students**

It will also be of importance to look into what programs have worked specifically for Latino students. Most of the investigation on this topic examines what each program centers its services around. For example, a program could focus on getting students into college through academic tutoring and mentorship by college students. There is a primary focus on programs that are based in, or developed in, California. Thus, the program will focus on the specific needs of Latino students that live in this state.

According to Santiago and Brown (2004), AVID (Achievement Via Individual Determination) builds its success by enrolling students in college preparatory classes. In order to support this program, students are given motivational and academic support by college tutors (Santiago & Brown, 2004). AVID has non-tutorial days that are devoted to a writing sequence and grade-level study skills for college entrance/placement exams (Santiago & Brown, 2004, p.11). According to Santiago and Brown (2004), the students

work with the college tutors in collaborative groups. AVID appears mostly academic, but it offers some services that are developmentally and culturally appropriate and could fall under the umbrella of mentoring. Students get a chance to work with individuals that are older and already in college. Collaboration is a feature found in AVID, one that is an important culturally sensitive component for Latino students.

Another California based group is the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project (CLYLP) (Santiago & Brown, 2004, p.12). The CLYLP introduces students to state government and politics, emphasizes the importance of culture and family values, and inspires students through individual and group interactions with local businesses (Santiago & Brown, 2004). Students are also provided information on public and private post-secondary education (Santiago & Brown, 2004). In addition, students participate in activities that include mock trials, campaign development workshops, career day, and college fairs (Santiago & Brown, 2004). CLYLP disseminates information and exposes students to careers, while emphasizing the importance of a positive support network with an appreciation for cultural sensitivity. Students are provided first-hand experience in the processes behind government and politics. Activities provide a balance of both individual and group-based interactions. Students are given support in the form of connections with professionals from the business sector and information for post-secondary education related to students' career goals.

One program differed in their approach to serving Latino youth. As described by Santiago and Brown (2004), Passport to College (connected to the Riverside Community College Foundation) found that 5<sup>th</sup> grade is a critical junction for both children and families to begin thinking about college and the future (Santiago and Brown, 2004). This

program also includes teachers and parents as part of the structure (Santiago and Brown, 2004). Santiago and Brown (2004) list the services and events involved with Passport to College:

Passport to College provides campus tours, classroom presentations, teacher training workshops, parent meetings, financial-aid workshops, and mentoring opportunities to encourage student academic success in high school and college entry. The program guarantees college admission to all participants who graduate from high school, and two years of tuition and fee assistance to those who successfully complete the program and enroll at Riverside Community College.

(p.16 -17)

Those behind this project conducted research to structure the program specifically around the needs of Latino youth. The program takes a collaborative approach that enriches classroom experiences, empowers parents, and connects primary schools with post-secondary institutions.

Both programs disseminated information and provided hands-on experiences, but each program had a specific focus. CLYLP disseminated information on colleges, but with a focus on careers and how to network. Passport to College had an academic focus that provided experiences to foster secondary school success and encourage entry into post-secondary education.

### **The Role of School Counselors**

School counselors will be the leaders in the delivery and management of this program. The specific ways in which counselors will take this leadership position is

through the model for a comprehensive counseling program as described in the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) national model. Investigation of the structure of a comprehensive counseling program will lay the foundation for the delivery and management of this program, as well as the specific role of the counselor.

This program is a response to transition issues that Latino students experience upon entry, and the duration, of their middle school experience. According to ASCA, responsive services fall under the delivery system of a comprehensive school counseling program and are designed to meet the immediate needs, or concerns, of the students (2005). Responsive services include consultation, individual counseling, small group counseling, crisis counseling, referrals, and peer facilitation (ASCA, 2005). The description of peer facilitation includes training students as peer mediators, conflict managers, tutors, and mentors (ASCA, 2005). It is part of a comprehensive counseling program to train students to be mentors for their fellow students in order to facilitate the delivery of responsive services in the school setting. Per ASCA, counselors assume that leadership role by training students as mentors.

Closely linked with delivery is management of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2005). Within the management system is the concern for closing the achievement gap through the implementation of interventions (ASCA, 2005). Part of closing achievement gaps is found in advocating for students, and creating a school climate where academic success is expected (ASCA, 2005). School Counselors will train 8<sup>th</sup> grade students to mentor 6<sup>th</sup> graders so as to make a smoother transition and be able to report on issues their 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees experience that may require intentional interventions. By managing the data collected by their trained mentors, counselors can

respond with intentional interventions that promote a positive academic atmosphere, and advocate for students by seeking changes to school policies that the collected data suggests are hindrances to student achievement. By disaggregating the data, school counselors can further the effectiveness of this project by identifying how subgroups within the Latino student body are affected.

