

CREATING DRIVE: A CASE STUDY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AUTHENTIC  
INSTRUCTION IN AN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

by

RACHAEL JEAN FORRESTER MCCLAIN

(Under the Direction of Elaine Adams)

ABSTRACT

During the 2012-2013 school year, Lanier Charter Career Academy (LCCA) began offering an authentic educational program targeting at-risk high school students with the purpose of preparing students to be effective members of the workforce. This qualitative case study investigates the student and staff experiences during the transition from an on-line curriculum model that had been used extensively in the past to the current format of a teacher-taught, authentic curriculum model. The new model was launched in an effort to increase student engagement levels and positively impact student outcomes. The desire of the program was for a greater number of students to move productively into the workforce or post-secondary options following the successful completion of their high school requirement. Students, faculty and administrative staff were interviewed and students observed to fully investigate the outcomes of the curriculum model change during the 2012-2013 school year. The researcher engaged in participant observation in order to develop a clear understanding of the transformation occurring at the secondary institution during the course of the school year.

Student participants in the study were observed in classroom settings and participated in a series of in-depth interviews over the course of the school year. Data were analyzed throughout

the research study using the constant comparative method seeking common themes across stories from the participants as well as narrative analysis of individual stories. Participants' voices can be experienced through the narratives shared from interview data. Archival data and student work were also used to create a multi-viewpoint picture of the case.

From the conceptual framework of the DRIVE program, the weight of importance of research-based strategies for effective instruction of at-risk populations can be heard in the students' narratives as well as the themes from the comparison of data from interviews, observations, and document analysis.

**INDEX WORDS:** Alternative Education, Authentic Education, Narrative Analysis, Constant Comparative, Themes, Workforce Education, Case Study, Participant Researcher, At-Risk Education

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RACHAEL JEAN FORRESTER MCCLAIN

BBA, North Georgia College and State University, 1993

MAT, University of Georgia, 2008

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013

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RACHAEL JEAN FORRESTER MCCLAIN

Major Professor: Elaine Adams  
Committee: Janette Hill  
Myra Womble

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
December 2013

## DEDICATION

To my husband, Mark, for his unwavering support and encouragement. To my beautiful children, Colby, Cassie, Ellie, Mattie, Sara, Elijah, and Kevin for your insights, patience, and high expectations. I hope you will always know how much I love you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family for endless nights of babysitting and shuttle service while I was busy with educational pursuits. I would like to thank my committee members for their precious time, on-going support, and shared knowledge over the past year especially Dr. Elaine Adams. I appreciate our conversations, your insights, and your encouragement! And I would like to thank God for giving me the wisdom to achieve a finished product.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: A CASE FOR AUTHENTIC INSTRUCTION IN AN AT-RISK ENVIRONMENT

A significant level of high school dropouts in a society demanding a minimum of a high school education has led to potentially higher levels of unemployment, a greater chance of relying on public assistance, and a life below poverty levels for a substantial portion of the United States (Plank, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2008). More than a million students in the United States enter ninth grade and then fail to graduate from high school within four years (Siegrist, et al., 2010). Levels of high school dropouts directly affect college enrollment numbers, workforce skill levels, productivity, and inequality in America (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). Fortunately, several trends regarding career academies, alternative education models, and authentic instruction in education address the phenomenon of high school dropouts and appear to be converging to create an effective environment for learning (Kerka, 2003).

#### **Dealing with Dropouts**

The establishment of secondary-level career academies has been a nationwide effort over the past 30 years. Career academies were developed to address the unique needs of students at-risk for dropping out of high school. Typically, a career academy is defined as a small learning community offering a focused effort to create a personalized, supportive environment for students. Career instruction designed to increase the relevance and rigor of the curriculum is a vital part of a successful academy (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). Substantial research exists describing the impact of career academies on quantitative educational factors including increased

student retention, decreased absenteeism and discipline issues, and increased enrollment in post-secondary education or training programs (Blomenkamp, 2009; Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Kemple & Wilner, 2008; Page, Layzer, Schimmenti, Bernstien, & Horst, 2002).

In a career academy setting, educational methods come from a variety of experiences combining classroom instruction with hands-on learning in a small school environment (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). The combination of these educational experiences intertwines to create an effective and progressive learning environment that does not resemble traditional education, but rather a professional workplace (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). School systems operating career academies, offering career majors, utilizing student projects and other innovative career-related strategies have made integration of career-related curriculum and academic classes a key strategy for improving teaching and learning (Stasz, Kaganoff, & Eden, 1995).

Dewey, an early proponent of the hands-on education setting, promoted educational advancement through the use of scientific problem-solving and experiential learning (Marrapodi, 2003). Dewey was well-known for his pragmatic viewpoint promoting the idea that education depended on action. He promoted the concept that learning and ideas develop from situations where students grow knowledge out of experiences that had meaning and importance to them (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). If students can become engaged in applicable curriculum then the benefits for their future can be more clearly seen. This educational environment ideally leads to greater retention, greater understanding, greater emphasis on continued education, and a greater society (Cline, 2010). Yet, research continues to show that a dichotomous relationship exists between academic and real-world preparation of students (Bailey & Merritt, 1997; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; Dewey, 1914; Hoachlander, 1999). Many contemporary career

academies seek to bridge the gap between academic and career preparation by offering students learning opportunities in an authentic, career-focused format (Kemple & Snipes, 2000).

### **Bridging the Gap**

The Lanier Charter Career Academy in the Hall County Schools system is a career academy offering programs targeting at-risk youth. Historically, the program has used an online delivery method called e2020 with teachers acting in the role of computer lab monitors. In the 2012-2013 school year, the school launched a new curriculum delivery method based on the parallel-curriculum model. The parallel-curriculum model was originally developed for gifted education and is designed to create an interactive learning environment moving students from lower-level thinking to higher-level application of knowledge. Students move through the four parallel pillars of curriculum ranging from foundational knowledge to application of the knowledge (Tomlinson et al., 2002). The focus of the program is workforce development using authentic learning situations that collaborate learning between career-preparation classes, academic classes, internships, and apprenticeships. This study investigated students' experiences during the transition to the new curriculum model. The staff's perceptions as related to students' experiences were also explored. Investigating the motivations of at-risk youth regarding truancy, graduation, and academic success or failure can be used by educators to create stimulating school environments where students are engaged while being prepared for their future college and career success. Therefore, the outcomes of this study could impact the importance of authentic education in at-risk and mainstream educational environments (Lagana-Riordan, et al, 2011).

### **Creating DRIVE**

Developing Resources and InValuable Experiences (DRIVE) is the branded name of the program being used in the 2012-2013 school year at Lanier Charter Career Academy. DRIVE,

based upon the design of the parallel curriculum model, is the culmination of instructional strategies targeting at-risk students and practiced at Lanier Choice and Project Forward programs. Appendix A is a visual representation of the Lanier Charter Career Academy model. Lanier Choice is the full-time day program for students working to complete their high school degrees. The Project Forward program is for students who are working to prepare for the General Education Diploma (GED) test. The Project Forward students will eventually withdraw from the school system in order to be qualified as a high school dropout. At the point of withdrawing from school, the Project Forward students can take the GED.

The program's foundation is the DRIVE soft skills class which all students in both Lanier Choice and Project Forward programs complete. However, students who were within a semester of completing graduation requirements were not required to participate in the program. For example, students completing graduation requirements in Fall semester 2012 were permitted to opt out of the newly developed program.

DRIVE concentrated on the development of 11 basic principles: (a) personal responsibility, (b) creative thinking and problem solving, (c) communication, (d) attitude and respect, (e) discipline and character, (f) civic responsibility, (g) professionalism, (h) teamwork, (i) leadership, (j) time management and work habits, and (k) personal marketing. These principles coincide with the standards of the GeorgiaBEST rubric (Morley, 2012) and align with the four-Cs of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills model (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). The GeorgiaBEST rubric is provided in Appendix B and acts to define each of the 11 principles of the program.

GeorgiaBEST is a program launched by the Georgia Department of Labor to encourage soft skill training at the secondary level (Morley, 2012). The students of LCCA were evaluated based upon the rubric of the GeorgiaBEST program at the end of each semester. The four-Cs of the

21<sup>st</sup> century learning model encourages training at the secondary level to engage today's learners in a more relevant manner (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). By definition, a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning model is a comprehensive strategy designed to develop both knowledge and soft skills in a students. By focusing on the 4 C's of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, students develop stronger employability skills while completing their high school degrees (ACTE Issue Brief, 2009; Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011).

Students enrolled at LCCA completed the basic DRIVE class, designed a personalized career and graduation plan (referred to as a Road Map in the LCCA curriculum model) in coordination with their advisor and other faculty, and earned on-site internship positions to gain relevant employment experiences that reinforced their academic and soft skills educational preparation. Based upon their interests and abilities, students will eventually work towards employment placement in the community to gain authentic skills to help them be successful in their future careers and other post-secondary plans.

Tobin and Sprague (2000) determined that an educational climate promoting student ownership and offering relevant studies related to student interests, flexibility, and school pride combine to create a positive indicator of success. The DRIVE program includes aspects of these areas along with personal interaction, authentic instruction, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills interwoven into academic classes. Key best practices at the most successful alternative education schools include strong student support that is personalized to keep students on track for graduation, flexible-learning opportunities that are challenging and provide catch-up time, and teach college and career readiness that promotes transitions from high school into the real world (Quint, 2006).

Based upon learners' career plans, students enrolled at LCCA could "specialize" in one of four broad areas of training as they moved through the pillars of the parallel curriculum

model. Students could specialize in entrepreneurship skills, leadership skills, customer service skills or community service skills. These four training areas provided preparation in relevant skills that are easily generalizable and applicable to most jobs. Authentic, cross-curricular projects and specialized classes were offered to reinforce a students' selected training areas.

Student attendance and student motivation are historically significant issues handled by Lanier Charter Career Academy instructors. The DRIVE program utilizes "Feature Fridays," a reward system for students with good attendance, good academic progress, and no behavior referrals. Initially in the program, students selected a Feature class based upon their interest and attended a class two times each month. As the year progressed, Feature Fridays happened the last Friday of the month. Students nominated by teachers for recognition of their work, behavior, and attitude watched a current movie in the school's theater area complete with popcorn, sodas, and other snacks.

Strong personal adult interaction is a positive success factor in at-risk education (Lombardi, 2007). Students at LCCA interacted in teacher-taught classrooms with a maximum of a 17:1 student to teacher ratio. Each student had an assigned advisor and advisement was scheduled to take place up to two times a month. Advisement time was to be used to check student progress on their Road Map and reinforce the DRIVE soft skills class topics. A network of business and community leaders acting as mentors was scheduled to be established in the 2012-2013 school year along with a peer-leadership program; however, both of these programs were postponed until the 2013-2014 school year in order to firmly establish other aspects of the DRIVE program. The LCCA school counselor interacted directly with student families and each student had an identified adult in their personal life acting as a role model and establishing high expectations for the student regarding personal and educational goals.

At the end of the 2012-2013 school year, cross-curricular activities with an authentic focus were being developed in each academic area. Academic teachers reinforced DRIVE soft skills topics from the DRIVE soft skills class through instruction in their classes. Classroom instructional strategies focused on collaboration and integration of technology. The school recently received a technology grant from a local sale tax funding initiative.

On-going professional development was offered to assist teachers working with the LCCA students. Technology Tuesdays offered information on use of technology hardware and Web 2.0 tools to interested instructors. Friday professional learning sessions were offered to faculty with information on authentic instruction, problem-based learning, and collaborative learning. To assist with the addition of new technology, the school recently received a technology grant from a local sale tax funding initiative. The addition of technological resources allowed students and instructors to operate in a more interactive environment.

Business and community partnerships between LCCA and outside organizations lent classroom expertise through guest speakers and mentorships, locations for job shadowing, funding for paid internships, and opportunities for apprenticeship placements. Currently the local Society of Human Resource Professionals, Goodwill, several large manufacturers, multiple hospitality business partners, and the local Chamber of Commerce are all working with the Academy model established at LCCA.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative case study sought to investigate the results of a new curriculum model based in authentic educational experiences via listening to the narratives of at-risk students and staff describing the students' experiences and participation in the DRIVE Program, an authentic learning environment infused with practical learning outcomes. The DRIVE Program was a new

program implemented in the 2012-2013 school year following several years of the school using an on-line education model called e2020 (e2020, 2012). Based upon conversations with the teachers and administration at Lanier Charter Career Academy, motivation and relevance were two of the biggest challenges to communicate to the students. The lack of educational motivation and relevance in students' minds resulted in significant truancy issues and a high drop out rate for LCCA. Ideally, the ability to uncover students' motivations related to engagement levels in the learning process could lead to a much greater understanding of education instructional models resulting in improved student achievement and overall student knowledge retention (Lagana-Riordan, et al, 2011). At-risk students could provide valuable feedback regarding public schools and impactful education policies that may lead to improving the United States school systems (de la Ossa, 2005). Although quantitative studies exist showing career academies are having an impact on retention rates for at-risk populations, very little research exists that focuses on the experiences of at-risk students (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). Narratives describing the experiences of these student including discussions on daily educational routines, engagement levels, thoughts on the education and the students' futures, as well as what past, present, and future occurrences impacting the students' educational outcomes and goals were gathered. These narratives focused on both positive and negative experiences. Investigating LCCA students' experiences can potentially uncover students' unique insights, learning opportunities, motivations, engagement levels, and future plans. Themes and relationships from the individual student narratives can uncover common patterns in positive and negative experiences for students. Information discovered from these students can offer significant insight for the school systems and the treatment of at-risk students in effective educational methods (Lagana-Riordan, et al, 2011).

In order to develop a sense of students' unique experiences and the impact these experiences have on student engagement and motivation levels in an authentic learning environment, the study investigated at-risk youth participating in the DRIVE Program during the 2012-2013 school year. Faculty's viewpoint of the students' experiences in the newly adopted program were also explored in this study in order to provide a more complete picture of the case with narratives about the student experiences coming from multiple viewpoints. The aim of this qualitative research study was to fully understand the case so initial research questions were modified to accommodate new issues that arose through data collection and analysis (Stake, 1995). The following questions were the final guiding statements to focus the research as the case study begins:

1. What are the student experiences (from the viewpoint of students, faculty, and administration) resulting from creating a rigorous, authentic learning environment focusing on relevance, collaboration and career-preparation in an environment designed for an at-risk student population?
2. How does the change to a curriculum delivery method that focuses on relevance, collaboration, and career-preparation in an authentic format impact (a) student learning, (b) engagement, (c) motivation, and (d) educational experience?

### **Importance of Study**

In May 2012, Lanier Charter Career Academy was listed by the Georgia Department of Education as a Graduation Alert School. An Alert School has a graduation rate that is at or falls below the third standard deviation of the statewide graduation rate (Georgia Department of Education [GADOE], 2012). As an Alert School, the GADOE provides support in and interventions to raise graduation rates at the targeted schools. Based upon the current enrollment

levels for the 2012-2013 school year, the best graduation rate LCCA will be able to achieve is 25% (Cindy Blakely, personal communication, June 4, 2012). This figure was determined by looking at enrollment numbers, comparing students who are not on track for a high school degree completion in the allotted 4-year time frame, and removing students who have already dropped out from past years. Increasing the graduation rate to 25% would be a feat for the staff to have been proud to achieve, but to truly become effective, the staff, faculty, and students of LCCA must look long range with graduation goals for the next four to five years established in a realistic but rigorous level.

Beyond LCCA, the exploration of student experiences in the authentic educational environment of DRIVE resulted in insights into effective and non-effective strategies for at-risk students. Experiences can be defined as unique insights, learning opportunities, motivations, engagement levels, and future plans of students. The experiences of at-risk students can be used to shape instructional strategies for all students by exploring activities that result in unique insights, learning opportunities, motivations, engagement levels, and future plans of students (de la Ossa, 2005).

### **Theories, Frameworks, and Roadmaps**

Lombardi (2007) defined authentic learning as an opportunity focusing on real-world, complex problems in which a variety of instructional tools are used to engage students in the solution of the problem. The authentic learning theory as proposed by faculty members of the University of Australia emphasizes the use of real-world scenarios when teaching students through collaboration, modeling, performance opportunities, and reflection (Herrington, 2005). With authentic learning as a backbone of the design, the DRIVE program provided students authentic learning opportunities that can be carried out in real-world settings.

The situated cognition theory as proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize that novices engage in learning by observing expert members of the community and then slowly move from the outer regions of the community to fully participating members. The environment of LCCA promotes learning from a social standpoint as described by Bandura’s social learning theory. The social learning theory strives to explain how behaviors are learned in the interaction between observed behaviors, cognitive factors, and external environments (Bandura, 1971).

Figure 1 visually demonstrates the overlapping concepts of the authentic learning theory as the method of teaching, the situated cognition theory as the learning process, and the social learning theory as the foundation of the learning environment. The DRIVE program operates within the overlap of these theories.

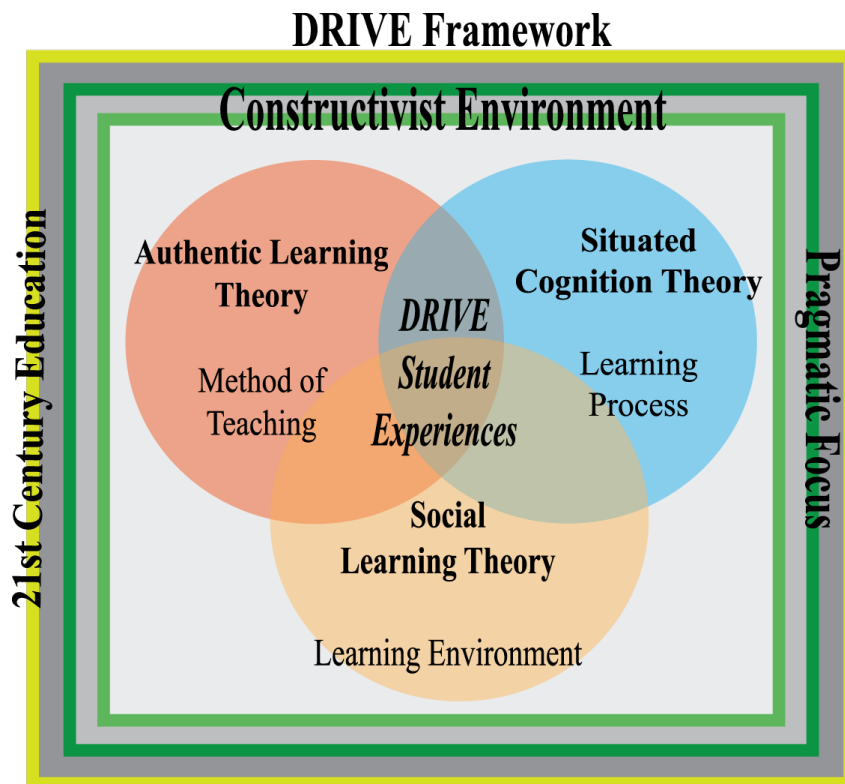


Figure 1: DRIVE Conceptual Framework

Surrounding the operational outcomes of the theories are the paradigms of constructivism and pragmatism. Constructivism has a long history rooted in both philosophy and psychology with insights from Dewey, Hegel, Kant, and Vico (Doolittle & Camp, 1999). In the education field, learners are allowed to construct their own knowledge and understanding of a topic. The role of the teacher is not to teach the material, but rather to help learners uncover their own facts, figures, and ideas of material (Marrapodi, 2003). Progressivism from a pedagogical perspective means teaching students the skills needed to be successful in regards to a specific subject. Learning occurs through active engagement, self-directed learning, and promotion of the learner's discovery of knowledge (Labaree, 2005). Progressivism in the classroom has distinct characteristics, but above all, knowledge gained through experience is the pivotal concept.

A recent line of thought is blurring the lines between progressivism and constructivism. A reawakening is occurring between classical pragmatism based upon Dewey's teachings and social constructivism (Neubert, 2001). Pragmatic social constructivists look to action rather than abstract reason as the source of knowledge (Larochelle, Bednarz, & Garrison, 1998). As a major contributor to the progressive philosophy, Dewey's emphasis on observation, life experiences, and communication lends itself well to the concepts of social constructivism (Neubert, 2001). Wrapped in the overriding goal of pragmatic education as put forth by Dewey (1914) where learning is intertwined with practical uses for society, the DRIVE program was designed to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment focusing on an extension of traditional educational strategies (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2011).