### **Summary**

Middle school provides a context for experiences of the 11-to-14 year old student that suggest a need to focus on the psychosocial development of adolescents. Pubertal influences in physical, social, and cognitive development add to the challenge of transition from one academic setting to another. A counter to pubertal influences is transitional programming that is sensitive to this general growth pattern of the middle school student. Specific challenges to transitional programming will also include interventions that are sensitive to the specific socio-cultural identities of a specific demographic at a time when identity formation is burgeoning. Meeting the needs of students that identify as Latino or with the Latino culture, in the 11 – 14 year old age range, in a middle school setting, requires extensive planning, and training, collaboration of school staff, and leadership from school counselors.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### Intended Audience and Project Outline

The purpose of this project is to present a comprehensive, student-driven mentorship program that is designed to be sensitive to the needs of Latino students transitioning from elementary school to the middle school setting. In the sections to follow, I will discuss the initial development and how the final product could be implemented. In addition, I will mention other student populations that could benefit from this program and which individuals will help to administer this program. The closing sections will describe the equipment and environment that is appropriate for this program, as well as a brief outline of the steps for counselors to follow for implementation of this project.

#### **Development of Project**

Initial steps began to form from ideas that arose from my work with a group intervention, of ten 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, in a middle school setting. The group work was focused transitioning into a public middle school in the Los Angeles Unified School District. This group met once a week, for one class period (50 minutes), for ten sessions, and topics for discussion focused on transition issues common in 6<sup>th</sup> grade: making friends, getting involved with student body government, navigating a new campus, and skill building exercises for homework or tests. The group participated in an informal discussion as to what was actually helping them make a successful transition from elementary school. Besides the time to leave class and reflect on the perceived stress of being in a new school, the responses suggested friendships with each other and



classmates had linked them to people that could help them with other stressful situations including: learning how to use the locker, locating classes, and how to get involved in the school, thereby increasing a sense of school connectedness. At the close of our sessions I began to ask how to reach out to other students that were not receiving the same kind of support but could use the help and the group had suggested having more of these interventions.

Time constraints and other counselor duties prevented the counselors and I from facilitating multiple groups of this kind. However, comprehensive school counseling models (like ASCA's), or the military transition program, and research on cross-age peer mentors have become the main anchors of this final project. The ASCA model laid the groundwork for how a counselor could utilize students as a necessary part of a comprehensive program. The Army Sponsorship program reminded me of the importance of long-term training. Although research on cross-age peer mentorship is promising in one-on-one relationships in the high school setting, the lack of research about its effectiveness with middle school students in a group setting shows a need for this kind of evidence to be gathered.

### **Intended Audience**

Another reason for the program to be designed for groups of students in middle school is the intended population. This project is designed to be sensitive to the needs of adolescents from collectivistic cultures like the Latino population. With the intended setting being the middle school, the age range is approximately 11 to 14 years old.

It is important that strict guidelines are not listed in the text of this program in recognition of the fact that every Latino middle school population is different. Specific guidelines may work for one middle school in one district, but a narrow view could make for a limited scope that only works for a school with those exact conditions. For example, intending the audience to be third generation Latino with English proficiency would prevent other Latino populations that may have a greater need to participate as mentor or mentee. The specific student criteria will be different from one middle school to another.

### **Personal Qualifications**

School counselors are the primary individuals responsible for implementing this transition mentorship program for Latino middle school students. A school counselor that would have the training to implement a comprehensive school counseling program possesses a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential that allows the individual to work with students in grade levels K – 12. Group facilitation is an essential skill set to have, so experience with leading school groups is a must.

### **Environment and Equipment**

Mentor training takes place in a class room, and then actual mentorship relationships will take place on the school campus. Experiential exercises for mentors, either dyadic or counselor facilitated, will take place on campus. Monthly mentor and mentee meetings will take place in either an auditorium, or classroom, and will be facilitated by the counselors.

An academic environment that promotes cultural sensitivity can play an important role in the sustainability of this program. Elective courses that offer education about people from other countries will support collaboration with teachers. An existing cultural awareness class can be used as part of the mandatory training for the seventh grade mentor trainees.

In my own middle school experience, I was programmed into a class that was called cultural awareness. This course explored the history of cultural norms found within different countries, and the cultural difference of each region within each country. Coursework was done during class time, and performed in groups. Individual assignments included a mock radio show (based on folklore of a region), paper bag puppet show (based on folklore of a region), and a mock newspaper report of a historic event from an assigned region. An individual presentation about family origins, as well as a culturally relevant food item, was shared with fellow classmates as the culminating project.

A lack of electives means that counselors must collaborate with as many teachers as possible to incorporate culturally-based lessons in seventh grade coursework. Without collaboration, the counseling staff will need to find ways to weave cultural lessons into the training or intervention meetings. Recognizing the individual differences and group differences of each others' culture is part of the training that will help mentors become better listeners through empathy and understanding.

## **Project Outline**

After the school counselors decide who among the Latino population will be the primary focus of the mentoring program, advertising the project to parents and teachers will be the next preliminary step. The school counselor should then write a letter to incoming students' parents/guardians that states that a mentoring program is being planned. The letter would then explain that their son or daughter could be given a mentor, but only if the parents/guardians come to an orientation about the program. Another letter would be sent by the school counselor to be sent to the parents/guardians of next year's 7<sup>th</sup> grade students. These parents will receive information about the program and that their son or daughter could be selected to participate in a mentor training program, but that they have to attend an orientation about the program. At the orientation, both sets of parents that received letters/notices will be informed about the project and its goals. Upon conclusion of the orientation, the parents/guardians and students decide yes or no to potential selection and participation in the transition mentorship.

The middle school transition program begins with the school counselor and his/her team selecting potential mentors, based on individual school criteria, from the seventh grade students. In order to provide enough matches for future mentees, grade point averages should range from 2.8 to 4.0 and a balanced selection of male and female students is required. Since teachers see these students on a regular basis, recommendations based on classroom behavior and overall disposition is a requirement. Classroom behavior and overall disposition should include leadership, friendly disposition, positive work ethic, focused/ good attention, and/or organized. Candidates must possess at least a positive work ethic, friendly disposition, and good attention skills.

A large pool should be built for the final selection process that will occur after an orientation session. Orientation will cover the program in more detail, including expectations. Upon completion of the orientation, students will be given the option to leave, or stay in the program as a willing participant. The willing participants that remain will go through training in the basic listening sequence of the counseling profession. Skill sets will be cultivated throughout the seventh grade year through dyadic experiential exercises that will be observed and facilitated by the counselors. Counselors will also provide these students discovery-based exercises that focus on career interests, social interests, and how one learns in academic classes. Important skills that will also be imparted on these future mentors include the need to be organized, and to keep personal information confidential. Each future mentor will be expected to make the time to meet with their mentees and report out on their progress to the counseling staff.

The mentors will be afforded the opportunity to accompany counselors during elementary school visits, or registration, to be introduced to incoming sixth grade students and talk about the mentorship program. In the weeks prior to the fall semester, counselors and mentors will hold ice-breaker sessions with interested incoming sixth graders and their parents. Upon conclusion of these sessions, mentor matching by the counselors will be conducted, based on school specific student body criteria, prior to the beginning of the school year so that meeting times and locations can be arranged. Meeting times and locations will be student driven afterwards, but all information will be reported to the counselors in charge.

As the school year begins, there will be another orientation session for mentors and mentees to go over the guidelines. For mentees, it will be a session that tells them

how to use their mentors. For the mentors, it will be a refresher session as to their role, and responsibilities. The eighth grade mentors will use a handbook that holds a checklist of tasks to be accomplished to ensure a smooth transition for their sixth grade mentees. Mentors will meet with their respective mentees for weekly check-ins, recording key words and phrases in a log. In addition, mentors will report urgent information about their mentees well-being to the counselor as needed.

Each month there will be three comprehensive meetings. The first will be a counselor facilitated meeting with mentors and their mentees. The focus will be to discuss issues that need to be brought to the attention of the counseling staff so that they may formulate interventions. The second meeting will be the group intervention; counselors will run group exercises with the mentees, or hold discussions to assess the next steps to be taken for maintaining the wellbeing of this group. The third meeting is a check-in session with the mentors to ensure that their needs are being met while performing their duties during this program, and that listening skill sets are maintained.