According to the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2011), student success in today's global economy is going to require more than a focus on traditional school topics of the past. In addition to core knowledge and the context of core knowledge instruction, students must develop

critical thinking, creativity (problem solving), communication, and collaboration abilities. The model proposed by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills builds on a foundation of standards and assessments with a system of instruction that promotes authentic instruction and problem-based learning that is well-supported with technology in and out of the classroom. Teachers are active participants in the professional development communities designed to give the instructors the resources to transform the traditional classroom into a collaborative 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010).

With aspects of both pragmatic and constructivist philosophies, the DRIVE program was built upon on premises of the authentic learning theory along with aspects of the Bandura's social learning theory and the situated cognition theory. The DRIVE program of LCCA was an attempt to direct at-risk students to a roadmap leading to a productive future including a high school graduation, employability skill development, and work-force and/or post-secondary readiness. This research study focused on uncovering the experiences of the students and faculty members in the first year the model was proposed and launched.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A wealth of research regarding education, trends in education, and effective strategies for at-risk students can be found in today's body of literature. Chapter 2 looks at an overview of current educational trends focusing on improved outcomes for at-risk students. Discussions involving a 21<sup>st</sup> Century educational model will also be reviewed. Additional information from the body of literature regarding the theoretical concept of the DRIVE program is also be presented.

#### **Current Trends in Education**

As a charter career academy, Lanier Charter Career Academy combines several educational trends in creating a school targeting at-risk students. Investigating histories and current trends facing career academies, alternative education strategies, and authentic instruction is worthy of review. The overlapping of these trends provides a rich environment for potential effective strategies in educational systems.

#### **Career Academies**

According to the National Career Academy Coalition [NCAC], the concept of career academies originated in 1969 when Charles Bowser, Executive Director of the Philadelphia Urban Coalition, proposed The Academy Model as a response to the inner city riots of 1968 (2010). Bowser's model utilized business and community leaders to mesh academic curriculum with career technical courses in applied learning environments where faculty and students work in a team setting to produce results (ACTE Issue Brief, 2009; NCAC, 2012,). In 1968, Bower

launched an Electrical Academy at Edison High in collaboration with Philadelphia Electric. With the success of the Electrical Academy, 29 other academies focusing on 12 different career areas were developed (Stern, Dayton, & Raby, 2010).

Career academies typically have significantly different structures than traditional schools with end-goals that focus on career preparation (NCAC, 2010). Academies prepare students for both college and careers with the injection of career themes into the overall curriculum (Delano & Hutton, 2007). Since their inception in the 1960s, the use of career academies as an instructional model has grown due to the dual focus of career and college preparation, the broad selection of students served by the academies, and the on-going evidence of the success of the academy model (Brand, 2004). Several key elements of design are of critical importance in career academies including:

- Students are grouped together for at least two years and are taught by a team of teachers from different disciplines,
- Academies provide college and career curriculum designed to allow students to see the relationship between school instruction and real world application,
- Strong partnerships exist between the academy, businesses, the community, and colleges to aid students in the facilitation of their future plans for college and their career (Brand, 2004).

The desire and need for a well-educated and skilled workforce is critical for business development. It is this need that has prompted the growth of the career academy concept over the past 40 years (Delano & Hutton, 2007).

Significant milestones mark the development of the career academy model to the current status of the educational structure of academies today. In the first two decades following the

development of the Academy Model, the growth of career academies was steady, but limited (Stern, Dayton, & Raby, 1998). In 1990, the number of academies grew rapidly with over an estimated 1,000,000 students enrolled in academies across the United States (Stern, et al., 1998; Brand, 2009, Stern, et al., 2010). Following the example of the Philadelphia Academies, California launched a Computer Academy in 1981 followed by New York's establishment of the Academies of Finance (Stern, et al., 1998). In recent years, interest on behalf of policymakers, educators, and researchers has increased as career academies have continued to show promise for effective strategies. These strategies have related to improving student performance, increasing overall academic results, and raising graduation rates (Kemple & Willner, 2008).

In Georgia, 26 charter career academies offer services to over 14,000 students in 34 school systems (Cagle & Munn, 2012). Table 1 provides a listing of the current academies and the locations of the schools. The charter career academies benefited from the support of Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle with over \$67 million in grant funds being allocated to support the continued development and growth of the career academies program over the past six years (Cagle & Munn, 2012; Dodd, 2010). Annual grants are awarded through the Technical College System of Georgia for the additional start-up of charter career academies that focus on dual enrollment opportunities and career preparation for high school students (Department of Technical and Adult Education [DTAE], 2012).

The shift in the philosophical view of education from the industrial age time period to an experiential learning experience leads to the realization that for true reform to occur, basic assumptions regarding education must change (Blomenkamp, 2009). Career academies allow students with divergent learning styles to prosper in an educational environment. Academies

Table 1

*Listing of Current Georgia Career Academies*

<b>Career Academy</b>	<b>Partnering Technical College</b>	<b>Location</b>
Athens Community Career Academy	Athens Technical College	Clarke County
Baldwin County Career Academy	Central Georgia Technical College	Baldwin County
Carroll County College & Career Academy	West Georgia Technical College	Carroll County
Central Education Center	West Central Technical College	Coweta County
Floyd County College & Career Academy	Coosa Valley Technical College	Floyd County
Decatur Career Academy	DeVry Advantage Academy or DeKalb Technical College	Dekalb County
Douglas County College & Career Academy	West Central Technical College	Douglas County
Effingham Career Academy	Savannah Technical College	Effingham County
Gateway to College	Georgia Perimeter College	Newton County
Golden Isles Career Academy	Coastal Georgia Community College	Glynn County
Gordon County College & Career Academy	Georgia Northwestern Technical College	Gordon County
Hapeville Charter Career Academy	Atlanta Technical College	Fulton County
Heart of Georgia College & Career Academy	Heart of Georgia Technical College	Laurens, Dodge, and Wheeler County
Houston County Career Academy	Middle Georgia Technical College	Houston County
Lanier Charter Career Academy	Lanier Technical College	Hall County
Liberty College & Career Academy	Savannah Technical College	Liberty County
Newton College & Career Academy	Georgia Perimeter College	Newton County

*Table 1 continues*

*Table 1 continued*

*Listing of Current Georgia Career Academies*

<b>Career Academy</b>	<b>Partnering Technical College</b>	<b>Location</b>
Putnam College & Career Academy	Central Georgia Technical College	Putnam County
Rockdale Career Academy	Dekalb Technical College	Rockdale County
Southeastern Early College & Career Academy	Southeastern Technical College	Toombs/Vidalia/Montgomery
Tech High School	Atlanta Technical College	Atlanta
Walton Career Academy	Athens Technical College	Walton County
Whitfield Career Academy	Dalton State College	Whitfield County

Note: Adapted from Georgia Charter Career Academies, Cagle & Munn, 2012

rather are authentic providers of skills and abilities that will lead to success in future college and career actions (Blomenkamp, 2009, NCAC, 2012).

### **Alternative Education**

Alternative education, or education in a variety of non-traditional formats, began in the 1960s and has continued to grow prolifically through the past decades in response to a crisis in the number of students not completing high school (Siegrist, et al., 2010). The concept of alternative education, however, can be traced to John Dewey and the progressive education movement that recognized the benefit for some students in their active involvement in the education process (Neumann, 1994).

Since the inception in 1960, alternative education has developed into several programs with varying definitions. Broad views exist like that of Smith (1974) who defined alternative education as any educational institution providing alternative learning experiences that are different than those provided by the traditional schools within a community. More current and restrictive views can be found where an “instructional program is different and separate from

regular classroom instruction (Foley & Pang, 2006, p. 135). The U.S. Department of Education describes alternative education as

a public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides nontraditional education which is not categorized solely as regular education, special education, vocational education, gifted and talented or magnet school programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 55).

The foundation of many alternative education programs today focus on individualized learning for students based upon personal needs (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006). Student ownership, studies related to student interest, flexibility in learning, community support and involvement, and school pride are also key factors of the successful alternative education programs (Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Alternative programs may have significant themes involving discipline issues from behaviorally- or emotionally-challenged students. Alternative education programs exist in a wide range from those that are disciplinary in nature to programs with specific academic goals. Programs that have shown the best results are designed with a caring and flexible environment with enhanced academic programs (Atkins, 2008, Lagana-Riordan, et al., 2011).

Current statistics describing the levels of dropout rates across the United States clearly indicate the need for effective alternative education designed to support students that are not successful in traditional schools (Siegrist, et al, 2010). Students who are not successful in traditional educational settings typically exhibit poor grades, high absenteeism, disruptive behavior problems, and other circumstances limiting optimal learning conditions (Lagana-Riordan, et al, 2011). In public school systems, the need for alterative education programs

continues to grow as special needs and at-risk students (especially in minority sub-groups) increase (Lagana-Riordan, et al, 2011).

Georgia is one of many states legislating different aspects of alternative education, including enrollment criteria, funding, and staffing qualifications (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). Under GADOE guidelines, a school system may provide alternative education with in-school suspension programs, disciplinary alternative education programs, school-community guidance centers, community-based alternative education programs, or other alternative education programs that meet state guidelines. Alternative programs must follow Georgia Performance Standards, focus on core curriculum and self-discipline, and award credit as in a traditional school program (GADOE, 2012).

### **Authentic Learning**

Authentic learning is defined as learning opportunities that focus on real-world, complex problems and use a variety of instructional tools, including case studies, role plays, problem-based activities, and communities of practice (Lombardi, 2007). The power of authentic learning is summarized in the simple concept that students' experiences in school should resemble as closely as possible the students' future experiences in the real world (Cronin, 1993). Three major tenets can be used to more specifically define authentic learning experiences: "(1) students construct meaning and produce knowledge, (2) students use disciplined inquiry to construct meaning, and (3) students aim their work toward production of discourse, products, and performances that have value or meaning beyond success in school (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993, p. 8).

An educational movement is underway that places emphasis on authentic learning and 21<sup>st</sup> century instructional practices (Cronin, 1993; Daggett & Pedinotti, 2011; Symonds,

Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011). Progressive educators are working toward more authenticity, but not always complete authenticity in a classroom environment. Teachers should be open to all available authentic opportunities and take advantage of the opportunities by thinking outside of the traditional classroom. Educators must also systematically develop students' abilities to effectively operate in an authentic learning environment (Cronin, 1993).

Authentic learning directly aligns with the process cognitive scientists have uncovered through learning research. This cognitive process emphasizes how learners create connections to existing knowledge typically establishing long-lasting learning as the connections are established. New information is processed, and new contexts are connected in larger learning events creating sustained knowledge (Lombardi, 2007).

Multiple conditions exist to make the educational environment more receptive to authentic learning. The world is changing at a rapid pace, often faster than the educational institutions are able to adjust in curriculum, practice, and outcomes (Daggett & Pedinotti, 2011). A changing economic scenario, a new viewpoint on learning processes, and a different generation of students that demand more from educational institutions are factors impacting the authentic learning opportunities (Lombardi, 2008).

In the current global economy, United States graduates are in direct competition with graduates from around the world (Lombardi, 2008). According to a report by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006), "Employers complain that many college graduates are not prepared for the workplace and lack the new skills necessary for successful employment and continuous career development (p.12)." Today's students are competing in a global economy in which the importance of critical thinking and applied knowledge are much greater (Paine, 2006). Authentic learning provides opportunities to develop these skills for students (Lombardi, 2008).

The rapid pace of information development and the fact that most people will face multiple career changes in their lifetimes are also supportive of the need for authentic learning strategies since expert thinking skills can result from these types of strategies (Lombardi, 2008).

New trends in education result in an understanding of the benefit of authentic learning from both an educator's perspective and from a student's perspective. Learning specialists and educational researchers agree that effective instruction is critical to student success (Daggett & Perinotti, 2011). Effective instruction leads to the retention and transfer of knowledge that results in long-term learning (Lombardi, 2008). Unfortunately, the 20<sup>th</sup> century model of education remains commonplace in much of the United States education system, focusing on teaching versus learning and following a structured system regulated by bells, segregated by age groups, and divided by curriculum topic (McNulty, 2011). Transitioning to authentic learning with application for students to the real world not only facilitates long-term learning, but also creates higher levels of engagement for today's learners. Today's students are consumers expecting increasing transparency from teachers regarding overall thought processes, application of information being taught in the real world, and clear expectations for criteria of student success (Lombardi, 2008). Authentic learning environments facilitate opportunities for today's students seeking these qualities in education.

### **Convergence of Educational Trends**

Kerka (2003) prepared a summary of the most effective practices of alternative education programs targeted at at-risk youth following an extensive review of current educational research. Table 2 illustrates Kerka's summary of effective practices in correlation with the characteristics of authentic education and career academy instruction.

Table 2

*Coordinating Strategies between At-risk, Authentic, and Career Academy Efforts*

<b>Effective At-Risk Strategies</b>	<b>Authentic Instructional Strategies</b>	<b>Career Academy Strategies</b>
Presence of caring, knowledgeable adults	Direct interaction with work-site mentors, community leaders, peer-to-peer facilitation of educational practices.	Personal student-teacher interaction, work-site mentors, and community and business leaders.
Sense of community	Direct connection between core curriculum instruction and real world applications.	Small school design with extensive and sustained personalized contact between teachers, students, and community members.
Development of assets	Long-term learning created through critical thinking opportunities and applied knowledge.	Partnerships with employers, community leaders, and post-secondary resources to develop student motivation, achievement, and transferability of skills.
Respect for youth	Social support characterized by high expectations, respect, and inclusion of all students	Development of a collective responsibility between students, teachers, mentors, and community leaders.
Comprehensive, multidimensional curriculum	Career-related instruction in authentic, off-site settings.	College-preparatory curriculum infused with career-related instruction.
High expectations for academic achievement	Use of higher-order thinking, depth of knowledge, and connection to the world.	Curriculum framed by the National Standards of Practice and 10 key elements for sustained and successful implementation.
Authentic, engaging learning	Recognize the importance of multiple learning styles including hands-on, engaging environments.  Development of specific skills and practical knowledge to be successful in future college and career success.	College-preparatory curriculum infused with a career theme to allow students to connect academic learning to career application.
Support and long-term follow-up	Instructors are facilitators rather than teachers in the traditional sense offering support for the learning process.	Post-secondary partnerships and training as part of the career development process.

Note: ACTE Issue Brief, 2009; Borthwick, Bennett, Lefoe, & Huber, 2007; Cronin, 1993; deVincentis, 2010; Kerka, 2003; Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Lombardi, 2007; Lombardi, 2008; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993.

All students can benefit from learning in an engaged, motivated, and innovative environment (Daggett & Pedinotti, 2011). Students at-risk of not completing high school are in

need of the most support, the most innovative teaching strategies, and the most engaging environments (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). An at-risk student is broadly defined as any student who for a variety of reasons can be in danger of not completing high school. Factors from socio-economic conditions, race, past academic progress, literacy levels, and family support systems can factor into risk level for a student (Siegrist, et al, 2010). Offering alternative education programs focusing on authentic opportunities and career and college preparation instruction can provide vital support for a group of students in desperate need of engagement, motivation, and direction.

### **Delivering a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education**

A 2010 survey conducted by the American Management Association (AMA) reported business executives need a workforce equipped with more than the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The surveyed executives indicated a strong preference for skills in collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication (AMA, 2010). The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, and the Society of Human Resource Management conducted a survey of over 400 business leaders in 2006. The results of the survey illustrated the top five most important skills needed by high school graduates based upon the business community's opinions. Professionalism, teamwork, oral communication, ethics and social responsibility were ranked one through four. According to the business community, the fifth most important skill needed by high school graduates was reading comprehension (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2011).

According to the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, student success in today's global economy is going to require more than a focus on traditional school topics of the past. In addition to core knowledge and the context of core knowledge instruction, students must develop

critical thinking, creativity (problem solving), communication, and collaboration abilities (2011). Relatively few schools and school districts across the country are currently embracing an integrated model of instruction that steps away from the traditional education role (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). The model proposed by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills builds on a foundation of standards and assessments with a system of instruction that promotes authentic instruction and problem-based learning that is well-supported with technology in and out of the classroom. Teachers are active participants in the professional development communities designed to give the instructors the resources to transform the traditional classroom into a collaborative 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010).

In an effort to address the needs of employers in producing a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, the Georgia Department of Labor launched the GeorgiaBEST program in 2010 through a group of 21 pilot programs in high schools across Georgia. The assessment program allows teachers to evaluate students 10 workplace skills in a similar manner to an employer evaluating an employee in the workplace (Morley, 2012).

In 2012 the American Society for Training and Development published a report entitled “Myths and Truths and Soft Skills.” The report explained the need for soft skills as a matter of the developing workforce (Rao, 2012). The Georgia BEST program is the Department of Labor’s answer to this workforce need. The GeorgiaBEST program is not a curriculum for instruction but rather a rubric encouraging teachers to use a portfolio evaluation model reviewing the 10 key employment standards: (a) Discipline and Character, (b) Attendance and Punctuality, (c) Work Habits and Teamwork, (d) Professional Image and Appearance, (e) Self-Management and Time-Management, (f) Productivity and Academic Performance, (g) Oral and Written Business Skills, (h) Attitude and Respect, (i) Responsibility and Organization, and (j) Job

Shadowing or Career Research (Morley, 2012). The rubric for the GeorgiaBEST portfolio is found in Appendix B and details the evaluation criteria for each of the 10 standards.

Students completing the GeorgiaBEST program are awarded a certificate and are endorsed as students who have a greater level of soft skill training than other high school graduates. Companies working with the Georgia Department of Labor guarantee students with the GeorgiaBEST certification interviews with their organization (Morley, 2012).

The curriculum model of LCCA for the 2012-2013 school year utilized the rubric from the GeorgiaBEST program. Students began their soft skills training by completing a mandatory soft skills class in which initial evaluations on the GeorgiaBEST rubric were completed. As students increased their ratings on the rubric, they earned internship positions that began as authentic experiences and moved to paid experiences. The ultimate goal for the students was to be placed in paid apprenticeship roles where post-secondary training and opportunities can be pursued upon graduation.

Through the use of the career-focused GeorgiaBEST program, LCCA offered a multi-discipline curriculum combining academics with employability skills. Multi-discipline curriculum is student learning that occur across disciplines. Teachers combine together various disciplines to emphasize skills and concepts for the student (Drake & Burns, 2004). The career academy offered career majors and other innovative career-related strategies involving the emphasis on employability skills resulting in the integration of career-related curriculum and academic classes. The integration of the curriculum is a key strategy for improving teaching and learning (Stasz, Kaganoff, & Eden, 1995).

## **Practical Construction of Knowledge**

Career academies have followed the same basic concepts of design since their inception over 30 years ago. The small school environment offering personalized education in a hands-on and authentic format is a consistent description of most career academies (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). A 2010 Gallup survey with over 700,000 responses indicated that 23% of high school students were disengaged in education with another 14% actively disengaged with the goal of disrupting the learning process (Lopez, 2010). An additional poll shows a significant percent of at-risk students are self-described as not engaged in the classroom (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison, 2009). In 2006 the Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE) published a list of the ten elements of successful high schools. The following five characteristics from the AEE report can be seen in the applications and instructional strategies promoted by some of the more popular educational trends of today: (a) Challenging courses, (b) Personal attention for all students, (c) Bringing the real world into the classroom, (d) Family and community involvement, and (e) Skilled teachers (AEE, 2006). These educational characteristics also support the career academy model.

### **Progressivism**

James (2007) states, “Pragmatism is willing to take anything, to follow either logic or the senses and to count the humblest and most personal experiences (p 120).” Pragmatism follows the principle that only the things actually experienced or observed are real. In pragmatism, reality is constantly changing, making the universe dynamic and evolving. John Dewey is arguably the most influential pragmatic philosopher impacting the educational setting (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). Dewey felt schools should emphasize subject matter based upon

social experience. Character is developed through a group decision-making process in light of established consequences (Cohen & Gelbrich, 1999).

In a career academy setting, the educational strategies come from a variety of experiences: classroom, hands-on, personal, and collaborative. All of these experiences can combine to create an effective and progressive learning environment that does not resemble traditional education, but rather a professional workplace (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). Dewey promoted educational advancement through the use of the scientific problem and experiential learning (Marrapodi, 2003). Progressivism is an educational philosophy derived from pragmatism. Progressivism promotes democratic and social living through a hands-on learning process. The reconstruction of society is also a goal progressivism. Pragmatists strive to develop active learning environments, which creates a problem-solving capacity in individuals who can reform society through their educational competence (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008).

Cline (2010) described a pragmatic viewpoint as one that “can be summarized by the phrase “whatever works, is likely true.” Because reality changes, “whatever works” will also change — thus, truth must also be changeable and no one can claim to possess any final or ultimate truth (p. 1). From a purely pragmatic education standpoint, whatever works for the current time is what we need to be teaching students. If students can become engaged in applicable curriculum, the benefits for their future can be more clearly seen. This environment will ideally lead to greater retention, greater understanding, greater emphasis on continued education, and a greater society (Cline, 2010). Research has shown that a dichotomous relationship has existed between academic and real-world preparation of students (Dewey, 1914; Brand, 2004; ACTE Issue Brief, 2009). A career academy seeks to bridge the gap between

academic and career preparation by offering students learning opportunities in an authentic, career-focused format (Kemple & Snipes, 2000).

In today's education world, progressivism from a pedagogical perspective means teaching students the skills needed to be successful in regards to a specific subject. Learning occurs through active engagement, self-directed learning, and promotion of the learner's discovery of knowledge (Labaree, 2005). Progressivism in the classroom has distinct characteristics, but above all, knowledge gained through experience is the pivotal concept. Experience is based upon "the interaction between subject and object, between self and its world and represents only the result of integration of human beings into the environment" (Radu, 2011, p. 86).

Schools and educators adhering to a progressive format to the learning process tend to focus on the whole child, involve community and collaboration between students, instills a sense of social justice in learners, and strives for intrinsic motivation in students leading to deep understandings (Kohn, 2008). In a progressive environment, teachers provide a foundation of knowledge and then real-world applications are utilized to make long-term connections for learners (Marrapodi, 2003).

Interpretations of a progressive classroom that are too broad or too narrow can lead to significant limitations in education. Narrowly defined expectations for a progressive classroom may only focus on one aspect of educational philosophy, such as caring teachers. Narrowly focused ideas of progressive education can be seen in many traditional classrooms, but that does not lead to a truly progressive environment (Kohn, 2008). Progressive classrooms that are defined in the broadest, or perhaps vaguest, sense result in a tendency for highly engaged, but relatively unchallenged students (Labaree, 2005).

## **Constructivism**

Constructivism, a learning theory attributed to Piaget, follows the premise that learners produce knowledge from experiences, transforming students from passive to active participants. This learning process represents a methodology of much greater interest to today's students (Irwin & Ryan, 2013). Constructivism is considered an experiential learning environment where it is critical for learners to have access to many ways of actually gaining experience related to concepts and then to be able to use, increase, or adjust the experienced activity in further experiences, expanding knowledge in the process (Reich, 2007). Constructivism is one of the more popular theories among education researchers today (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008). The theory has several main premises:

- Knowledge is socially constructed.
- Knowledge must be embodied for the learner to acquire it meaning the construction of knowledge is a physical act.
- Knowledge is constructed by the learner creating representations that are tied to familiar concepts and meanings (Jonassen, 1991; von Glasserfield, 1993; Duffy & Cunningham, 2001).

Constructivism has a long history rooted in both philosophy and psychology with insights from Dewey, Hegel, Kant, and Vico (Doolittle & Camp, 1999). In the education field, learners are allowed to construct their own knowledge and understanding of a topic. The role of the teacher is not to teach the material, but rather to help learners uncover their own facts, figures, and ideas of material (Marrapodi, 2003).

The constructivist camp has a range of assumptions following a continuum to create multiple types of constructivism. According to Doolittle and Camp (1999), cognitive

constructivism is at one end of the continuum with learners constructing knowledge internally through creating a relationship between their past experience and new knowledge. Radical constructivism focuses more on the creation of mental structures in order to create meaning. Social constructivism follows the idea that knowledge is created on the basis of social interaction and knowledge is gained through the conversations and interactions with others to solve problems. Social constructivism is informed by the work of Piaget, Bruner, and Bandura (Splitter, 2009).

A recent line of thought is blurring the lines between progressivism and constructivism. A reawakening is occurring between classical pragmatism based upon Dewey’s teachings and social constructivism (Neubert, 2001). Pragmatic social constructivists look to action rather than abstract reason as the source of knowledge (Larochelle, et al., 1998). As a major contributor to the progressive philosophy, Dewey’s emphasis on observation, life experiences, and communication lends itself well to the concepts of social constructivism (Neubert, 2001). Constructivism, both cognitive and social, has some distinct traits in the classroom. Table 3 summarizes selected traits of constructivism and the impacts of those traits on a constructivist classroom.

Table 3

*Summary of Constructivist Principles and the Associated Classroom Impacts*

<b>Constructivist Principle</b>	<b>Impact on Classroom</b>
Learning is an active and creative process.	Classrooms include challenging projects and open-ended problems that encourage discussion, research, and collaboration.
Learning needs to be relevant to the outside world.	Issues, problems, and projects are based in the reality outside of the classroom.
Learners have a vested interest in the gaining of knowledge.	Students should have ownership of what is learned and learning should occur based upon the experiences of the learner.

*Table 3 Continues*

*Table 3 Continued*

*Summary of Constructivist Principles and the Associated Classroom Impacts*

<b>Constructivist Principle</b>	<b>Impact on Classroom</b>
Learners' efforts at productive reflection leads to greater understanding.	Students should use feedback mechanisms like peer-assessments and self-evaluation regularly.
Learners should gain knowledge independently through problem-solving.	Teachers should be in the role of mentor and coach as opposed to lecturer.
Knowledge is built on current understandings.	Teachers can develop critical thinking skills by challenging the current understandings of a student learner.
Learners gain knowledge through social interaction.	Micro-communities should be created in classroom for social learning opportunities.
Social interaction needs to occur in a secure, safe environment.	Teachers should work to create a community spirit to stimulate collaborative learning.

Note: Adapted from Paris, 2011.

A theory as broad as constructivism has its share of proponents. However, it also has a significant number of educational researchers expressing concerns over various constructivist principles. Some criticize constructive theorists for downplaying the role of the educator in the classroom as an expert (Brandon & All, 2010). Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark (2006) launched a compelling argument regarding the lack of impact on the unguided classroom. Mayer's (2004) recommendation that educators "move educational reform efforts from the fuzzy and unproductive world of ideology—which sometimes hides under the various banners of constructivism—to the sharp and productive world of theory-based research on how people learn" (p. 18) was a central premise of their argument.

### **Authentic Learning and Other Applicable Theories**

Dewey stressed throughout his lifetime the idea that a student's own experiences in the real world must be acknowledged as the heart of their education (Splitter, 2009). The theory based in authentic learning stresses the use of reality in the classroom and the movement of students out of the classroom and into the real world (Lombardi, 2007).

The authentic learning theory promotes some practical concepts related to the ideas encouraged by career academies. The faculty of education at the University of Wollongong, Australia offered a summary of the authentic learning theory in a listing of tasks as related to higher education as the following: (a) "an authentic context that reflects the way the knowledge will be used in real life"; (b) "ill-defined activities which have real-world relevance"; (c) "access to expert performances and the modeling of processes"; (d) "provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources"; (e) "provide the opportunity to collaborate"; (f) "provide the opportunity to reflect"; (g) "providing opportunities for articulation, i.e. , the tasks need to incorporate inherent opportunities to articulate"; (h) "providing a collaborative learning environment where more able partners can assist with scaffolding and coaching"; and (i) "provide opportunities for students to be effective performers with acquired knowledge" (Herrington & Kervin, 2007, p. 3).

The authentic learning classroom provides instruction in a real-world context with engaged learners working collaboratively towards the solution of a problem or challenge (Lombardi, 2007). Engage learners are typically students who have minimal discipline problems, low absenteeism, and high levels of task completion (Hudley, Dauod, Polanco, Wright-Castro, & Hershberg, 2003). It demonstrates four main qualities:

1. *Mediation*: Learning occurs when the learner uses tools and instruments to gain knowledge.
2. *Embodiment*: Learning occurs when the body and mind are engaged in the learning process focusing on cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects.
3. *Distribution*: Learning takes place not just in the learner, but in the social context around the learner. Knowledge is spread to others in the learning community.

4. *Situatedness*: Learning occurs in a realistic setting where knowledge is gained through actions in a specific setting (Hill & Smith, 2005).

The authentic classroom loses effectiveness when instructors do not understand the concept of the environment or try to reach an authentic environment in extreme manners. Cronin (1993) summarized four pitfalls of authentic learning with the following statements:

1. Striving for total authenticity in the classroom sometimes results in instructors hesitating to engage in any learning that is not purely authentic in nature.
2. Teachers feel they must be legitimate experts in all subjects they teach in order to create an authentic classroom.
3. Teachers and students expect the authentic classroom to be fun all of the time resulting in the movement away from more rigorous instruction if the content is less than entertaining for students.
4. Teachers feel that all authentic learning must be involved and complex when in reality many authentic tasks are straightforward.

### **Situated Cognition Theory**

In practice, situated cognition theorists propose the most productive learning environments place learners in an authentic setting where knowledge is acquired through social settings but in a naturally occurring habitat. Wilson and Myers (1999) describe the situated cognition theory as the point where thinking and learning make sense only within specific situations. All learning and cognition are situated within particular context. The learners increase the opportunity for application of the learning within similar contexts and through strategic application of the learner's prior knowledge on a given subject (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Figure 2 is a visual representation of the situated cognition theory. Situated cognition theory is

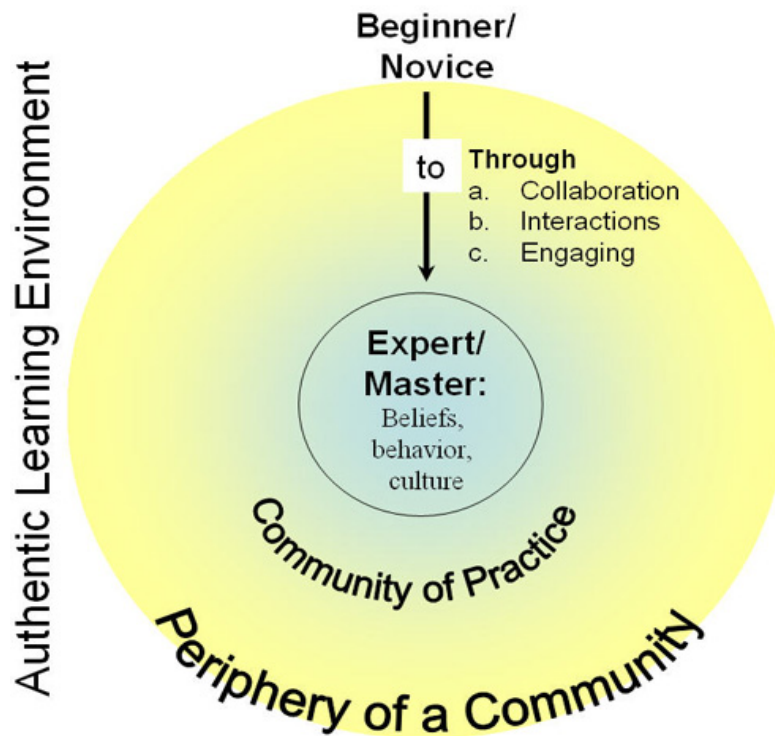


Figure 2: Situated Cognition Theory (Amarasing, 2009)

based upon an anthropological view of natural learning in a natural setting (Schell & Black, 1995). However, a wide view of cognition is prevalent within the research community ranging from a cultural and anthropological viewpoint with stronger societal impacts to a more individualistic approach to cognition within a single person or within a smaller sector of a society with an overriding goal to understand the individual mind (Wilson & Myers, 1999). For the purpose of this study, a more individual approach to the social cognition is adopted. Considering the major issue with social cognition is the construct of learning transfer, the generalization of acquired knowledge from a societal standpoint is not as viable when placed in a small learning community as specific as a career academy (Schell & Black, 1995). Without addressing the learning transfer at a sociological view, the study looked more closely at the findings of Sternberg and Frensch (1994) which propose that teaching should lead to contextual learning that is as close as possible to the authentic setting in which the acquired information will

be applied. In this scenario there is a better chance of the acquired knowledge to be utilized when needed.

Situated cognition theory is seen in several practical teaching strategies, including case-study analysis and apprenticeship programs. Harvard's Business School's case-study method is a student-centered, discussion-based approach to learning where students read and analyze real-life scenarios describing business problems. (Jonassen, Peck, & Wilson, 1999). The use of real-life scenarios being analyzed in a community of learners is an objective of the situated cognition theory (Christensen, 1991). From the classroom strategy of case-study analysis to the real-world use of apprenticeship programs, situated cognition has multiple practical classroom applications. Cognitive apprenticeships are indicative of a social constructivist thought process with students working in teams on projects with the close relationship of a mentor or instructor. Reflected in the situated cognition theory, cognitive apprenticeships allow students to perform tasks that are more difficult than are able to be completed in an individual setting. However, through the social setting of peers and instructors, learners are able to produce real-world results with transferable knowledge to other similar situations (Oliver, 1999).

Situated cognition theory proposes that the traditional learning methods that promote the gain of knowledge from a conceptual standpoint alone is not as effective as a learning process which incorporates the authentic use of that knowledge in real-life contexts (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). The gap between "know what" and "know how" exists in traditional education. Miller and Gildea's (1987) research investigated the process of vocabulary teaching in the K-12 education system where seniors in high school have learned on the average 5,000 vocabulary words per year. Traditional methods of teaching vocabulary have resulted in the definition and review of 100 to 200 vocabulary words per year. The balance of quantity of vocabulary is

gained through every day talking, listening, and reading. In Miller and Gildea's research it was further discovered that the words taught in the traditional method in the education system were typically used incorrectly and were virtually useless in practice. Experienced readers, however, were much more proficient in understanding how vocabulary words were contextually situated. Based upon research in this area, several salient features of cognitive apprenticeship apply to the study:

1. *Collective problem solving.* Groups work together to accumulate knowledge through their members.
2. *Displaying multiple roles.* Working together in a collective setting, individuals must understand the roles of others in a group setting in order to make a successful completion of assigned tasks. As an individual is able to successfully perform multiple roles, increased opportunities for learning are gained and applied.
3. *Confronting ineffective strategies and misconceptions.* Groups can be effective in recognizing and drawing out, confronting and discussing misconceptions and ineffective strategies.
4. *Providing collaborative work skills.* The workplace exists with collaborative conditions, which leads to the importance of knowing how to learn and work collaboratively. In the traditional education system, students are taught individually rather than collaboratively which can lead to failure to develop skills needed for collaborative work. If students are going to learn to work in a group setting, they must be given the situated opportunity to develop those skills (Brown et al., 1989).

A very narrow view of the situated cognition learning process focuses only on the individual's cognitive activity of the learner. Focusing on the overall situated learning process,

rather than the cognitive activity adds a collaborative aspect to situated cognition theory. The expanded focus encompasses the learning process outside of the individual learner's mind and into a community of learners (Henning, 2004). The social interaction that occurs between the experts and novice student learners is critical to the success of the theory of situated cognition (Vincini, 2003). Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize that novices engage in learning by observing expert members of the community and then slowly move from the outer regions of the community to fully participating members.

In order to effectively apply the situated cognition principles, teachers must realize the importance of authentic situations, problem-based learning structures, and collaborative efforts between the subject, the environment, and the students (Hung, 2002). The combination of these aspects in a classroom can prove to be challenging for teachers.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Hand-in-hand with situated cognition theory, the social learning theory explains how behaviors are learned from the interaction between observed behaviors, cognitive aspects, and outside environments (Bandura, 1971). Bandura proposed the social learning theory including several major facets. Learning by observation, imitation, and modeling as indicated in this theory are all sources for educational experiences in a career academy setting (Ormrod, 1999). The social learning theory strives to explain how behaviors are learned “in the context of reciprocal determinism, or the interaction between observed behaviors, cognitive factors, and external environments” (Bandura, 1971). According to Bandura, interactions affect a person's belief leading to goals that are achieved by either encouraging or discouraging a particular behavior (1971). The social learning theory intertwines behavioristic concepts and cognitive psychology to describe the learning process. (Bandura, 1986). Bandura proposes that the learner

has the power to direct their own learning in new situations by controlling the situation in which the learning is to occur regardless of whether the situation is imposed, selected or constructed (Bandura, 1999). Figure 3 is a visual representation of the social learning theory. The process of the observational learning model proposed by the social learning theory follows the following

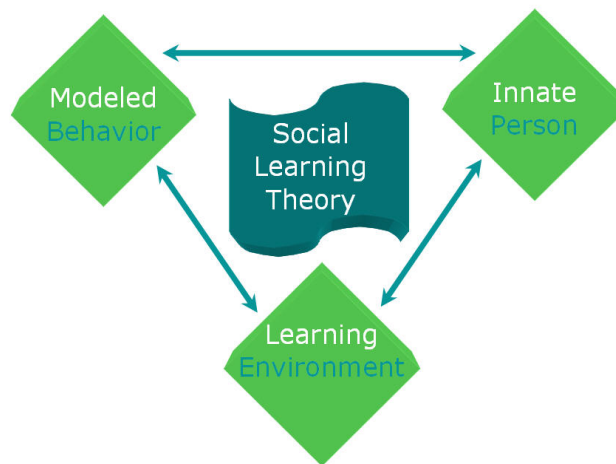


Figure 3: Social Learning Theory (Amarasing, 2009)

order: attention, retention (including cognition and rehearsal) ,motor reproduction, motivation, and observer characteristics (Patsula, 1999). A practical example of the social learning theory is the use of television commercials where actions are observed in specific settings resulting in specific results, causing the viewer of the commercial to desire the product being advertised (Kearsley, 2007). Based upon this practical example, certain guidelines must be followed to ensure appropriate learning in a social context:

- Cognition plays a role in the learning process.
- Teachers should model appropriate behaviors and avoid modeling inappropriate behaviors.
- Modeling provides a method to shape new behaviors (Cunia, 2007).

Ormrod (1999) provided a selection of implications to the education field using the social learning theory. A sampling of those implications includes:

- Students can learn a great deal through observation.
- Modeling behaviors provides an alternative teaching strategy for new behaviors.
- Teachers should employ self-regulation techniques for learners to improve student behavior.

A valid objection to the premises of the social learning theory concerns the lack of focus on a subject's motivation level. The theory's main focuses on learning through observed behavior ignores individual motivation factors along with any genetic tendencies related to innate characteristics that affect learning (Grusec, 1992, Miller, 2002).

### **Conception to Inception: DRIVE**

Based upon the research findings in current literature regarding effective strategies for engaging at-risk students, the DRIVE program was launched at Lanier Charter Career Academy in the 2012-2013 school year. Table 4 summarizes the aspects of the DRIVE program and actual classroom initiatives with the topics as discussed in this review of current literature.