The process restarts at the end of the school year, but with different types of meetings that need to take place. The first meeting is a termination session between mentors and mentees, facilitated by the counselors. Mentees will then complete a survey to evaluate the experience. The next session is the termination session with the counselors and mentors that will also include an ad hoc review/evaluation to gather information for further changes. The information collected from the surveys and ad-hoc meetings will be included with data from school wide surveys to ensure that the focus of the program is aligned with the needs of the specific school's Latino population. Deciding on needed changes will be a part of the planning for next year's cycle, as well as maintaining the

adaptive nature of the program. The next meeting is the restart of the selection process for potential mentors from the group of transitioned sixth graders.

Although the first year of having a group of eighth grade mentors and sixth grade mentees will be taking place, a gap situation must be prevented with the students that will be in their seventh grade year. Therefore, a group of seventh graders must be going through mentor training during the pilot year. Training a group of seventh graders during the pilot year of the mentorship program will help to ensure continuity of potential eighth grade mentors to future sixth grade mentees.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### Summary and Evaluation

#### **Summary**

This thesis project mentoring program is designed to provide the opportunity for the school counselor who is directing the program to participate in data collection for a one-to-many, cross-age mentorship program. The program is intended to be a long-term transition aide that covers the span of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. This transition mentoring project also allows for student-driven participation, but to be integrated as part of the delivery system within a comprehensive school counseling program, maintained by counselors. A transition mentoring program that is implemented for all three years of middle school could allow for data collection on the effectiveness of a long-term transition intervention. A transition mentoring program that is implemented for the three years of middle school will also allow for data collection on transition of students entering high school with or without this kind of transition mentorship program. With the project designed to be sensitive to the needs of collectivistic populations, this project could be implemented across other school districts in California and other states in the United States.

#### **Evaluation**

This program was reviewed by a school counselor at a middle school in the Granada Hills area of the San Fernando Valley. This middle school is in the Los Angeles Unified School District, and this counselor holds a supervisory position that also provides administrative/secondary counseling services. Upon review of this program, the concerns



that were raised involved the ability to set the foundations for a comprehensive school counseling program: a pre-condition for implementing this mentorship program. The counselor admitted to the need for time and training to get started on a comprehensive model that follows the one offered by the American School Counselors Association. Without an effective comprehensive counseling model already in place, this project may not be delivered, or managed effectively by the general staff.

Further examination by the counselor revealed other concerns. One area of concern was that there is no specific mention of how many counselors would be needed to both deliver and manage this program. Another area in question was regarding no specific mention of what the starting number of mentors and mentees would be for the pilot year of the program. Another concern was the use of a handbook for mentors, instead of coming up with ways to use technology or a combination of the two. Additional technology concerns involve coming up with survey questions that can be used for computer-based assessments.

Monetary concerns were brought up, but not as a serious concern. Realizing that the design of the program is to organize and utilize the student body as a mentor resource for counselors, this evaluating counselor's initial concern dissipated. However, time constraints were mentioned as an issue loosely related to money. Extra time spent at school for a counselor is usually unpaid due to many contracts indicating "additional duties as assigned," and more time needed either before or after school may raise a concern to other counselors that have obligations outside of regular school hours.

## **Conclusion**

Most of what is required for delivering and managing this transition mentorship program for Latino middle school students will already be in existence if a comprehensive counseling model is being followed. The number of students as potential mentors and mentees will be dependent upon the needs assessments that are done as part of an existing comprehensive school counseling model. The number of counselors to both deliver and manage this program will be dependent upon the number and structure of the existing counseling team. As some counselors will have specialties in collecting and analyzing data, other counselors will be better suited for training, and/or program management. However, each counselor with the required credentials and training from an accredited college/university should have the skills and willingness to effectively deliver and manage this program. Incorporating the duties of this program into the daily duties of counselors today would be ideal. Unfortunately, either providing added compensation or number of counselors will be necessary to make the goals of this program practical.

## **Recommendations**

An important recommendation is that an effective comprehensive school counseling program, similar to ASCA's, should already be in place before attempting to deliver and manage this mentorship program. If time and money is still an issue for a comprehensive school counseling program, writing a grant to hire an additional counselor to collaborate, train, deliver, and manage this program, can be a helpful tactic. Even though a grant to hire a counselor to begin taking actions for implementing this program

would be a clever means initiating this program, collaborative efforts are still necessary for it to take off.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Overview for School Counselors**

Dear School Counselor,

If you are looking into the structure of this program, then it is likely that you have conducted needs assessments that revealed potential transition problems related issues for 6<sup>th</sup> grade Latino students. This program will be a basic guide for what will be needed in your program, but some details are to be filled in by your school's specific needs. The reason for the lack of specific details is to keep the foundations of the program open to supporting any transition mentorship program at an individual school. Funding capabilities, or lack of funding, prompted the design of this open foundation. Although the necessary training will be the responsibility of the school counseling staff and other collaborators, the remaining functions of the program will be carried out by the students that are trained to become transition mentors.