Table 4

*DRIVE: Developing Resources and InValuable Experiences for At-risk Students*

<b>Research-based Strategies</b>	<b>DRIVE Characteristics</b>	<b>Actual Classroom Initiatives</b>
Career Academies	<p>Parallel curriculum model utilizes the design of the career academy with 7 businesses open to the public to provide internship opportunities for students.</p> <p>Small school environment targeting specific focus for workforce development.</p>	Students in DRIVE program can be recommended for paid internship positions in the businesses on campus.
Alternative Education	<p>Small school environment with low student to teacher ratio.</p> <p>Strong support system for students with college and career planning on an individual basis.</p>	All students complete Roadmaps outlining career and college plans. Roadmaps are used to customize the students' educational experience.
Authentic Learning Opportunities	<p>Academic classes reinforce topics of soft-skill development from DRIVE program.</p> <p>All classes participate in authentic instruction opportunities moving away from traditional instructional methods as much as possible.</p>	Cross-curricular, authentic-focused projects with community appeal.
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Education	Technology-based lessons with authenticity and relevancy as descriptors.	All classes focus on problem-based instruction with consistent links to relevance and on-going use of technology in the classroom.
Multi-discipline curriculum	Focus on employability skills as identified by employers across the state as important in addition to traditional academic coursework.	Mandatory DRIVE classes covering each of the 11 topics on the Georgia BEST rubric.
Progressivism	Emphasis on relevant instruction for practical use in the students' future.	Focus of student-operated businesses give students transferable skills to be successful in local industries in the Hall County area (hospitality, medical, manufacturing)
Constructivism	Knowledge is constructed by building on past experience. Course work and internship experiences provide students with foundation to develop skills for their future by building skills and knowledge in a hands-on, authentic manner.	DRIVE classes provide foundation of skills that are then reinforced and developed through internships monitored by mentors, job coaches, and the Work-based learning coordinator on staff.

*Table 4 continues*

*Table 4 continued*

*DRIVE: Developing Resources and InValuable Experiences for At-risk Students*

<b>Research-based Strategies</b>	<b>DRIVE Characteristics</b>	<b>Actual Classroom Initiatives</b>
Authentic Learning Theory	Students are provided with ample opportunities to apply knowledge in real-world situations.	Internships provide real-world experience for students to operate in a business and interact with customers.
Situated Cognition Theory	Academic knowledge is used in a practical manner through authentic learning scenarios and internships.	Internships provide real-world experience for students to operate in a business and interact with customers.
Social Learning Theory	Students work alongside mentors and job coaches who model appropriate behaviors. Lead interns also model behavior.	Internships provide real-world experience for students to operate in a business and interact with customers.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY: BUILDING A CASE FOR AUTHENTIC INSTRUCTION IN AN AUTHENTIC ENVIRONMENT

The Lanier Charter Career Academy (LCCA), a secondary public school that serves Hall County Schools in Gainesville, Georgia has historically offered programs for at-risk youth using an online teaching delivery method where teachers act as computer lab monitors. During the 2012-2013 school year, LCCA incorporated a new instructional structure based on the parallel curriculum model, a model developed for gifted students that parallels academic classes with real-world application (Tomlinson et al., 2002). The new program focused on workforce development using authentic learning situations in teacher-taught classrooms. Authentic learning is defined as learning opportunities that focus on real-world, complex problems and use a variety of instructional tools including case studies, role plays, problem-based activities, and communities of practice (Lombardi, 2007). Teachers coordinate student learning between career-preparation classes, academic classes, internships, and apprenticeships. This study seeks to explore the experiences of students in this new educational model.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore Lanier Charter Career Academy students' educational experiences during the 2012-2013 school year and the meaning they attach to those experiences as the curriculum model was shifted to an authentic learning format. Faculty and administrative viewpoints were used to further explore the students' experiences. Since authentic learning is epitomized in the simple concept that students' school experiences

should resemble as closely as possible future experiences in the world of work, the addition of authentic world relevance to the secondary education experience can impact students' futures (Cronin, 1993).

A single case study design was used that explored the experiences of LCCA students as they transitioned from a traditional to authentic learning curriculum format. Data gathered from a series of in-depth interviews with purposively selected students and faculty was developed into narratives. Additional information was gathered from archival data and observations in the classroom environment. Students in three teacher-taught, career-focused classrooms were screened for potential selection based upon previous attendance, credits earned, and number of years enrolled at LCCA. Observations and archival documents were used for gaining additional understanding into the students' experiences at LCCA. Collected data was analyzed using a constant-comparative method where data is compared to uncover common themes across and between the subunits within the case study. Narrative analysis methods purposed with the role of investigating the stories of participants offered an additional perspective within the subunits allowing for the voice of the participants to clearly be heard. The student experiences of particular interest in this study related to unique insights, learning opportunities, motivations, engagement levels, and future plans of students.

The following questions were used as guidelines to focus the research:

1. What are the student experiences (from the viewpoint of students, faculty, and administration) resulting from creating a rigorous, authentic learning environment focusing on relevance, collaboration and career-preparation in an environment designed for an at-risk student population?

2. How does the change to a curriculum delivery method that focuses on relevance, collaboration, and career-preparation in an authentic format impact (a) student learning, (b) engagement, (c) motivation, and (d) educational experience?

### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative case study focused on participant narratives gathered from interviews, archival data, and observation. Participants included students, faculty, and administrators. Qualitative case study research is an effective method for exploring a phenomenon using a variety of sources that reflect multiple viewpoints (Baxter & Jack, 2008). However, using case study research is a challenging task (Yin, 2009). The case study needs to reveal the complexities of a single study while revealing the activities within the study's circumstances (Stake, 1995). Exploring the transition of alternative education programs at Lanier Charter Career Academy from a self-paced, computer-based format to authentic, teacher-facilitated instruction provided an excellent arena for case study analysis due to the complex nature of the bounded case (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

### **Case Study**

Case study methodology originated around 1900 in the field of anthropology. With the influx of positivism in social science research, qualitative researchers engaged in case study research turned to a grounded theory approach when analyzing cases in the late 1900s (Johansson, 2003). Today, however, many areas and disciplines use case study including sociology, law, and education resulting in a variety of types of case study research options including the quantitative studies found in medical research and instructional studies used in legal education programs (Stake, 1995; Zainal, 2007).

An explanatory case study is used when researchers seek to explain the presumed relationships between interventions and results in a complex setting that can be limited with experiments or surveys (Yin, 2003). The opportunity to study students and teachers at Lanier Charter Career Academy at a point of transition from computer-based instruction to teacher-taught classes focusing on authentic learning opportunities presented an opportunity for a single-case study with embedded units or subjects contributing to their experiences in the transition (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The transition of instructional strategy at Lanier Charter Career Academy was the subject of the case study. The transition was described by the use of data gathered from interviews, archival data and observations of individual participants or subjects. Qualitative case study research is based upon a constructivist viewpoint with most researchers believing that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Case study research allows participants to closely collaborate with researchers as views, experiences, and actions are shared (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Lather, 1992; Yin, 2009). It is through the shared stories of participants along with additional data gathered from observations, documents, and archival data, that a researched phenomenon can be better understood (Yin, 2009). The students, faculty, and staff of Lanier Charter Career Academy provided various viewpoints on the phenomenon. Additionally archival data (student work, attendance records, transcripts) offered supporting sources of data to provide a more complete picture of the case.

The case study used the combination of research methodology of narrative research and the analysis method of constant comparison under the umbrella of case study research. Research methodology can be a combination of processes and thought where the researcher moves from the practices of a paradigm to the empirical results of gathered information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Researchers can opt to combine various aspects of methods at any point in the research

process ranging from data collection to analysis to the representation of the findings (Lai, Suto, & Ungar, 2012). Lai et al. (2012) coined the phrase *combined methodology approach* to reflect the blending of theoretical and philosophical aspects of various methodologies when using more than one isolated perspective. In order to fully investigate the potential intricacies presented in Lanier Charter Career Academy case, narrative inquiry was used to gain greater insight from individual participants in the research study.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry has a long history that is rather challenging to trace. Although narratives have a history as early as Aristotle's *Poetics* in 335 BC, the earliest forms of narrative inquiry in life histories can be traced to the early parts of the 20th century (Lai, et al., 2012). Like most qualitative case study research, narrative inquiry takes place from a constructivist perspective where participants' shared experiences are co-constructed to be presented to others in storied form (Lai, et al 2012). Richards (2003) explains the importance of narrative inquiry as "ordinary conversation [that] provides a unique insight into the ways in which people understand and represent their social world" (p. 26).

Narrative inquiry was appropriate to the study for multiple reasons. First, through stories, the complexities of student experiences can be investigated as the "ways human experience the world depicted through their stories" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 1). Secondly, student engagement and motivation levels are very complicated processes best approached from multiple perspectives. Narratives allow researchers to present their findings "with all its complexities and richness" of the personal stories of the participants (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 2). Also, the students' personal experiences and the faculty's viewpoints of the students' experiences encountered during the LCCA transition could effectively be shared via stories. "Experience

happens narratively, and therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 19). And lastly the context of the Academy’s transition was critical to understanding the impact of the new curriculum model of LCCA. Context is well expressed by stories (Varaki, 2007).

In effective case study research, data collection is dependent upon multiple sources (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003, 2009). In addition to a series of student and faculty interviews, data sources for this case study included archival records of student attendance and transcripts, direct observations of the students in the classrooms by both the researcher and the teachers, and participant observation (Yin, 2009). Each student and faculty selected to participate in the case study was treated as a subunit. In a single case design with embedded subunits, analysis of the collected data can be conducted within subunits, between subunits and across the subunits to provide a richer source of information and findings (Yin, 2003). The goal of the research was to construct narratives of each participant or subunit experience within the new curriculum model. By using narrative analysis methods, the voices of the participants could be heard as they shared their experiences while participating in the new curriculum model of LCCA. Richmond (2002) used a narrative research process to investigate learning outcomes in adult learners based upon their personal stories. Richmond incorporated the use of storymaps that allowed the individual stories to be paralleled based upon past, present, and future experiences. Using the concept of storymaps with the study allowed the researcher to see common themes while taking into account the personal history, the current ideas and actions, and the future plans of the various participants when telling their individual stories.

The narratives were constructed from interview data. The narratives, in addition to observations and archival data, were used to produce a complete picture of the experiences of

the participants in dealing the new curriculum model of LCCA. A typical narrative framework creates a skeleton plot via four categories: orientation of the characters and the setting, abstract of the incidents of the story, complicating actions that share events, conflicts, or themes, and resolution of the outcome of the story (Mishler, 1986) Butler-Kisber (2010) expands the above categories with a narrative structure that includes an abstract or summary of the story, orientation of the story, complicating actions, evaluation of the significance or attitude of the narrator, resolution, and a coda or return to the present. By transforming the students' experiences into narratives detailing past, present, and future outcomes as related to the students' educational processes and based upon an established storymap, the case study was enhanced.

Yin (2009) identified five components of a case study design as critical, including research questions, propositions, unit(s) of analysis, logical linking of data to its propositions, and criteria for interpreting findings. Research questions act to guide the direction of the study while the study's propositions orient the overall goal of the research effort. The unit of analysis is the subject of the case study and determines the most effective manner of gathering data and analyzing the information for interpretation (Yin, 2009). Table 5 summarizes these aspects of the Lanier Charter Career Academy study as well as the methods to establish hallmarks of quality research.

Table 5

*Summary of LCCA Study*

Case study components	LCCA study components	Design test
Research questions	<p>What are the student experiences (from the viewpoint of students, faculty, and administration) resulting from creating a rigorous, authentic learning environment focusing on relevance, collaboration and career-preparation in an environment designed for an at-risk student population?</p> <p>How does the change to a curriculum delivery method that focuses on relevance, collaboration, and career-preparation in an authentic format impact (a) student learning, (b) engagement, (c) motivation, and (d) educational experience?</p>	
Study propositions	<p>Since this is an exploratory case study, limiting the study's propositions hindered the exploration of the participants' viewpoints. However, the study focused on the direction of authentic learning opportunities and linking the relevance of educational study to the real world.</p>	
Units of analysis	<p>The change in the curriculum delivery method at LCCA was the unit of analysis with subunits represented by individual students and staff's experiences during this transition.</p>	
Process of linking data to propositions	<p>Data analysis included constant comparison methods or pattern matching to investigate for emerging themes that can be explored further through a series of interviews.</p> <p>Narrative analysis creates storymaps of students' experiences at LCCA to understand motivations, experiences, viewpoints, and understandings.</p>	<p>Reliability is established through transparency in the research design for future replication studies.</p> <p>Construct validity is established through multiple sources of data (interview, observations, archival documentation), transcription checks with participants, and peer checking.</p>
Criteria for interpreting findings	<p>The theoretical framework for the study was used as the criteria in interpreting the findings from the research data.</p> <p>Rival explanations for outcomes were considered for emerging patterns during analysis phase and were based on educational philosophies.</p>	<p>External validity established through use of theoretical framework in a single case design.</p> <p>Internal validity created through pattern matching and rival explanations.</p>

Note: Adapted from Yin (2009).

Case study research can be limited by arguments historically used against this research format. Case studies have been accused of a lack of rigor often due to sloppy investigative practices (Yin, 2009). Due to the small number of subjects, case studies provide little grounds for generalization. The dependency on a single case can make for poor arguments for a generalized conclusion to other scenarios (Tellis, 1997, Yin, 2009). Case studies are also criticized for lengthy write-ups due to the volume of information that is gathered (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009; Zainal, 2007).

Narrative inquiry brings some limitations into the research process as well. Quality narrative research requires the researcher to be sensitive to both obvious and subtle insights into what is being studied (Polkinghorne, 2010). Narrative research can be considered subjective, bordering on fiction mixed with fact, leaving the research open to criticism by some (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

### **Research Site**

The Lanier Charter Career Academy (LCCA) is located in Gainesville, Georgia operating in the Hall County Schools System. The school is a secondary level organization serving students from across Hall County. Currently, the school houses six actual businesses that are open to the public and operated by students:

1. The Corner Café: a bakery and coffee shop with students preparing specialty coffees and pastries along with quick lunch items.
2. Get Gifted: a specialty retail store offering unique product lines for gifts.
3. The Bistro at the Oaks: a casual fine dining restaurant serving a four-course meal for lunch.

4. Meetings & Events: a full-service conference center for groups up to 200 people along with an event-planning service for community events.
5. Design360: a wholesale operation designing and producing tee shirts, banners, sublimation products, and embroidered items.
6. Reflections Salon and Day Spa: a full-service salon and day spa with both cosmetology and esthetician services.

The researcher, as a participant observer in research process, also served as the Workforce Development Coordinator at the Lanier Charter Career Academy. The researcher worked full-time at the school coordinating instructional training, business relationships, and authentic learning opportunities for career-technical and academic classes. Access to co-teachers and students was easily granted due to the nature of the working relationships. The data was gathered as part of a program evaluation for Hall County Schools and was approved by the school system. The data was then de-identified and turned over to the University of Georgia for analysis.

Project Forward and Lanier Choice are two programs targeting at-risk students on the LCCA campus. Both programs have historically used online classes for credit recovery versus teacher-taught classes. At the current time students can choose to attend LCCA from area high schools based upon their age and their number of units of credits earned. Students can also elect to attend LCCA as their high school of choice.

With the introduction of a new curriculum model at Lanier Charter Career Academy based on the parallel curriculum model and focused on soft-skill development, the overriding goals of the 2012-2013 program were to produce students that exhibit 21<sup>st</sup> century skills by the time they complete the high school curriculum and graduate. The branded name of the program is DRIVE:

Developing resources and invaluable experiences. All students in the program are encouraged to continue with post-secondary options through dual enrollment opportunities, planned advisements, and constant post-secondary information sharing.

### **Participants**

Students enrolled in either the Lanier Choice Program or the Project Forward GED Preparation Program represented the population from which potential participants were screened. These students participated in the mandatory soft skills training class called DRIVE. DRIVE is a semester-long class concentrating on 11 skills identified by employers as needed traits for success in a career. The topics are professionalism, creative thinking, time management, leadership, teamwork, personal responsibility, communication, character, respect, personal marketing, and civic responsibilities. Students participating in DRIVE were screened for participation based upon several general characteristics regarding age, credits earned, and time enrolled at Lanier Charter Career Academy.

Lanier Choice students were to be at least 16 years of age, attended Lanier Charter Career Academy (LCCA) in 2011-2012 school year and was to be currently enrolled at LCCA as full-time students with plans to graduate in the next 18 months. Project Forward students were to be at least 17 years of age, attended LCCA in the 2011-2012 school year and were currently enrolled at LCCA in the GED preparation program. Students in the Project Forward program should have had less than 10 credits completed.

Typically, Lanier Choice students who met the stated requirements were within 6 months to a year of being current in their academic progress with students their same age but in a more traditional school setting. By considering these students, the case data had information from students who had struggled for whatever reason in traditional school settings, but still had the

option of completing a degree in a timely fashion. Project Forward students meeting the stated requirements were significantly behind other students their age making the GED preparation course their only option for completion of a high school equivalency prior to aging out of the Hall County Schools system. The Project Forward students demonstrated a more extreme student that has never been successful in a traditional school setting. Since the case study is investigating student experiences with the change in curriculum delivery method, it was important for selected students to be enrolled in programs at LCCA for more than just the current school year.

LCCA faculty and administration staff have taught or been involved in administrative tasks at LCCA for a minimum of three years. Faculty and administration could better understand the curriculum change at LCCA in the 2012-2013 school year with a longer term exposure to the previous curriculum model. Additionally, research indicates that first-year teachers are not as effective as third-year teachers in a classroom increasing the importance for the purposes of this study of involving experienced teachers as participants (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012).

Students enrolled in the DRIVE Project Forward class and the DRIVE Lanier Choice classes (two classes) were screened for potential participation. Students meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria stated earlier received a letter of introduction to determine interest level in participating in an evaluation of the program. Based upon class rosters, up to 75 students could have qualified to receive the letter of introduction.

Initially it was planned for fifteen participants to be randomly selected from the pool of interested students. If more than 15 qualified students had expressed an interest in participating in the program evaluation, all potential participants' names were to be placed in a container with 15 names randomly selected from the pool. Since less than 15 students were interested in

participating, then all 14 interested students were selected as participants in the process. By allowing students to volunteer for participation in the process and then randomly selecting initial participants, the potential bias of the participant researcher was limited. Savenye and Robinson (2004) indicated that for a study to be valid, the readers must believe the participants are representative of the cultural context being studied. The initial participants were selected in order to provide a sufficient pool of students to allow for the participation in the more intensive observations and follow-up interviews. The goal was to have five “final” participants for the research study that are selected in a purposeful manner based upon the guidelines listed below, however, seven “final” participants were selected. To begin the process of the purposeful selection, follow-up personal conversations were scheduled to be held with the fourteen students. Prior to the initial interview, one of the 14 students was kicked out of school and a second student was determined to not to have attended LCCA in the 2011-2012 school year. The remaining 12 students participated in the initial interview after consenting to the program evaluation as well as the University of Georgia study process. The initial student interview protocol was used during the follow-up personal conversations with each of the 12 selected student.

Once initial interviews were concluded with all 12 selected student participants, observations in the DRIVE classrooms were conducted. Based upon interview results and observations, seven participants were selected from the pool of participants for in-depth and continued focused study throughout the 2012-2013 school year. The seven participants were selected based on the following guidelines:

- At least one student was a representative of the Project Forward program. Project Forward is the branded name of the GED preparation program.

- At least one student was a representative of the Lanier Choice program. Lanier Choice is the branded name of the program for students enrolled as a high school student with plans to graduate with a high school diploma.
- Two students represented a current non-success of the authentic learning model. Students were identified as non-success of the authentic learning model through the observation protocol identifying traits of engaged students, attendance records, and academic progress records.
- Two students represented a current success of the authentic learning model. Students were identified as successes of the authentic learning model through the observation protocol identifying traits of engaged students, attendance records, and academic progress records.
- One student represented a neutral outlook toward the authentic learning model. The neutral outlook was determined based upon the interview data and observation protocol and represented neither a positive or negative experience to date with the change in curriculum.
- All selected students committed to an additional two interviews over the course of the 2012-2013 school year.
- All selected students were willing to be observed in their school setting.
- All selected students shared substantive information in the initial interview with rich data being provided when the researcher asks questions.

On-going observations in the classroom specifically observed the selected students.

Teachers were asked to provide observational data as well. The selected students were observed to determine if they exhibited engaged characteristics (student/teacher interaction,

questions/answers, eye contact, collaboration with other students) as well as exhibited unengaged characteristics (truancy, sleeping in class, off-task behaviors, disruptive behaviors). Student archival data was used to complete a picture of the experience of the student while at the same time providing triangulation of data sources to limit potential researcher bias (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009).

In addition to the student participants, one faculty member responsible for the Soft Skills Curriculum at the school along with an administrator from the school was asked to voluntarily participate in the study. Both the faculty member and the administrator met the qualifications as described earlier. Appendix C is a visual representation of the research design.

### **Data Collection**

Case study data collection begins at the planning stage of the research project where the unit of analysis or the case boundaries are decided (Yin, 2009). With the selection of the single case, Lanier Charter Career Academy's alternative learning program, the boundary to the case was established. Within the case, subunits represented different participants who offered various viewpoints on the schools' transition. The subunits in this study were seven students, an administrator, and a faculty member. In order to ensure the fullest exploration of this case study "remember this rule: no matter what you are studying, always collect data on the lowest level unit of analysis possible" (Bernard, 1995, p. 37). The subunits of the case provided the information to build a complete picture of the nuances from the curriculum changes during the 2012-2013 school year.

Case data is gathered from a variety of sources including interviews, observations, archival documents, impressions, and contextual information (Patton, 2002). De-identified student records from the Hall County Schools Infinite Campus program were used to review past

attendance records for students. De-identified student transcripts were used to determine current status of credits earned and anticipated units needed for graduation. A series of interviews were conducted in the spring semester of the 2012-2013 school year, shortly after midterm of the spring semester, and within the final month of the school year. Observations of classrooms and authentic work opportunities provided additional perspectives. Students enrolled in Lanier Charter Career Academy completed a personalized graduation and career plan called a Road Map. Students' Road Maps in the form of online portfolios were used to provide insight into the case by providing greater detail regarding a student's future plans for graduation, post-secondary, and career. Students were also expected to compile a personalized portfolio to meet a GeorgiaBEST rubric as a critical piece of the curriculum model. As a participant in the research process, I had access to the interactions, meetings, and collaborations of students, faculty, and other staff members who provided additional data.

The following steps were completed for the research process:

1. Screening of students in the mandatory soft-skills DRIVE classes to determine eligibility and interest in participating in a program evaluation of the DRIVE program for Hall County Schools.

*Students enrolled in the DRIVE Project Forward class and the DRIVE Lanier Choice classes (two classes) were screened for potential participation. Students meeting inclusion criteria received a letter of introduction to determine interest level. Based on class rosters, up to 75 students could have qualified to receive the letter of introduction.*

2. Program evaluation introduction letter (October, 2012) to all qualified students. Fourteen students expressed interest in participating in the process, but one student was removed from

school prior to the initial round of interviews and one student did not meet the qualifications for the study.

3. Twelve participants consented to participation in the program evaluation for the purpose of gathering the data for the study. Initial interview with 12 selected participants (Spring semester 2013). Twelve initial students were interviewed in order to create a large enough pool for the purposeful selection for the next series of intensive interviews.

4. Initial interviews with selected administrator and faculty member (Spring semester, 2013)

5. Observations of participants/faculty in classroom (Spring semester, 2013)

*Once initial interviews are concluded with all selected participants, observations in the DRIVE classrooms were conducted. Based upon interview results and observations, seven participants were selected from the pool of participants for in-depth and continued focused study throughout the 2012-2013 school year. Seven participants were selected in order to have representation of two participants that are being successful with the program, two participants that are not being successful with the program, and a neutral participant with little to no change in their academic patterns from the previous school year and curriculum model.*

6. Follow-up focused individual interviews with seven selected participants (March, 2013)

7. Observations of participants/faculty in classroom/authentic work sites (March-April, 2013)

8. Final interview with seven selected participants (May 2013)

9. All participants were consented to turn de-identified data over to University of Georgia researcher for continued evaluation (Spring semester, 2013).

Throughout the study, on-going observations of the school environment and participant interactions were conducted. Additional data collection efforts examined archival data including class work, personal career and college plans, attendance records, and discipline records. Data

gathered from the archival documents was used to complete a picture of the students and their overall academic experience. Data collection was conducted based upon the protocols in Appendix D. All introduction letters and consent forms are also available in Appendix E.

### **Data Analysis**

Yin (2003) described multiple options for data analysis in case study research, such as pattern matching, linking data to propositions, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and synthesis. Pattern matching data analysis is similar to the analysis process known as constant-comparison. The constant comparison method is a vital aspect of data analysis used in developing grounded theory. The analysis process of pattern matching is relevant to explanatory case studies and is parallel in format to grounded-theory generation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Yin, 2009).

The process of pattern matching or constant comparison is historically closely tied to grounded theory methodology. According to Charmez (2006), grounded theorists study initial data and use coding methods to separate, sort, and synthesize data. Early data is analyzed through the constant comparison method to develop initial themes. Themes are common ideas or concepts that are reflected by multiple participants, and are determined to warrant greater exploration while generating an emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparative method was identified as the data analysis method to be used in developing grounded theory. However, as a process of analysis, the constant comparative method is an effective manner to analyze data in multiple methodologies including case study (Charmez, 2006). The process involves:

- Identifying a phenomenon, object, event or setting of interest

- Identifying a few local concepts, principles, structural or process features of the experience or phenomenon of interest
- Making decisions regarding initial collection of data based on one's initial understanding of the phenomenon. Further data collection is expected, but is only determined during data analysis and the emergence of themes leading to theory. As themes emerge, additional data collection needs can then be determined through theoretical sampling methods.
- Engaging in theoretical sampling where the key question is what group or subgroups does and which direction the researcher turns to next to collect data? Subsequent sampling decisions should be purposeful and relevant based upon the emerging themes developed during the data analysis process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Coding is an essential activity in the constant comparison approach. Coding is the process where initial data is reviewed and a labeled based upon common thoughts, ideas, or statements (Charmez, 2006). Coding provides the framework for future analysis and the emergence of categories and conceptual concepts that can lead to future insights and additional studies (Charmez, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The constant comparison approach is very effective when gathering data where participants have a shared context (Charmez, 2006). The process of constantly comparing sets of data to sift through information to arrive at general themes or even theory reveals the strength of this method (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004). Using a constant comparison method allows for a clear overview of the collected data with the intent of looking at major themes, common denominators between the at-risk students and their educational experiences, and emerging concepts that are avenues for future research studies (Charmez, 2006).

As transcripts were recorded, data was analyzed with line-by-line coding. Similar coded lines were gathered together into groupings. Groups of similar code were reviewed for an overall theme and memos based upon that theme were generated. Memos served several purposes including allowing for a thoughtful and reflective review of the data, creating a format to develop categories of data, and forming the groundwork for all future writing (Charmez, 2006). The use of memos led to conceptual categories supported by the data from the transcribed interviews.

In order to deeply investigate the internal experiences of each participant, narrative analysis methods were also used. Interpretative research, especially narrative inquiry, can be effective in enhancing the body of educational research (Giovannoli, n.d.). By using narrative analysis methods, the voices of the participants can be heard as they share their experiences while participating in the new curriculum model of LCCA. Richmond (2002) used a narrative research process to investigate learning outcomes in adult learners based upon their personal stories. Richmond incorporated the use of storymaps to allow individual's stories to be paralleled based upon past, present, and future experiences. Storymaps are a visual illustration of a narrative placing information into categories related to the past, present, and future of a participant (Richmond, 2002). Using the concept of storymaps allowed me to see common themes while taking into account personal history, current ideas and actions, and future plans of the various participants. I specifically looked for events from the students' past impacting their educational experiences, current experiences based upon their experience in an authentic learning environment, and future plans for college and career.

In order to investigate the collected data within subunits, between subunits and across the subunits participant interviews were compiled into narratives in addition to the constant

comparative method (Yin, 2003). Narratives, or the stories of the participants, provided a rich description of the participants' experiences for stronger detail within the subunits. By comparing narratives through constant comparison analysis methods, between subunit comparisons could be made. With a review of the overall data collected, themes can be seen across all of the subunits as well. Narrative thinking allowed for the participants' thoughts on past, current, and future events to not only inform the research from a descriptive viewpoint, but also inform the practices which the students engaged in during the 2012-2013 school year (Polkinghorne, 2010).

A typical narrative framework creates a skeleton plot via four categories: orientation of the characters and the setting, abstract of the incidents of the story, complicating actions that share events, conflicts, or themes, and resolution of the outcome of the story (Mishler, 1986). Butler-Kisber (2010) expanded the above categories with a narrative structure that includes an abstract or summary of the story, orientation of the story, complicating actions, evaluation of the significance or attitude of the narrator, resolution, and a coda or return to the present. By transforming students' experiences into narratives detailing past, present, and future outcomes as related to the students' educational processes, the case study will be enhanced with a clear view of individual students' experiences in this case study.

All data analysis was conducted using the Dedoose online qualitative software. Data was stored on a personal laptop and backup data is stored in a Dropbox cloud as well as the Dedoose cloud. The laptop and the online sites were password protected preventing access from those outside the research process. Participants' names were kept confidential in the final analysis and all participants were identified by pseudonyms. The name of the school and the school system were kept intact since the approval for the program evaluation was received by the county administration.

## **Reporting Findings**

Case study should take readers into the case with detailed and clear description and be complete in design creating a full and detailed picture of the unit being studied. Cases should be a total description of the phenomenon with sufficient detail (Patton, 2002). To achieve trustworthiness of the case study, clearly written questions are researched. The case study is designed in a manner that is appropriate to the questions. Purposeful sampling is used, data is collected in a systematic manner, and data analysis is completed correctly (Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DeCenso, & Guyatt, 2005).

In an effort to insure validity, or address the issue of why this research should be believed, validity checks were a significant step during the research process with the researcher working closely with participants seeking the meaning of the stories told in the interviews through collaboration and investigations of the researcher's personal insights (Creswell, 2004; Giovannolia, n.d.; Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Persuasive arguments resulting from the collection of the stories from the participants can be made through the use of direct quotes from data to offer supporting evidence (Perelman & Kluback, 1984). In an effort to increase validity, generated texts from the data were presented to the participants to insure researcher bias and involvement were minimized and the participants voice was heard clearly in the narratives (Polkinghorne, 2010). From the narrative outcomes, an interpretation section was not provided since the themes common to all of the data was presented in a separate chapter. The overriding goal of the research narratives was to understand the participant's stories and the significance of the meaning attached to those stories (Polkinghorne, 2010).

Aligning methodology, theoretical frameworks, research methods, and output in a logical manner ensures quality output. (Butler-Kisber, 2010). The more transparent the research

process, the greater the consideration of validity on behalf of the reader (Mishler, 1990). In reference to the overall case study design, transparency and a clearly articulated research plan increases the reliability of the study and opens the opportunities for future research to replicate the study (Yin, 2009). From the viewpoint of the subunit data, the quality of the narratives can be weighed by considering the persuasiveness of the research based upon the depth of the information, the plausibility, and the style (Giovannolia, n.d.).

Triangulation is a key aspect of quality qualitative research. Four types of triangulation might be employed in research study to increase quality results:

1. Triangulation of data by using data from various sources;
2. Triangulation of researchers through several evaluators or auditors;
3. Triangulation through theoretical perspectives by using several perspectives to interpret a single set of data;
4. Triangulation via the use of several methods to study a single problem (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009).

Considering the above guidelines, multiple opportunities for triangulation exist in the study. The design of the study employed multiple sources of data creating construct validity (Yin, 2009). Through the use of validity checks along with peer reviews of the conclusions from analysis, the research was subjected to an additional level of authenticity. Several theoretical perspectives influenced the study: Bandura's social learning theory, the authentic learning theory, and the situated cognition theory (Bandura, 1971; Lombardi, 2007; Wilson & Myers, 1999). Using the principles and ideas of these theories to review data findings strengthened the findings and established external validity (Yin, 2009). Finally, through the analysis techniques

of the constant comparison method and narrative inquiry, the overall and internal interactions of the data were explored with a firm internal validity design (Yin, 2009).

### **Ethical Considerations**

When dealing with underage participants, several ethical considerations had to be taken into account. Maintaining confidentiality of the participants can be a challenge in a case study research process (Houghton, Casey, Shae, & Murphy, 2010). Case studies can opt to maintain confidentiality regarding the location of the study or reveal the location of the site (Yin, 2009). In the case study for Lanier Charter Career Academy, the site was revealed; however, the participant's identification remained confidential. Even though the student body is large enough to prevent the identification of students, care was taken when sharing results from interviews with teachers and administration due to the small number of potential candidates. In order to avoid breaches in confidentiality, information from interviews of faculty and staff members was used to inform the overall aspects of the case study. Rather than create individual narratives of the faculty and administrator participants, data from the staff interviews was used to create the narrative of "Pat." Pat represented the combination of all of the transcript data from the staff (Houghton, et al., 2010; Shaw, 2008).

My dual role as a researcher and employee of Hall County Schools posed a potential conflict of interest in this study (Houghton, et al., 2010). To minimize this conflict, the role of the researcher was clarified with participants in advance of their participation as part of the informed consent. The participants had a clear understanding of the role of the researcher in the organization of the school. The motivation of the researcher in the desire for success of the new curriculum model was also disclosed.

As a participant observer in this research process, I attempted to balance between pure observation (researcher is removed from the actions and behaviors of the participants) and pure participation (researcher adopts the full identity of the participant) at a level as described by DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) as moderate participation. Moderate participation is when the researcher is present in the scene of the observation, identifiable as the researcher, but only occasionally interacts with the participants during the observation process (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Due to the nature of my professional position at LCCA, I had the opportunity to interact with the student, faculty, and administration participants on a deeper level defined by as “being with.” Since transparency is critical to participant research in a qualitative study, decisions concerning how to manage observations in advance was important to the validity of the research (Keiding, 2011). Observation protocols detailing specific traits that were to be identified during the observation periods were used to maintain objectivity in the observation process.

Participants in the research study were given informed consent prior to their participation in the process. Consent was a process with participants being given the option to review and negotiate ethical concerns throughout the research process specifically when the data collection results were de-identified and turned over to the University of Georgia for analysis. Rather than a one-time informed consent, an informed consent process was employed throughout the course of the study (Engisn, 2003; Munhall, 2007; Raudonis, 1992).

A particular ethical consideration to narrative research involved the collection of people’s stories and their lives. As a researcher gathering the life stories of participants, I became a character in those life stories. Once the researcher becomes involved in the “story” the risk of altering the story is great (Shaw, 2008). In the research process at LCCA, a valid risk was present when I as the researcher and school employee invested time in the participants, which

may have directly influence the desired of the student to succeed academically resulting in skewed findings.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

In a career academy setting, educational opportunities come from a variety of experiences: classroom, hands-on, personal, etc. As I worked at the Lanier Charter Career Academy, I saw the students attend traditional classes as well as engage in authentic learning experiences in a business setting, I saw first hand different learning theories in practice everyday. I have always leaned towards a constructivist framework for learning with students building knowledge on previous understandings through hands-on experiences. LCCA offers a unique environment in which the students actually operate five businesses that are open to the public: The Corner Café (a bakery and coffee shop), Get Gifted (a unique gift retail store), Meetings & Events (a full-service conference center), The Bistro at the Oaks (a fine-dining restaurant), and Design360 (a personal promotions lab producing tee-shirts, banners, embroidery, sublimation products). During any given week the school's businesses, located along "Main Street" or the front hallway, hosts 100 to 300-plus guests from the community and businesses in the area. In November of the 2012-2013 school year, a sixth business opened called the Reflections Salon & Day Spa which used authentic learning to teach cosmetology and esthetician skills to high school students.

As the Work-based Learning Coordinator for the past three years, I worked very closely with the interns who operate the businesses in addition to the students from the traditional classrooms who rotate through the businesses. I saw first hand the different learning strategies in progress. During the 2012-2013 school year, my role transitioned to the Workforce Development Coordinator. In this role I was responsible for bringing the business connections

into the classroom, assisting teachers to provide authentic learning opportunities in a collaborative and technology-rich environment, and assisting students in gaining skills for the workplace.

Coming from industry prior to teaching, I had high expectations for the classroom, only to be disappointed in students' desire, initiative, and interest level in the classroom. I soon understood; students generally are in their comfort zone being given worksheet assignments to complete requiring little more than a basic level of ability to read a book and complete an answer. I was very disillusioned by teachers who chose to teach classes in traditional methods like lecture and textbook activities.

As a student myself, I was academically strong, graduating 5<sup>th</sup> in my high school class, and Summa Cum Laude from my undergraduate program. I personally always enjoyed projects rather than lectures. My preferred learning style is still hands-on. I actually resent lecture-based instruction and feel that instructors are short-changing students by simply choosing to stand and deliver information to a classroom. My favorite class in high school (and really the class I have used the most over my life from a practical sense) was Yearbook. I understood the practicality of the skills I was learning in Yearbook for my future. I think this experience in high school has definitely influenced my opinion of creating a relevant classroom experience for students in order to engage them in the learning opportunity that is present.

As a qualitative researcher, I bring unique strengths and weaknesses to this study. I feel my background in industry and my desire for hands-on instruction can be a potential source for bias. I honestly would have a hard time accepting traditional instruction as a preferred method of learning based upon my own personal opinions and experiences. However, my work environment provided direct access to a unique setting where limited traditional instruction

methods were preferred. I feel my access to this environment and my close ties to the setting allowed for an in-depth understanding of the nuances of the situation. This factor strengthened the study.

As an insider into the research setting, I recognized the need to analyze my access to the students, teachers, and administration and constantly remind myself of the students and staff's view of me within the organization. As part of the research process I attempted to keep a journal for the purpose of reflecting often on my role in the organization and how my role may have influenced data collection and analysis procedures. This journal became more of a scratchpad for my thoughts as data was generated and observations were conducted.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXPERIENCES FROM WITHIN DRIVE

In this chapter, students from the DRIVE program at Lanier Charter Career Academy share their stories: why they came to the Academy, their outlook on education and instructional strategies, their hopes and plans for the future, and some of the challenges experienced in their lives. The narratives in Chapter 4 provide the answers to the initial research question for this case study:

1. What are the student experiences (from the viewpoint of students, faculty, and administration) resulting from creating a rigorous, authentic learning environment focusing on relevance, collaboration and career-preparation in an environment designed for an at-risk student population?

Each narrative is presented with an introduction sharing my observations of the student in the classroom setting as well as a summary of grades, credits earned, attendance, and discipline issues as applicable. Teachers also provided statements about their observations of the students in the classrooms. These statements are also provided in the introduction to each narrative.

Table 6 provides an overview of the seven participants who shared their educational experiences and backgrounds with me during the 2012-2013 school year through a series of three interviews.

Table 6

*Participants in LCCA Study: In-depth and Continued Focus*

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Program of study	Degree Option	2013 Status
Megan	16	Female	Caucasian	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Graduated
Jasmine	18	Female	Hispanic	Project Forward	GED	Dropout
Michael	20	Male	Caucasian	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Enrolled
Lamar	18	Male	African American	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Enrolled
Josephine	16	Female	Caucasian/Hispanic	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Graduated
Miguel	18	Male	Hispanic	Project Forward	GED	Enrolled
Tamara	17	Female	Hispanic	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Graduated

Each narrative is a compilation of the transcripts from the student interviews. I generated the narratives based upon a storymap process utilized by Richmond (2002) where sections of the participant’s stories were placed in order as determined by a storymap. Richmond used a narrative research process to investigate educational outcomes in adult learners based upon their personal stories. Richmond incorporated the use of storymaps that allowed the individual stories to be paralleled based upon past, present, and future experiences. In order to create the storymaps, initial coding was used on the transcripts. The initial codes were then grouped by topic on the storymap. The excerpts from the transcripts were then placed into order in the narrative based upon the storymap. The students’ words were edited for flow and cohesiveness, but no other editing was done in order to preserve the voice of the participant. Underlined text indicates my own additions to the narrative in order to facilitate the flow of the narrative. The storymap I used for the format of the narratives is detailed in Figure 4. The codes were generated based upon the premise of the research questions, current at-risk education trends from the literature review, and emerging information from the process of line-by-line coding (Charmez, 2006). The codes were grouped together based on the storymap in order to provide a

coherent, semi-structured design to the narratives (Richmond, 2002). The storymap used for the student narratives covered the history of the student’s educational experience, positive and negative factors in their lives (personally and academically), and personal, future plans.