The guide has a specific set of training goals for future mentors to learn important skills in listening. This sequence will be familiar since these are the same foundational skill sets used by current school counselors. The purpose for training students in these skills is not only to make them better listeners, but to make them better reporters. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade mentors help the new 6<sup>th</sup> graders with making their first year a transition with support, but the transition mentors will also be there as a resource for 6<sup>th</sup> grade transition information by reporting to the school counselor.

The transition mentor can help with the issues where school counselors may be short on time to assist students while tending to additional duties: how to use a locker,

where to find certain classrooms, where to find certain offices, how to get involved in clubs, who is the principal, and other areas of school life that only a fellow student could assist with during short passing periods or lunches. These smaller forms of support can be tracked with the mentor checklist which doubles as a reminder for the mentor as to which basic needs are to be taken care of during transition. The mentor log doubles as a report for school counselors to use as part of another assessment for other interventions that may be needed for the 6<sup>th</sup> graders, interventions that are to be developed and implemented by the school counselors.

In addition to providing information that can be used to establish other interventions, or how to make this transition mentorship intervention more effective, the mentor log allows for periodic check-in times with the mentor. Periodic check-in times with mentors will be used to ensure proper relationships exist, to ensure proper skill use, to ensure overall health of the mentor, and to assess individual/group needs of mentors that may also require intervention.

Although a calendar is included, this calendar is guide that requires the specific details of your school schedule to be filled in. It is understood that each school may have different schedules, so this calendar is to assist you in figuring out where to plug in the important trainings, meetings, and events. Use of an open set of guidelines is to encourage you in organizing and scheduling in a way that works for you and your students. Strict guidelines may be desired by some school counselors, but conforming to a program may not allow for interventions that are shaped to the needs of your students. An important point to note is that once this program has been implemented at your school for a few years, the eventual changes may transform the overall program to something

that looks different from what is written in this project. However, the changes your school will make are supported by this projects foundation in the research. Below are the 11 steps and a basic calendar for those steps. In addition, here are the important training goals for future mentors. The mentor handbook that follows only includes the mentor log and check list. Any additional items that are school site related must be added by your staff.

Step 1- Reading through the Literature Review and Project Outline- this is the basic foundation of this thesis project and reviewing it with fellow school counselors at your site will afford awareness of this projects aim.

Step 2- Forming the team and selecting leadership- including all counselors in the process maintains accountability, but each member should represent a part of the program to be a leader for each specific area (i.e. training the mentors, data collection and reporting, project implementation/maintenance, and parent liaison).

Step3- Planning and collaboration- figuring out the resources, deciding the criterion for mentor selection, collaborating with teachers, and planning and deciding the timeline for the overall project.

Step4- Advertising transition mentorship to parents and students- before a selection and training process begin, current middle school parents, parents of future sixth graders, and students need to know more about it.

Step 5- Selection of mentors

Step 6- Training of mentors

Step 7- Pairing process- developing surveys for mentors, and future mentees, to gather student preferences for proper matching.

Step 8- Full implementation of project- 1<sup>st</sup> meeting- pairing mentors with mentees and their orientation on how the relationships work.

Step 9- Maintenance and Accountability- ensuring mentors are meeting with mentees, holding the mentor check-in sessions, holding monthly interventions for 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees, and collecting the data from mentor logs and mentor check-list.

Step 10- Evaluation/Termination sessions- concluding the mentors' relationships with their mentees, concluding the school counselors' relationships with their mentors, and gathering mentor/mentee evaluation of experiences.

Step 11- Redevelopment/Recycling of process- review of the student experiences, restructuring the areas for improvement, and recycling the process from step 1.