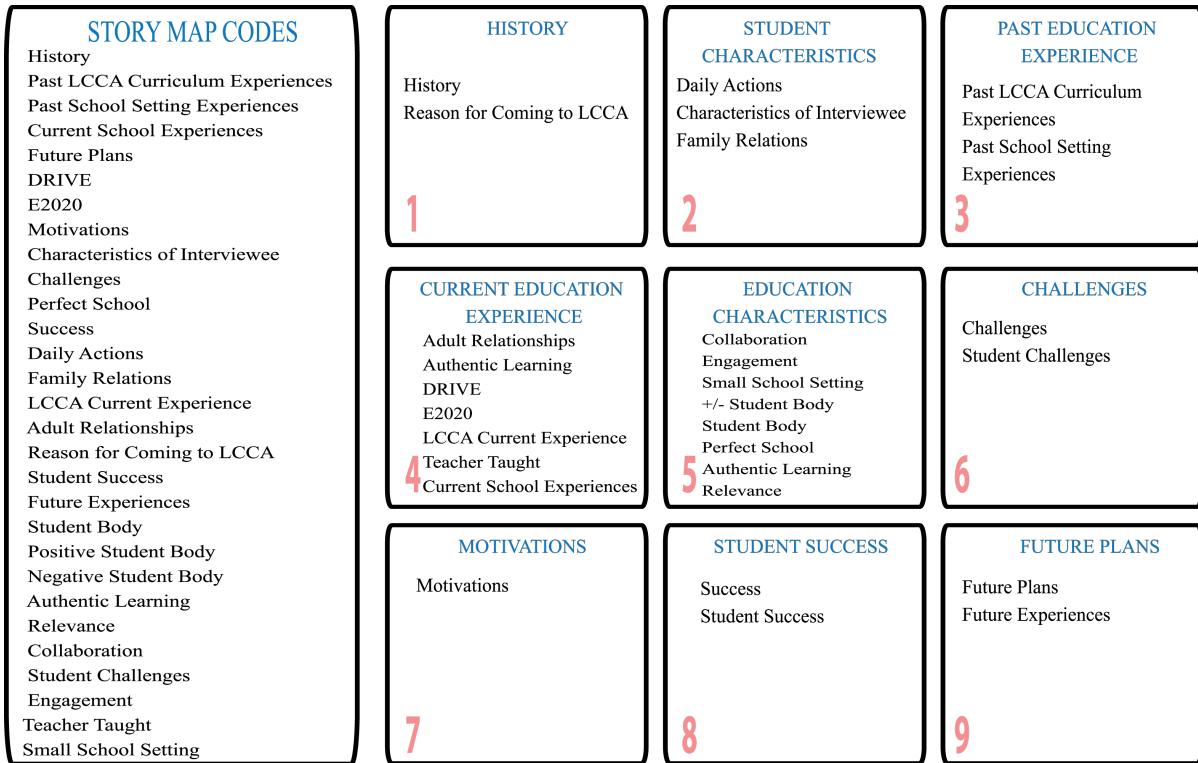


Figure 4: Storymap Codes

Creating the narratives from the students’ words allowed for the participants’ thoughts on past, current, and future events not only inform the research, but also provide a descriptive viewpoint and inform the practices which the students engaged in during the 2012-2013 school year (Polkinghorne, 2010). Figure 5 is a flowchart representing the creation process of the narratives using the storymap as a guide. The flowchart demonstrates how data were analyzed the data starting with the original transcripts to the final narratives.

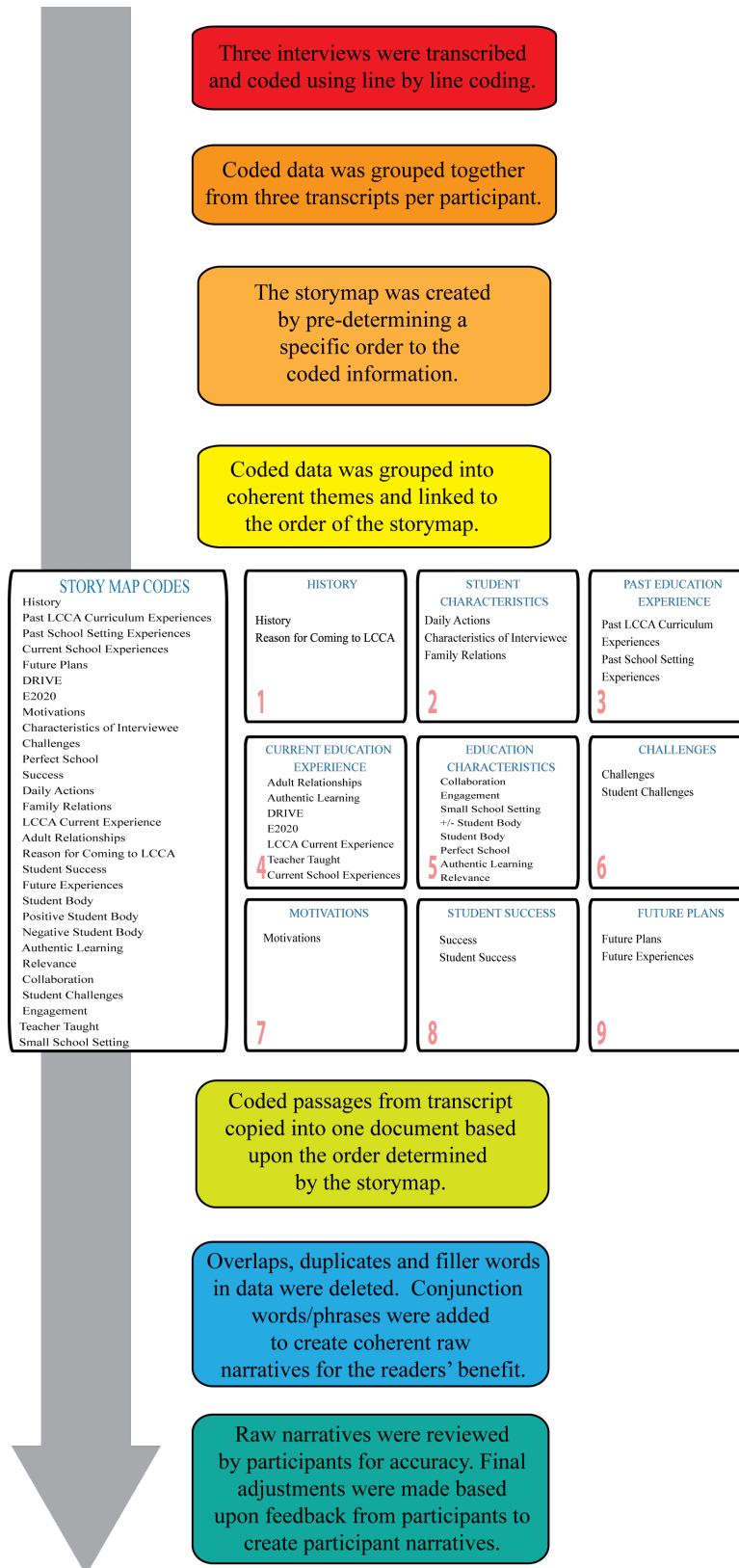


Figure 5: Narrative Creation Based Upon Storymaps

It is to be noted that LCCA Workforce Development Academy is a school of choice program. Although several students mentioned their parents “made them come” or references to not having a choice to attend LCCA, the Hall County School System’s policy is clear. LCCA is a school of choice with the decision for students to attend the Lanier Choice or Project Forward programs in the Workforce Development Academy being a family/student decision (Loveless, 2013). The comments in the narratives regarding discipline students refer to a discipline-based program offered on the LCCA campus. The discipline-based program can be mandatory due to significant rule infractions by the student in the traditional schools of the system.

### **Megan**

Megan is a 16-year-old student who completed high school a year early due to the flexibility of coursework at LCCA. In the classroom she was usually engaged in the discussion, however, when students were loud or not working on the classwork, Megan had a tendency to not participate in the class. Megan’s DRIVE teacher shared her observations of Megan in the classroom:

*Megan is engaged in class, but needed very specific directions and was reluctant to work on activities alone. Megan showed an interest in participating in a school-wide project, which was developing a geocaching course in the school’s green space. She was very involved with the project initially. Overall Megan’s work quality was very good...she was driven to make good grades on assignments.*

Megan did have a short temper and was very blunt in her discussions with teachers and classmates. Her student work samples showed a more contentious effort than many peers in the DRIVE program. She related very well with one particular teacher at LCCA and spent much of the free time before and after class with this teacher. Her attendance was overall good only

missing classes due to doctor's appointments and other excused absences. Although she did have a history of discipline referrals in the traditional school environment, her discipline issues were minimal since coming to the Academy in the 2012-2013 school year. Megan completed her graduation requirements in May 2013. Meet Megan:

*I get up at 8:00 and do my hair. Come to school, come to my classes, go home maybe drive with dad a little bit. I practice driving and then I am done for the day other than chores. A recent success was that I got behind the wheel one day, but I only rode the brake though. I did not have a permit. But, now I have a learner's permit. I took practice tests online and I got two 100's in a row.*

*I am an only child. It is kind of lonely--but really good at holidays--especially with Grandmas and Papas. I graduate in a few weeks. So after graduation I will be sleeping if I don't get a job and I am trying to do interviews and what not. Well, since I am only 17, I can't be alone with the children so I interviewed for an assistant at a childcare facility. I am going to start college in the winter semester. I don't know why, my parents decided that. I turn 18 next February. I have shaved off a year of high school. I am going to University of North Georgia in Gainesville. I've heard that they have good educational programs.*

*Well I came here because people were bullying me at my old school, Charlie High. And, I have a different experience here than I did at my old school. It's a more friendly environment. When I moved from Charlie High to here it was hard at first, because I was trying to get use to everything and my online classes, especially Math II was hard. I had seven semesters of every class that I had to do. Second semester math was complicated. But I got through it. I got through Biology- I think it was Biology- I had to come to summer school for that too this past*

*summer just to get caught up. I was here last semester and the last part of last year. So I have been here like a year and a half maybe. But, I don't know just I just wanted to come.*

*I don't really know what was a challenge. I'm trying to think. There was a challenge when I switched from Charlie Middle to Charlie High. Because, at Charlie Middle my past, was my enemy, and so, I went to Charlie High and I got a fresh start. The fact is that I have been diagnosed with Asperser's Syndrome in 2001, when I was in first grade. That was back at Charlie Elementary. I think getting diagnosed has helped a lot. But with the bullying like at traditional schools it has been overwhelming. Like they don't know, they know that you are different but at the same time they don't know how and they are not willing to let you explain it. Just teens- just crazy, they were mean, and rude. I understand that it is like sort of brain development thing. I am wrote an essay- I am writing a narrative right now- I have part of it and I have a part- a chapter dedicated to Asperser's Syndrome. [The following is Megan's chapter, a fictional dialog she wrote explaining Asperger's Syndrome]*

They went to their computer's so Layla [fictional name] could type her speech.

"I'm so nervous! I've never done anything like this before. It's going to be hard!" Layla said.

"Is it because of your Asperger's Syndrome?" Gabriella [fictional name] asked.

"Yeah..."

"What exactly is Asperger's Syndrome?"

"It's a part of something known as an Autism Spectrum Disorder, or ASD."

"Okay. So when were you diagnosed?"

"I was diagnosed in first grade back in 2001."

"Oh. What are the signs?"

"You can see it in a persons eyes. For example, if a person is looking you in the mouth and not the eyes that could be a sign that they have autism."

"Okay, but what about Asperger's Syndrome and writing?"

"For me, it's hard to get my thoughts down on paper. I believe this is most likely because my brain is different from a 'normal' person's brain."

"Okay... that kinda makes sense... Do you mind explaining further?"

"Of course! Asperger's Syndrome is a type of developmental disorder that affects how the brain processes information. For example, you could ask me a question one way and I wouldn't understand because of the way my brain processes it. However, you could ask the same

question in a different way and it would totally click and I would be able to answer you using the right words. Does that make sense to you?"

"Yeah. So what do you do if it doesn't click and the person that you're talking to doesn't know that you don't understand? What would you do in that situation?"

"That actually has a simple solution. I would say something along the lines of 'I don't understand what you're asking. Do you mind rewording your question?' Of course, if they ask why I don't understand I would explain it as I'm explaining it to you."

*Most classes to me are easy if I understand it and it clicks in my brain, but if it doesn't then I am going to need extra help like maybe one-on-one time with the teacher or something. Less students makes it easier to get one-on-one time, the smaller classes. The environment makes it feel easier. And I have a lot of teacher help. What not. My teacher says pay attention...that is how I know something is important. And when all my classmates are paying attention and what not. If they're just goofing off and the teacher is just like whatever then it's fine, but other than that I'm paying attention.*

*My relationship with my teachers is very important because a teacher needs to get to know their student and the student needs to get to know the teacher and how the teacher teaches and the teacher needs to get how the student learns. So here there is very good interaction with teachers, especially with Ms. Chris. She is like an embarrassing mom. She tried to dance today and was some old dance and I was like "what are you doing?". You are so embarrassing. I told her that she was more embarrassing than my mother and father combined. A teacher can increase my interest level in a class by making learning more fun- like interesting what not. I don't know what that looks like. I just know that it has to be more fun because kids now days are just like bored with it. But I don't have any ideas to perk them up.*

*Mainly the online classes have been my biggest challenge in school, cause like, I'm more of a live learning person, like a live teacher. The online classes are kinda complicated sometimes, especially Spanish II. That one is really complicated. When I finished my last*

course, last, last semester, it was my first, my Spanish, Spanish 1 course. And then I didn't have to do any thing the whole break. It was great. I was working my butt off so, so much. Right now I am taking Chemistry second semester right now. I'm like at 58% in that already. I've only been on it, 6 days today. But the classes are harder on, when your online. They're little more complicated than when you have a live teacher. I have taken quite a few online classes.

I don't know of any positive experiences from online classes right now, I have a lot of negative ones. Like there are not to up to date on their stuff. Like on government, the lady said George W. Bush was still the president which it is Barack Obama

now. And with chemistry they need to make stuff more clear of how to do it step by step- like how to work out a problem step by step and with like math they should do that too because I know a lot of my friends are having trouble on that. But, I guess though I feel kind of neutral toward online classes in general. Don't do away with it completely because there are some classes that are good, but make most teacher taught, because most kids need teacher taught for certain things. A little flexibility is nice. Teacher taught classes are more quality education because, you can actually get extra help rather in online classes you don't get anything at all unless you actually go out and find somebody that can actually do that- specific thing that you want, need them to do.

I've noticed that things are different since we've moved into this school year, like last semester. When we started last semester, like, all the 3-6 kids were all the disciplinary. The discipline kids. And then like, mainly all the, day program kids were the good kids. So, that helps a lot in a learning environment. Especially for someone like me. Less distraction and a little more one on one time with the teacher sometimes.

*DRIVE helped with mostly with the communication skills and everything. And then all my other classes, are just like the basics. I did the, that thingy, the geo cashing thingy. We presented in front of the Board of Education. That was out of my comfort zone. Yes I think the stuff we learned in DRIVE was useful, because they are teaching you what employers are looking for, what to do and what not to do, like how to do an interview and what not. I would agree probably that stuff is hands-on because they can put you on internships, whether you are prepared or not they give you experience. The class that is most relevant is the baby room, because I really want to go into early childhood education. Authentic learning is a great opportunity, especially if you are trying to figure out what you want to do. Cause high school is the time you want to figure out what you want to do like if you want to go to college, have a job that has minimum wage or what not. So they can know what they want to do in their life. The baby room is my example of this. In the regular classes, we kind of sort of used authentic learning in a way yes, but I don't really know how, I just know that it helps.*

*The DRIVE class helped with employability skills and what not also. It has helped with jobs because that showed us how to fill out a job application one time, so and they made us do our resume and stuff like that. The internship has gone really good. I am going to miss the babies though. I learned everything. I enjoyed it. I still don't know how to change a diaper, though. Because I might need to know that for the future. The DRIVE program means that they are focusing more on how to get you a job and show you how to get a job, fill out job applications, get a resume together, everything about the jobs that you need to know.*

*Just the fact that they have showed me what I want to do and gave me opportunities to do different type of things has made a difference for my future. I did other internships too. Like, I worked in the kitchen, worked in hospitality and now I have worked in Design 360 and now I've*

worked in the daycare, so. And the one that fit was daycare because children are awesome--just not when they are fussy. But some classes will not help. Spanish won't help--cause if you take it online it won't help--just because they are mostly talking Spanish in Spanish II actually cause everything you have to read is in Spanish. I don't see how math will help. Math is just like whoa...like when am I going to use this? Overall, though, my classes are useful classes.

It's been fun being a student at LCCA. I've had some hard times but just the bullying or what not and people don't really understand, but not as much at the traditional schools. I will remember how people treated me and what not but that is both good and bad. LCCA just prepares you for life and what you have to do in school, in jobs and what not, like the DRIVE program did. My perfect school....that's a lot to chew on. Hmmm, I'd make it a more friendly environment for people. Teachers and then the students, the students would all be friendly to each other. Like, no bullying what so ever would be allowed or anything. And if you got caught bullying you get suspended, or kicked out. I like everything about LCCA.

Like if you are motivated to do something like you have incentive to do something. I don't really know why I am motivated. I am just motivated. The baby room is a motivation for me. I am very motivated to finish high school. And I am very, very, very motivated.. a lot...to have a successful career, to get a lot of money. I want to teach school somewhere between kindergarten and third grade. The baby room has helped me with this. The baby room makes me look forward to coming to school. The baby room is my most memorable moment from high school. I just love the kids. I would say my internship has very positively impacted my future. It's made me more want to work more with children. I love children. I'm working with infants so this reinforces my love for it.

*My life will be different--like way different once I graduate. Like I will not be coming to school anymore and I don't know what I will be doing because I don't have a job at the moment--what not. A job can replace school, especially a job at a daycare. I plan to find a steady job so I actually have money and then apply for college. I am taking during my ACT this Saturday. I graduate in May. Then I start working on being a K-3 teacher and staying around here--I like Hall County. I just applied for a job. Well, first I just applied, but then Trina, the lady that works there said--we have the same hair dresser--so Tammy--our hair dresser, said Megan would be good at daycare and referred me and Trina got me an interview.*

*I think coming to LCCA means like you are going to a good school and like and you are going to get a lot of support there because it is a small school rather than a huge school--less students and teachers more dedicated to their students.*

### **Jasmine**

Jasmine is an 18-year-old parenting student who has been working in the Project Forward GED program. Jasmine actually withdrew from school during the middle of the spring 2013 semester; however, in talking with her, Jasmine has no concept that she is actually a high school dropout. When observing Jasmine in the classroom, she was engaged in the work and was very well behaved, although she interacted with her cell phone multiple times during class and violated the school policy by doing so. She is a polite and funny person. Her teachers had a very good rapport with Jasmine. Jasmine's observed conversations with one teacher were very maternal in nature with the teacher expressing concern over Jasmine's welfare, education, and family situations. Jasmine's DRIVE teacher shared the following observation on Jasmine:

*Jasmine has been preparing for her GED for a little over a year and at this point I am not sure that she has made a sincere commitment to doing the work that will be necessary to*

*obtain her GED. Jasmine always completes her assignments and usually strives for more than just mediocre [work] especially if she felt comfortable with the assignment.*

Jasmine had several discipline referrals at a traditional school involving alcohol and over-the-counter drugs. Jasmine had no discipline issues during her enrollment at LCCA. However, Jasmine's attendance progressively worsened over her two years as a student at LCCA finally culminating in her withdrawal from school. At the end of the 2013 school year, Jasmine was not in school and was not in a GED-preparation program. Meet Jasmine:

*Well when I wake up in the morning, I just get up, the baby wakes up, of course I have to change her, change her clothes, fix her hair, wash her face all those little things and then I fix the bed. I always do that, always fix myself a big bath--makes feel all nice and pretty. Then of course I have to change myself just all the little things that you do when you get up in the morning. I put the TV on because she loves to watch the TV. I sit her down in her chair and give her some cereal. Some little baby cereal and while she is eating that I make myself something--could be anything. Then after that, say hey to mom. She always wakes up around 10 or so. And, then after that, the baby and I will just hang out and watch some TV for a like a little bit. Maybe then like later on we'll just go outside. Just look at little things--like look at that bird and what not just look at the small stuff. And, I have an aunt and she lives with me, and she lives downstairs and she has a daughter as well. And sometimes we go and visit her and play with her too. The babies are close to same age so they get along well, they are like little best friends. If one hears crying, the other starts to cry...like twins. They're so cute--they have a connection. We'll be locked in a room, not like that, but we'll in the room and she'll be like shhhh--baby and she will go to door and open it and she really is crying. I say how do hear that--it is so cute. That is, so very, very sweet they're just like twins.*

*At first I came from Apple High. My grades weren't kinda doing too good and at the time I was pregnant. And like, school was kinda tight, and pregnancy, and being out of school was kinda hard. And so then, the, the school counselor, the graduation coach, he had told me about, about Project Forward, but I thought maybe, you know, it was a good idea. He explained to me about, you know like online classes maybe, and the school helping me out. I was like okay, sounds good to me. So, I came here last January. I was kinda nervous, I was just like; oh my gosh. I mean, I'd been here before, cause of other stuff.*

*At first I had gotten into some trouble at LCA cause I was involved with the wrong people at Apple Middle and then I had got sent here for 8<sup>th</sup> grade ALC [Alternative Learning Center], and I noticed that the school was quiet, it was calm, the teachers were very nice and helpful as well; and then I was like well, hmmm maybe I might come here a little later on. Then I had to come the second time, it was the same semester but it was like in August and I had to come and it was totally different because I wasn't wearing the uniform and it was a lot of people and like whoa--I didn't like expect that. But like the people were really nice to me so they were helping and teachers were still nice and they knew like if you need a check or if need something just let me know--everyone was really nice. I think it was last year--not sure, a couple of years ago. And the teachers were nice and helpful and just--they actually cared. They really do care. I have seen that--not just like that teacher or that teacher, but all the teachers, they all care about their students and their education and then graduating--especially that. Then I went back to Apple High. There I had a really good relationship with one of the principals and he told me you know the students that I had gotten in trouble with, some of them were still there and some of them had went to other schools, but he said he knew I was a good kid. "I know you won't be involved with these kids any more. You know to be honest now." And you know when I had went*

back to Apple High, I had like a goal. You know what like, I am going to forget about these kids. And my grades had improved so much, so much. And then that year I got an award cause I had, I mean my grades had just shot up, I mean just really, really good grades. And then, let's see, I was still behind on credits though and that was the thing and I was like doing some classes there and like online classes there and then around that time was the same time like I had gotten, like I kind of had gotten pregnant, yeah. So I talked to the graduation coach and he said it might be best for you if you went to LCA and could consider GED cause like cause of my credits. I liked LCCA as well. I had liked coming here. You know what...I really do like this school! I was like well my wish came true. I didn't want to miss school cause I really wanted to get out, and to be at home with, with my child.

When I had to gone back to Apple High, it was because I was suspended and I had to come here and then I went back. This was first semester, and I was just like, you know what, I'm just gonna like, put my foot down, bolted in and just go straight to like focusing on school. I just didn't care, I didn't talk, I talked less to my friends that I was, that I got suspended with. I just avoided them, didn't text them, no Facebook, no, none of that junk, I just like, you know. I like, I talked to my parents about that too and they seemed very comfortable with that, they were like alright. And so, close to the end of the year, it was like Honors Day and I had received an award. The Improvement & Achievement Award, for pretty much just, having a big change in my grades, they just shot up, so good. Yes, and I was just, I made my parents so happy. I was so happy, I was like, oh my gosh. And I still have it, it's just sitting up, in my room at my parents house, it's just there. I was like see, every time I look at it, it's there.

I am not yet working anywhere but, I am actually looking. I really want to work. When, the baby's father is like no, I should work and I was like okay. It is just--my baby's dad...he's

really like into his like culture, in his background like the man should always work and you know and mother stays at home. And he's working. He has a really, really good job. I have never had a job. I've probably had like small jobs--like babysitting something I can do at home--I guess you say like cut grass, wash cars. Honestly, cause my grandma, she sells Avon, I have thought about doing something like that and I think that is really nice and my mom she sell like furniture or something like that like from a book and it was really, really nice stuff, too. I think stuff like that would be really, really nice--cause I know other people like to get make-up, cute little make-up little things, you know.

My biggest success in my life, honestly, I would say it would be having my daughter--cause she, and I mean even when I like knew--when I first found out I was pregnant I was like okay. I will have to sit back and just think I need to cut off the world and think about that one thing. I was in love with playing ball like--basketball and when I first found out I was pregnant I just thought completely, I didn't like I was working out a lot too and then they had told me that I was pregnant and I was okay and just thought that but then of course then I had to be on my feet to be well. And I learned a whole lot in that pregnancy. I did, I learned a whole, whole lot. It was a new thing--it was something new and unexpected. I mean, I mean having her was actually planned. It was planned. She just came a year early. I was planning to get pregnant, it just came a year early, I was just like whoa--but it I was prepared for it. We did have a place, some things and some baby clothes. Me and the baby's daddy have been together since freshmen year. He went to Apple High as well. Me and him have been together for a really, really long time. He's been graduated, he's going walk, I think, May 28<sup>th</sup> at LCCA.

In the Fall of 2011 or this Spring of 2011 I came back. It was a little different people, cause when I had came it was a lot of kids, like so many kids. I was like of my gosh and when I

*had come earlier was like less people, it was quieter. I was like wow, I can actually do work-- and so then, the, the school counselor, the graduation coach, he had told me about, about Project Forward, but I thought maybe, you know, it was a good idea. He explained to me about, you know like online classes maybe, and them helping me out. I would say online classes is a higher quality of education than teacher-taught. Online classes actually helps, I mean personally I thought it was done well, I would pay attention--take notes and I love notes-- honestly I love taking notes. Like it is a really big help--really big help. I really do that's why they called me a little nerd for that cause I have a binder--a whole big section of notes. I love taking notes, I really do. Online classes was really good, I learned a lot. I wasn't so good on math--it was kind of tricky on math, but the rest of it was really, really good. Of course, I am not really good at math so, I am actually really better with like, like hands down teacher taught--like teachers explaining to me--the rest of it is great. The flexibility is great. It is actually very, very good for a lot of people that I know. I would say using online classes to just catch up on credits and early graduation is the best use of it. So a mixture of teacher-taught and online classes is good.*

*Let's see, this year, it's, I mean it's kinda different but it, it's ok, I still like it. I really liked the DRIVE classes. I learned a lot, I mean, oh my gosh, I had so much fun honestly, I remember having a school field trip, with you, with you at the Canopy Tour. I thought that was really nice fun. Even though it was hot I didn't care, it was really fun, I'd like to go back too. And like, going outside with Ms. Whitlock, thinking about, if we could like, fix the school what would we do with the bad part of the building, where the grass is, like, like what would we do there, and doing stuff on the computers and that, I figured out I was really good in doing things*

*on the computer, like Glogster and Weebles, and I was really, really good with that. That was really fun, I really enjoyed that class.*

*Honestly, I just like going to school. I really do. Just, how do I say it? Well, I just can't find the right words to say it. I just really, really do like school. Because, it's just, I know it is going to be good for you in life and in the future. I know graduating is important, my parents and family have told me constantly. I know my parents know I am such, like a smart, smart girl, and I know I have a big future, because of my interests.*

*I'm more focused in school and the teachers are very helping. That's what they told me that I'm doing, I'm almost there. And I have been really excited cause I just want to go home and like not worry about school. I mean I do want to go to college. The stuff that I've learned, like I wasn't so good in math, and now I'm getting there, I'm really, really getting there, cause I wasn't really, I've, I mean, I've like my whole life I've not been good in math.*

*Teachers were nice, they're really cool. I like Ms. Whitlock a lot, she's a really, really nice teacher. I learned a lot from last year with, when I use to go to the college, cause it was college class, a little college class over there for GED help, that teacher she was very, very helping. If something's important you should be learning it, like, is there anything that you think; oh well this something I should be paying attention to. I feel like the teachers that I have had are keeping me on track, staying focused, like forgetting the outside stuff. I was thinking, I was just so focused on getting maybe, my GED, nothing was distracting me, I was mostly here everyday. Each one of my teachers, just, they just know, and like they, they have patience, they have very, very good patience, and whenever I don't understand anything, I can like, I feel comfortable just to go up, just to go up to them and just tell them that, I don't understand this or maybe I need extra help in that. It's like I'm talking to my friends. It's like a good, it's like a*

*good connection with them. The teachers, the teachers know exactly what they are doing. They really, really know what they are doing. Everything else--everything is very really planned out and everything makes sense cause they explain it very, very well. I would say, yeah they're taking their time because of other students--but they do it really, really well. So that like the other students will understand--you know. I think, the teachers, they know what they're doing.*

*What is authentic learning? Hands on learning, you mean? That's very, very helpful--it really is--it's really helpful cause it will give you like a visual and hands on experience and, it will just give you, let's see. The Reality Check was something that will just like teach you like how it is going to actually be. When we were with Ms. Chris, we would do these little, little articles--like we would read an article and we would have our iPad and we would like read the article and like sum it down and just tell the teacher like if we can relate to this article and if just basically tell the teacher just what the article is about.*

*Hands-on learning makes me more interested because, honestly, I actually learn better that way. I really, really do. Being in the DRIVE class was very, very fun and very hands on and you do learn a lot. You get to do little projects on like Glogster, like PowerPoint make it look really, really, cool just when you present it. I agree that LCCA has had a lot of hands-on learning this year. I guess hands-on learning would give the students a little taste of--no--yeah a little taste of how it would actually be like--what they are going to face later on in life.*

*I think my relationship with my teachers is really important because they are also a motivation for me--especially Ms. Whitlock, cause she is just always like--are you going to come to today, are you going to do this, do you need like a ride--yeah, I know but she is just caring--she is very, very caring--she is like a mom to me. I mean, teachers were nice, they're really cool. I like Ms. Whitlock a lot, she's a really, really nice teacher.*

*I am very motivated. My dad he keeps me mostly motivated, mostly cause, my dad finished school and he's doing good in life, in his life. And he's just like, you should do this, and this, and this, don't worry about these people. I'm like, you know what you're right, my brothers also a big, motivation. I am very motivated to have a successful career too, I stay, I think very positive. I mean, I know there's a lot of things I'd like to do, but like I know sooner or later, they be just that one thing. To me motivation is just like seeing like somebody that made it in life and you just want to think you know what--if he or she can do it so can I. Like I don't have to do the same thing she did but I know that if I put my head into--just forget about everything else outside, I know I can reach that point like he and she did and be really, really good in life. So yeah, I get my motivation from my dad. He is a technician and he makes a lot of money of course, but he was like--that is something he likes to do and something he really likes to do. My dad has always been here for me and life. Every since I was little, he has been like I want you to be this--I want you to be that, but honestly, it is what you want to be. So he was a really big motivation in life. My daughter motivates me as well. Because I also want to provide for her and like give her food and get her cute little clothes just make her happy--spoil her. I mean she is an only child so. She is one. Mostly when I am just here, I'm just thinking about my daughter. I want the best for her, mostly her. Of course myself but the main focus is on her. I just want to provide for her when I get a career, and just, just to make her happy, the good stuff. I'm very motivated. I mean, I know there's a lot of things I'd like to do, but like I know sooner or later, they be just that one thing*

*There were plenty of good and bad memories from high school to be honest. Let's see I remember it was homecoming at Apple High--it was like everyone was just having a good time and I know that people like to be in little groups or whatever, but that night none it didn't even*

*matter. Everybody was just with just everyone- dancing everyone having a good time-this and that. Everyone was just having a really good time--it felt unbelievable--it felt like something from the movies or something. It was just a really, really great time dancing to every little song that they had put on--country, rap--everyone had a really good time. It was the best I have ever had.*

*I remember that was one time at back at Apple High--it was like end of course test for like history--I'm not sure--but all I did for like two weeks just was hard core studying like up late night- cause my momma would get so mad--she said you need to get some rest--no mom I need to frigging pass this test. I have too! And then we came to test day and I was like, oh my God, I don't remember anything, but then I was just like relax, chewed some gum cause that always helped me. I passed that test with like B--it was like very good. I was OMG I was so happy and on that same day I had the test for math and I remember that I didn't too much studying on that cause I had a really low grade in history but in math I had a passing grade--so and I did that and I passed it as well. I was so happy--like I didn't think I was going to pass it but I did. So I left Apple High with passing grades. I was so happy. So like for the rest of the summer, I was like, I passed all my tests.*

*In DRIVE, we did things that Ms. Whitlock thought of. Like we would walk around the school and like take pictures of some things like maybe we could fix or add more too and it came out pretty good. Like out front we could have more flowers, make a field in the back of the school things like that--we all got a very good grade on it. We worked in a group to do it. I would say math out of all my classes will help me the most in my future. Because I will be in the medical field and there will be a lot of measuring and stuff like that.*

*LCCA is a very big, and, very cheerful place honestly, with nice people, like, administration, principals, I mean people are nice here. Without having the teacher's yell at the students to be quiet and sit down and close the door--whatever any little thing and I liked it cause I did a lot of work done. It was great. I liked it. This year, it's still a lot of people, but people respect each other. They need, you know, they do like if that person is working just leave that person alone let them do the work. Just really respectful of their surroundings, not bothering anyone and the teachers of course are just the same. They are very--there really good teachers they know what exactly their doing. I mean let's see--the classes were easy, but then again you think about the students around you that may not understand that--what they are actually doing you know. Like I was in a class that students spoke only Spanish--so teachers would take their time and I would be patient--cause I understand that you know, yeah. I would say that I think that the work was just easier. I'm more focused in school and the teachers were very helping. I just seem to understand more, like maybe, English, and math.*

*Well, I know school can, let's see, I know school will help me out a lot. Wow, my idea school would probably be somewhere quiet, like around here: very big, and, very cheerful place, honestly, with nice people, like, administration, principals. Something like this, pretty much where everyone could just like come in, it's like a happy place. School is a happy place anyway.*

*Well, I really don't know what I would say is a challenge in my life. The stuff that I've learned, like I wasn't so good in math, and now I'm getting there, I'm really, really getting there, cause I wasn't really, I've, I mean, I've like my whole life I've not been good in math. But let's see, I'm kinda not sure on that one. I just didn't have a ride to come here. Well kinda of, I just need to get my license that's it.*

*I loved being a student at LCCA, absolutely loved it. I love the people. I love just the teachers all the students, the experiences just waking up one morning and feeling like I am going to a great place. A place, just like home. I will remember all my teachers. I remember this school. I'll remember you of course. I remember my experiences in my classes. Of course friends--can't forget about my friends. Ah, just everything that I have learned here and it's like I've experienced here at LCA.*

*My plan to get to my dream is well first since I have a child at home I got to see you know like who will be willing to watch her while I am going to college and then go to school and, go to school and talk to them about what I will be doing and then to also help me out with my GED--cause I need to get that done of course. I have withdrawn from school. I just wanted to make a step forward--you know what--just break the chain and go--just go for it. I just couldn't help it anymore, cause I just didn't want to be like another year, still here just--it is not just that I am not interested so much as just make that next step. I just felt like it was something I had to do personally. Honestly I can say there is nothing that LCCA could have done better to prepare me. I feel like I'm somewhat prepared to move on to the next part of my life, but I know I am.*

*I withdrew mid-semester but I am going to talk to Lanier Tech or Everest. They have a GED program too. Cause, they had called me asking for me cause I remember like no joke they really are no joke. Yeah, they called, they call me that same day, they'll do like, you should come down, to, Norcross, and we'll, we'll have, we'll like tour with you around the whole school, go in some classes. I was like, whoa this is for real, this is for real, they're not kidding, and like I was just so nervous and I so excited, I was like ahhh. Many of my people like my friends said it was a joke--but, Everest is no joke. You may think their whole commercials on TV are a bunch of crap, but it is not. They are for real. The person I spoke to he was like do you think you can*

*come into tomorrow. We'll give you a tour of the campus and I was like, wow--it wasn't expected. I would have gone, but I had no ride, that's just I had no ride. I was like no, I really wanted to go.*

*Honestly, there's lots of things that I'd like to be. But like, I love to draw, I just love to draw, I love cosmetology, the whole make up, the hair, I love fashion. I would, I like maybe to be a vet. Honestly, there's lots of things that I'd like to be. Or a medical assistant. Lot's of things I'd like to do, it's just. It is, lots... lots, lots, lots, I've been paying attention to TV commercials, or ads on like, Facebook or stuff like that, just, just to see. But I think I want to be in the medical field because, let's see, it's like the little things, you know like if someone gets hurt, like I know just exactly what to do--you know just like clean it and like put a pad of some sort and then wrap it and make sure they don't like walk on that leg or you use that arm or finger you know just the small things. So I was thinking about visiting Lanier Tech to see what they have or going to Everest one of the two.*

*I would like to say for the people that are like reading this or like somebody that is my age, just don't give up on anything--just do not give up. You might, might feel like you know what this is the end I can't handle this. There is always, I always tell myself yes, no, how do I say this? I always tell myself, yes this is bad but at the end it'll just go--it'll just, it'll just, it'll just, it will just go away. It'll just, just like think positive, it'll just pass, everything will be fine and just don't give up on things that you, that you, just love, especially in school. School is very, very, very important. My parents and my family made me see that school is very important and I've seen people around me that had dropped out of school and they are like in struggle--they really are. There's friends that I know that are in jail, there's friends that are selling drugs and there's like all these freaking things and I don't want to be involved in that, I really don't. And,*

*I've constantly told them you know like just set you mind straight--just go to school if not for you at least do it for your daughter or just to prove to your mom--say you know what mom, I could told you that I could do it. I told you that I could do it. I honestly say, I'd be like, like I would say you know don't regret it cause at that moment that's exactly what you wanted but there is always a second chance at things and a GED will also help. It'll also get you to be in the college--get at least a decent job--better job than you're doing right now...if you even have a job or so but, just you know--lets see, you just need to realize that the negative things around you are not helping you at all. It's just bring you down and making you feel I can just do this later--I can do this tomorrow or some other day--or some other day can be like you've been doing that for five years or more--so it's better to just forget about it and just do it, just do it--just do it.*

### **Michael**

Michael is a 20-year-old student enrolled in the Lanier Choice program working towards a high school diploma. Michael has 18 overall units of credit, however he only has one unit of math with four units required for graduation. His attendance is very sporadic at school with family problems and family illness being blamed for much of his absences. For example, he has missed over 70 second period classes this year with 64 of those absences being unexcused. Michael is not interested in moving to a GED preparation program, although in reality, he will probably “age-out” of the education system before meeting the requirements for graduation. His DRIVE teacher provided the following description of his class efforts:

*Michael was enthusiastically engaged in the DRIVE class on a regular basis. When there were concepts addressed that he may not have been familiar with or had not experienced, he was eager to find out as much as he could about the issues. He responded to the activities and assignments in a mature fashion, often getting frustrated with students who did not take*

*things seriously or who did not use good teamwork skills. He often initiated classroom discussion with the expectations that students would freely participate and share to enhance conversations and presentations.*

*Timely completion of assignments was sometimes an issue for Michael. This may have been due to the way he wanted to present his point of view or his acceptance of the prescribed way of completing a project. The overall quality of his work was good. I feel that the products were not always indicative of what he had to offer. Although, his attitude about what the DRIVE class was about and what we were trying to offer him was great. He often shared with others how the various concepts could be of help to him and the rest of the class.*

*I did recommend him for an internship. He shared some of his experiences with the other class members. He was never disruptive. In fact he felt the need quite often to make others who may have been disruptive at various points, understand how disrespectful their actions were.*

*Michael is very insightful and observant. He has a lot to offer and I hope that he eventually gets the opportunity to pursue some of his career goals and that eventually he is more tolerant of people who aren't as progressive as he can be. This attitude will allow him to enjoy more of his life and what it has to offer him.*