## **Appendix B**

### **Example of a Mentorship Program Calendar for School Counselors**

6<sup>th</sup> graders-

#### **End of May through June**

Newsletter announcements and meetings to educate parents on program (includes right to opt out student from being considered for a mentor position)

Selection process begins

Notification/Permission slips to parents about son or daughter being eligible to participate

Meetings with students to offer transition mentorship position and search for willing participants

7<sup>th</sup> graders-

#### **September – December**

If possible, program the potential mentors into a cultural awareness class.

Conversation and basic counseling skills instruction by the counseling staff (preferably small groups, once a month, inside elective course classrooms, or after school).

#### **January – May**

Practice modules- buddy teams (once a week meetings where partners role play common issues for new sixth grade students).

Accompany school counselors to visit feeder elementary school(s) for introduction about information about mentorship program.

#### **July – August**

Participate in orientation sessions to set up mentorship groups prior to first day of school.  
One eighth grader to two sixth graders using ice-breaker games to facilitate positive matches.

### **8<sup>th</sup> grade mentors with 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees**

#### **September-**

- 1<sup>st</sup> Counselor and Mentors' Monthly meeting with 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees ( How to use your mentor orientation)
- Campus familiarization before Homeroom/1<sup>st</sup> period, or after school
- Administrator, counselor, and teacher familiarization: Mentors will make appointments in groups to meet with different school staff at different times of the day (before school, during lunch, or after school).
- Locker familiarization before homeroom/1<sup>st</sup>, or after school

#### **October-**

- Counselor and Mentors' Monthly meeting with 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees
- 8<sup>th</sup> grader conference with counselors about initial issues for 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees
- Counselors hold first group intervention regarding the initial issues
- Counselors also hold first check-in session with mentors (skill refresher, general well being, etc)

#### **November-**

- Counselor and Mentors' Monthly meeting with 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees
- 8<sup>th</sup> grader conference with counselors about current issues for 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees
- Counselors hold group intervention regarding the recorded issues

**December-**

- Counselor and Mentors' Monthly meeting with 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees
- 8<sup>th</sup> grader conference with counselors about current issues for 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees
- Counselors hold group intervention regarding the initial issues
- Counselors also hold check-in session with mentors (skill refresher, general well being, etc)
- Counselors hold special holiday break group sessions to address how to handle homework concerns, family concerns, travel concerns, etc

**January-**

- Counselor and Mentors' Monthly meeting with 6<sup>th</sup> graders
- Mentors have special meeting with counselors on well-being and preparation for topics of concern for coming back after the break
- Mentors address any issues from over the break
- 8<sup>th</sup> grader conference with counselors about 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees

**February-**

- Counselor and Mentors' Monthly meeting with 6<sup>th</sup> graders
- 8<sup>th</sup> grader conference with counselors regarding current issues with 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees
- Counselors hold group interventions

**March-**

- Counselor and Mentors' Monthly meeting with 6<sup>th</sup> graders
- 8<sup>th</sup> grader conference with counselors regarding current issues with 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees
- Counselors hold group interventions

**April-**



- Counselor and Mentors' Monthly meeting with 6<sup>th</sup> graders
- 8<sup>th</sup> grader conference with counselors regarding current issues with 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees
- Counselors hold group interventions

**May-**

- Counselor and Mentors' Monthly meeting with 6<sup>th</sup> graders/Termination session/Evaluation session
- 8<sup>th</sup> grader conference with counselors regarding current issues with 6<sup>th</sup> grade mentees/Evaluation session/Counselor and Mentor termination session

## Appendix C

### **Mentor Training Goals**

#### **Time organization**

Goal- to introduce the idea of short, middle, and long term goals.

- 1) Bringing awareness and thinking through goals can help bring about the notion of importance of goals for everyday success (as well as school).
- 2) Make a time sheet

#### **Cultural Competence (learning, connecting, and creating)**

Goal- to bring awareness of how we are all different, but respected.

- 1) Discussing what makes you who you are- conversations about ourselves can help break the ice, but being curious of each others' stories can be rewarded with trust and respect.
- 2) Discussing interests, hobbies, and passions- an eighth grade mentor that has knowledge of clubs or groups on campus can help link his/her mentee to those with like interests, or be an advocate for his/her mentee's creation of a club/group to bring others together.

(These next goals are taken from the basic listening sequence found in Ivey, Ivey, and Zalaquett, 2010, *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling* 7<sup>th</sup> ed.)

Each of these goals are skill sets to be practiced in dyads, or triads, and administered by trained counselors with a Masters Degree in School Counseling and Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credential (or an equivalent that allows one to work with students that are in grades K – 12).

### **Attending behaviors:**

Goal- communicating genuine interest in mentee's well-being; increasing awareness of mentee's focus; establishing rapport with mentee.

- 1) Visual - Noticing breaks in eye contact both by mentor and mentee
- 2) Vocal - Awareness of voice pitch, volume, and speech rate. It communicates feelings about yourself or the mentee, and enhances attending to mentee's story.
- 3) Verbal - Build on the mentees' topics. Bring attention to those things actually said by the mentee in the near past, or present, through a question or brief comment.

### **Encouraging, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing:**

Goal - helping your mentee to feel understood

- 1) Types of encouragers are head nods, positive facial expressions, utterances ("Ummm" and "Uh- huh"), and open gestures keep the mentee talking, also stance (i.e., sitting in toward mentee).
- 2) Paraphrasing is restating the essence of what was said, using some of the key words used by your mentee, and followed by a question to check for accuracy. If done right, a person may explore and clarify an issue further. More importantly, your mentee will feel you understand, or are willing to understand a personal issue.
- 3) Summarizing is a longer form of paraphrasing that includes mentioning topics over the duration of your mentorship. This is similar to bringing up something that may have happened with a friend yesterday, but you only mention certain points that were important to say again. The point is again to help your mentee feel understood.

**Language of Emotion:**

Goal- understanding that people express emotions, both verbally and non-verbally, and being able to identify the six primary emotions. This skill will help the mentor when speaking with counselors about the overall well being of the mentees, or of the mentors themselves.

- 1) Brainstorming about the different levels of the basic emotions will train the listener to the basic emotions behind a mentee’s issues.

Sad	Mad	Glad	Scared	Surprise	Disgust
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

**Open ended questions:**

Goal- encouraging mentees to talk, and be provided with maximum information.

- 1) Beginning with what, how, why, or could. Closed questions that begin with is, are, and do, will provide specifics. However, closed questions place the burden of building the conversation on the mentor.
- 2) Story awareness- Giving the mentee the power to guide the conversation affords the mentor awareness of the mentee’s background, interests, hopes, and fears.

## Appendix D

### Beginning of Mentor Handbook

#### **For The Student, By The Student**

**(Place Picture/Image Here)**

*Student-Based Transition Mentorship*

## **Message for Mentors**

Being a mentor will be an important role for you, your fellow students, and your school. You will be the guide for fellow students that are experiencing similar issues you may have faced upon entering your sixth grade year. You will be an advocate/representative for your mentees. Besides helping them with the common task of opening a locker, locating classes, and managing time, you could also be their confidant for issues that may be affecting their focus on school. The greater challenge will not be helping with the common tasks, but with helping them express what they are feeling, as you would do for a friend, during this first year of middle school. Remember your training, your own experiences as a 6<sup>th</sup> grader, and to talk to your counselors. Your counselors are there to support you in your efforts to support your fellow classmates. When in doubt, seek the assistance of the counselors or other trusted administrators on campus.

Meet with your mentee often, but not just to casually talk. Middle school is a chance to join clubs, and get involved with other students, teachers, and your community. Help your mentee connect with club leaders, or encourage participation in student government. You could even help your mentee start a club, or community movement.

Enjoy what possibilities you can make for your mentee and yourself.

Be safe. Be respectful. Be responsible. Leave a lasting impression on them and your school.

**Mentor checklist for:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Campus Exploration**

- Locker
- Class Schedule
- Nutrition/Lunch areas

**Staff/Office familiarization:**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Student Initials</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Signature</b>
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**Date**

- Counseling office
- Attendance office
- Principal's office
- Assistant Principal's
- Dean's Office
- Parent Center
- Nurse's Office

**Mentor Log Sheet**

**Date:** (To be signed in front of a counselor)

**Name of Mentor:**

**Name of Mentee:**

**Meeting dates and times**

	<b>Mon.</b>	<b>Tues.</b>	<b>Wed.</b>	<b>Thurs.</b>	<b>Fri.</b>
<b>Before School</b>					
<b>Nutrition</b>					
<b>Lunch</b>					
<b>After School</b>					

**List of Activities (example- general talk, locker practice, campus walkthrough, etc):**

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**Key words and phrases (connect specific details to feeling words):**

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**Mentor Comments, Questions, and Concerns:**

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**Mentor signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Mentee:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Counselor:** \_\_\_\_\_