Michael has had only minor disciplinary referrals while in a traditional high school and no discipline issues while at LCCA. When in class, Michael was observed to be engaged and almost philosophical in nature. In a hands-on environment he often completed assignments; however when given larger projects, he would seem to get bogged down in details and not submit a finished product. Although Michael would like to have graduated in May 2013, he needed far too many credits to make that goal a reality. Meet Michael:

*I get up, get ready for school. If I need to make food--I'll make food. I'll leave to walk to the regular high school and take the bus here. Then I take the bus back to the home school and walk back home. I am not working now. My full time job has been caring for my family. We have like frequent family problems... drama. Yeah, like if I could get really paid for taking care of my family that would be great. It's just me and my dad now at the house and my older brother who needs special care. My mom is in California with my grandmother. My older brother does not work, does not go to school. He just stays there. He is 30. Well, he is, I think no he is 29, 29 this year. He just sits at the house. Sit around, lounge around, eat food, drive to his friend's house. Use our money.*

*I sorta came to LCCA by mistake. That's a good story. Really, I was absent for a whole week from school due to a complication with the family. I was looking for a way to get out of school faster cause I wanted--me and my friend wanted to go into the military together--and well me and my friend were just planning on dropping out and just go into the military right away, but they said they would not take us. And, so I went back and I asked; like is there anything I can do to graduate early, because that's what I wanted to do is graduate early, so I could you know, get into something or is there anything I can do you know like speed up my classes or like, something like that. And, they said well there's LCCA and I was like, what's that and my family was we've heard of LCCA before you're brother went there and I was like what is it? The way they described it sounded like this is the bad place, but you know, ah it's not a bad place at all. So they said it, and they were like; we can send your transcript there right now, and I was like no, no I want to kinda think about it, but they called my parents. And, were like; so, we have your sons transcripts and, or we have his transcripts and they were like do you want us to send it over to LCCA and my mom was on the phone and I was at school. They didn't come and talk to*

*me about it, they didn't you know ask me about it but my mom said yes. So I didn't like I had no say in it at all what so ever and I kinda wanted to stay in school because I had some classes that I liked. So like the first year I was here I was just a tad bit, you know, bitter about that. Also I think they lost some grades, while they transferred. So when I came here I was like I didn't want to be here. I admit that.*

*But, I mean it's, they just described LCCA as, a bad place you know at the time I was given, like you know all the rabid kids are be going at the afternoon classes which is where I was going. I didn't like it at first, but you know it grows on you. It got better. You know I saw some people I knew and I talked with them. Met new people. They weren't bad--not everybody is bad. This was three years ago.*

*This was all too perfect I guess, because my whole family had spent my college funds. So I mean, they needed the money and I said it's alright because I was planning on going into the military and getting a college education from them which is free. And, I also get paid from the military. So but that, you know, I didn't like that. So, they like, they basically, the military lied to me; and was like, oh yeah, you can and then you know, they called me back and was like no you can't really do that after they interviewed me and I was just like whatever. But, I came here and you guys are now giving me options and job experiences and all that stuff, and with that, I can raise back to money to go to college and go to college.*

*I'm a generally good kid. I don't like breaking the rules, when rules are there for a reason. So a success for me is living with my brother and not hurting him. I mean like, living with my brother without having a serious conflict. That seems less violent but yeah he's my little brother physically but, he's older. And like, he's basically, he's jealous of me in a way, because, like when my mom and dad had me, I was the third child, the youngest but my two older brothers*

were the most rowdy out of all of us, and, I was you know, basically they had to focus all their attention on keeping them out of trouble. And you know, so, they had no time for me what so ever. And as a kid; this is true, I tried to get, you know, like attention, good attention not bad attention. So, I got good grades you know, and did well in sports, you know they put me in because, you know my brothers were in sports. We all did soccer I could kick, kick the ball from the field goal to field goal This is when I was younger. In karate, from the time we started I was three months away from a black belt when we stopped, and I wasn't in there for a very long time, maybe a year and half. And I, I really did try my best, and, and I mean like, and everybody's was like; well congratulations, and then you know, my brothers came in, and you know, presented their achievements, and now, they were like; oh well, that's great you know, grand you know, fabulous, and I just got a good job, and they got praise for it. So, like around 5th grade, I, you know, I just stopped you know, trying to be perfect for them. Cause, I know I wasn't going to get anything, and around that 5th grade to 8th grade, I had the drop off period, where you know, you just kinda like, don't do well in school you know a little bit rowdy you know, just...I wasn't the perfect kid. I mean like, I obeyed the rules and you know, and I, I did all that stuff but like my middle school year I never done a piece of homework. Not at all what so ever, the only reason I got through was because I am excellent at testing. Apparently, so, I listened, I learned, but I did no homework.

My brother, he just keeps pushing me, and you know, like poking my buttons. He's very good at that, and like, all through my whole life; he got the attention, and I'm okay with that, I raised myself growing up, and I love who I am, if I could go back in time and change anything, I wouldn't. That's a good place to be, then like, love who you are. Yeah. Oh, I do, and like, I mean, everything that's happened to me I wouldn't change it. All the bad stuff that he has done

*to me, I mean, I wouldn't change it, because it molded who I am and, the best part is I got to him. So, I mean thinking about it, I mean like, if someone else helped you mold you, then you know, you can think about it, you know you can change stuff and you'd feel better about yourself but I had to mold it, nobody else. So, I feel really good because this is pretty good sculpture so far.*

*Honestly, I'm not super motivated, but I do push myself. I wake up, I try to get to school, I mean like, I know it has to get done, so, I'm going to try my best to get it done and as fast as I can too, cause as much as I enjoy it here, I kinda don't enjoy it here. It is really is hard to say what makes me interested in school. I'm not interested in school so much, but it's the people. I love to learn about people. My motivation for being at school is college. I am not so much motivated to get a job or have a career, but you know, I need to get it so that's motivation. Honestly, I don't want to say this without sounding like... graduating is not what gets me to school. It's like what gets me to school is coming here and making everybody as happy as can be you know like, you know like that's literally what I live on it making people happy. Not necessarily relationships it's like you know, if people are having a bummed out day. You know they come to school and they have a bummed out day, that's not a good school day, that doesn't, if I am having a bummed out day I know I'm not going to do good in school so if I can make that person smile and help them get through school I know they're going to help me get through school. But, nothing makes me dread coming to school. I don't dread anything.*

*This year LCCA is a lot more proper. This year, it's a lot nicer. More kids, more mature. Less messing around and more strict in a good way. LCCA is strict, more strict now. The first year I got here was very, very rowdy and, you know crazy and now, there was a lot of people that I didn't like, cause I mean, they were just like they acted all big and bad, and you*

know to, and all that stuff, and you know, were trying to pick fights people, you know getting in peoples faces you know, being stupid, always getting in trouble, swearing in front of everybody you know, acting uneducated. And so I mean like, now as the years go on, I mean like they've, got stricter and I saw that some of the people that were you know rowdy that were last year were gone. You know they didn't come back, you know so I assumed, with their attitude they couldn't go back to normal school. But these people, truth be told, are the people who are not very intellectual. There are a lot of people who goof around and, they're not that bright, and you know, they're here to work, and they do work, but it's so much that you can tell that they're not, I mean like, they're not bright at all. I mean, they're gonna be here for a while. But it's better, a lot better, cause last year there was like so much tension that you know, like that's when people started to get to me. For example, it was last year, and like I, I can handle it very, very well, but like it's just some kid made a un-smart choice, and confronted me about something, absolutely, ridiculously, something you shouldn't do, like maybe you should handle it mature, but he brought a group of his friends and thought there was going to be a conflict.

Motivation is a drive that keeps you going. I mean, people can motivate you or you can motivate yourself so it all depends on what your motivation is. I mean like, if you can't motivate yourself you're depending on other people, which you know sometimes that's good and sometimes that's really, really bad. I would say I am somewhat motivated because sometimes I can definitely motivate myself to do things and then sometimes I feel like this is definitely going to lead to something so I kinda don't want to know. I don't want to expect what's coming but if I keep looking, dude it's going to be fine, you know just keep going, and then you know I totally think this is going to be great you know, I'm right here and then it back fires in your face. When the world bears down on you and it becomes too much, friends help you pick up.

*Successful, oh my gosh there's not been, like no part when I have been successful, but, I mean like, there's parts where, I sorta felt successful. Like I guess the closest thing, was I was helping my brother move, and this is when I was fairly young, and he had a box full of books. He gets big books and reads them, and has manuals for cars and all that stuff, so you can imagine this box was fairly heavy. And, he was sitting there, and he was like take the little stuff, you couldn't carry this box, of you know books, and so; I was just like, who do you think I am. And so, I picked up the box of books and carried it up stairs.*

*I don't know a success story, I mean like, getting my friends to stop hurting themselves over emotional problems? Stop beating yourself up, it's not your fault. Making people happy that are very, very conflicted with themselves. When I can say don't hate yourself...that makes me feel successful. I love helping people, so like, a lot of people here were... when they came here, you know, some people were emotional, you know had emotional problems, and, and I, I like helping people with that, and I'm very good at that cause I see people the way I see me. I mean like, I think of, like how would I feel in those shoes, how would I fix that if I were in those shoes, you know, and like, so, and they also had problems with, like biology and you know the stuff that I could help them with. I would help them and I help people through problems, like some had relationship problems. I helped them through that, you know that also helped them to get through school. So, I mean like, if people have a bad day, you know, and if you, you could change that bad day, you get a better work status out of them, than if they were having a bad day. I don't know, I mean like, getting my friends to stop hurting themselves over emotional problems I think is something I am successful at. Telling them to stop beating yourself up, it's not your fault. Making people happy that are very, very conflicted with themselves. Don't hate yourself. You know my friends come to school and they have a bummed out day, that's not a*

good school day. If I am having a bummed out day I know I'm not going to do good in school so if I can make that person smile and help them get through school because I know they're going to help me get through school.

One of my most memorable moments of high school was the time was when I did a favor for my friend Phillip and I made a huge impact on everybody a ridiculously huge impact. I did something that help to make someone happy and impact everything. It was on the other campus but it followed me here. You know how everyone calls me Jesus? At Bravo High School I did something. I dressed up in a robe, just in a plain robe Julius Cesar literally. I have a Halloween costume Julius Cesar. No cuff links, no little tiara thing so I just came to school in just the robe and he really wanted to see me wear a robe and my friend George brought some sandals so you know they were actually like these are Jesus sandals and they were like dude put them on and wear the robe. And surprisingly I didn't get in trouble and everybody's jaws were dropped. People were coming up to me saying you look like Jesus. Jesus, it was it was amazing! I really only did it for Frank because he was he was a friend that I made from one month. He was just a stranger and like a really, really good friend. He was amazing so I did it for him before he left school. I also like when everybody starts to remember me cause when I went to high school nobody knew who I was or remembered who I was and then all of a sudden they remembered who I was and they were like that's him, he looks so different and I was really I'm the same person, forward backward, just a little bit older.

LCCA went through a great improvement. I mean, I can't really say anything in my opinion was a great improvement, but some people might like you know say that's there too much--we're losing too many kids and you know all that stuff because they are being stricter and so they can't deal with the strictness; but that's kind of what this school needs. I mean you know

that if you get kicked out of your school and you have to come here, I mean you know you have to be strict because you--I mean they did something wrong or you did something wrong to have to go to this school and you should fix your attitude you know and this like--get done. DRIVE was interesting--interesting. The DRIVE program means work force development class. The definition of a good employee is confidence, determination, and open mindedness. Confidence so they don't doubt themselves, determination so if they fail they keep going, and open mindedness being, you know...well that doesn't seem like something I'd enjoy but I'll try it.

I tried an internship with DRIVE. It's not that I didn't like the internship--it's that like you know it's not it wasn't a good time for me--I mean like I didn't mind it at all--it would have just taken me awhile to get use to it. The times I was to work, I had classes you know not--not a good time. I mean my classes and the internship clashed with each other. There was a class that I needed to be in at the time I was supposed to be at the Bistro. And, they needed me for that specific time so there was no working around it.

They definitely need to do authentic learning. But I mean, like with authentic learning you're gonna need to look at everything. What jobs do this, this, and this and like just kinda need to expect generally around to find out what knowledge need to be known. Because I mean like, you don't need to know algorithm to flip burgers. Besides some of the DRIVE class, I cannot think of any other examples of authentic learning, no. Positive attitude adjustments and a way to think positively is an example from the DRIVE class of authentic learning. I know it's going to impact my future, I mean like, it really depends if I know it's going to impact it but if it's going to impact it the way I want to I'm going to be very interested. If it's not I'm going to kind a shrug it off to the side. But if it's gonna impact me a big way, it's going to be something you know like, I don't believe in you know the whole star set thing, like if you're good at something

*you can do it, yeah you're good but that doesn't mean that's the only thing you're gonna be good at. I mean, like if you wanted to do something and you're bad at it but you're superbly good at something that you don't like doing, you shouldn't be set you know, with the thing that you don't like doing. You should, you know try what you like doing and you know, maybe work your way up to it. Working in groups is something businesses want. The biggest time when we had to work in a group was the DRIVE class where we had to like, create things to help the school, like you know the soccer field and all that stuff and we planned to put picnic tables out there. That was my idea you know. People were probably like why, but you know if people were walking the trails and got tired they could rest at a picnic table, get food from the store, eat outside, but you know that did not go outside. And well, the group was so totally unfocused. I mean, like everybody was distracted by other stuff and I definitely tried. I had my phone and created lists for stuff so if they ever asked so what to do you would have it. And my projects done! If group work goes great the outcome is great, I mean like, you can tackle more problems. But, if the group isn't good together, then conflicts will occur, nothing will probably get done and if stuff does get done only minimum.*

*Teacher taught classes can be better but then it depends on the quality of the teacher. Some teachers can be mean, try to be controlling, anti-fun, and that would make online classes seem like a blast cause you know you can just breeze through it. You don't need to sit there and have a guy yell at you all the time because you're going ahead, you're way past what they are. But probably all of the nice teachers is the thing that will impact my future the most.*

*I don't know if online classes will positively impact me, but I do like it because like I can, I can pay attention to the lectures but I don't really need to focus on them one hundred percent and I can understand it and I'm able to breeze through what I know, with what I've learned and I*

can go faster than normal. I do not have a whole lot of negative about online classes besides me taking classes that, you know, I don't need to graduate. Online classes can definitely do a better job of, you know... making you pay attention, or you know, it's just, they have such a boring, it's boring, it's too plain. They can definitely, like fix it us so that, you know, you might want to pay attention, you know. It's a boring format. I think the best use of online classes is for like if a kids way too rowdy in my opinion, you know like, sasses the teacher and all that stuff, you know, put 'em in front of the computer, and you know, make 'em do that so that the person doesn't have to focus on teaching and discipline. All you know, the kid is learning from the computer, so he can't sass that. But you know, if he, you know, tries to not pay attention or anything the person watching over them can just focus on disciplining, per say. I would rate the online classes a 6 out of 10 not to be mean or anything. When it comes down to online classes, it's like it's not something that's fun, it really isn't. I mean like that's something that you put in like for go for ISS. You could you could make it funner you know like, more entertaining so that it's not a punishment so it doesn't feel like a punishment. It can be used as a punishment. It's just long, dull, boring. I mean like, you sit there and you're trying to watch the lecture and you're going like this. Put some excitement in there!

Well I wouldn't say LCCA is easier because it's just, this school is... yeah, I just wouldn't say easier. It's calmer... more smooth, easier to adjust. But I think the coursework is like other schools. In my experience it's just a little bit more of hands-on learning this year. Well I mean like, the last year's classes I had its still teachers lecturing and you know, we didn't really do a whole lot as stuff. And this year was like we, we go over to the other building and go do stuff, but mainly it was still just sitting there in the classroom learning stuff. I have learned while I was here, but not just in class, it has been about people, like how people think, you know

learning about people. I would say I am interested in some of my classes because I mean like science interests me all the time but, I mean, I love science but like when it's about the government I'm not going to be a politician. I know that for a fact. It is very much so related to what I am interested in. You're gonna be a bad student if your classes are like all the stuff you don't like. The part where you have to learn useless information is the part about school I dread. Learning unneeded information I mean like, some algebra that's like rocket science, you know, stuff like that. I mean like it's just, the classes should be like what do you want to do and they should be like the DRIVE class that tests see like what you would be good at. They should try those and be like well this is what they'd be good at and you know then ask a student well what do you think you're gonna want to do when you grow up and then you know they gave you an answer you know maybe create a little test for yourself and then compare the two you know see meet the middle. Then teach students what they could use and you know show them that there's this pathway that you could do and you would be very good at it so if that that's what happens if that dude would be a great rocket scientist so there's the math point that some of us but a lot of us don't need. You could make a lot of money you could learn this stuff and you know be pretty good at it but you know you want to do this over here so we give you a few of these classes and if you don't like them come talk to us we'll you know change them for something you can actually use and you actually don't mind.

Some of my classes are preparing me for my future. Some, very much so. But my classes this year...they really haven't prepared me for the future. Language Arts, uh, science. Math is useful except for the like, Algebra 1 you can do but the rest no. Maybe a little bit of Geometry, Geometry 1--all the basics. But you know when it goes to like, oh you know, you're gonna learn Algebra 2 and you know like Advanced Geometry, and you know, Pre-Calculus. No, save that

stuff for the, when classes or when you know education actually requires Math. I mean like, if you're going out to be a mechanic you're not gonna need a whole lot of Algebra, you're only gonna need a certain type. And then, be like well, you know you need this type of Math to do this, well then no. Let him learn that type of Math to go into the job, not just learn it all in general in high school. Not all of us are gonna grow up to be, you know, a rocket scientist, or engineers, or you know, people who do mathematical algorithms. So don't, don't teach us the stuff now because that, that puts too much strain on us. I feel prepared to graduate and move on to my next phase in life. I'm always prepared. I prepare for everything. I mean like, I know that's really, really difficult but you know like I think of everything you know, I try to expect what happens to me before it happens to me.

My relationship with my teachers is very, very important to me because if you connect with teachers on a personal level you can both understand each other more, like if you're having a problem with a topic, it's easier to explain to them...I'm having a hard time in my life and this is blah blah blah blah. You don't really tell that stuff to teachers. You know it's on a personal level so if you're both on a personal level you can say you know I'm going through a hard time in my life so this is kind of a subject that has kinda given me a stop. So can you help me with it and they'll help you. I mean you don't need a counselor for I mean you don't need to go see a counselor cause I mean like my mom and dad are in a fight you know because you have that teacher support. LCCA is a small school. I feel yes and no on liking a small school. Yes because it's easy to you know seek out you know people, it's like hey it's easy to make a first impression, it is easy to spread.

People think if you're sent to LCCA, you're stupid. No, make it seem like if you go to LCCA this is, you know, this is, just like a school, although, you know, we give you another

chance. I think, in my opinion, trying to make this more like a school. I don't know, here, I don't feel like a student. Cause I mean, I'm not treated as a student and I don't act like a student. I act like an adult and get treated like an adult. I mean, I don't get in trouble a whole lot and people understand me. In twenty years, I will remember all of the good people in high school.

I did not change my plans for the future but you know, LCCA helped me find out what I want to do cause I was unsure and not one hundred percent, so I was like, well I could want to do my own business, kind of thing and to help people out, but nah... that would just, that would just...so LCCA helped me be a little more focused.

I hope to pull a miracle and graduate this year and then be like ok and then you know. But maybe move on to college, hopefully. But, not too soon. I plan to have a little R&R, and then you know maybe get a job, then go to college. That way I have some income and if like, sorry we can't pay for your college right now. I could be like okay, I, luckily I saved up this amount of money for this.

When I graduate, I'll take a few years off school and then I'll head into college. If not, then after that I'll just get a job and work there a little bit--make some money and then go into college. But first, I guess I plan on getting a degree in probably, science or, something to do with something that could help people. I will probably go into something with a little bit of forensics--science and focus on that and once I get a degree there, I'll get a job with that degree and then work my way deeper through getting a better degree and a job that pays more. Like a forensic detective is the thing that the closest degree, that I could get and then probably I'll be working for my psychology degree. I would love to be a psychologist, I love helping people, you have no idea. My next step is college. I am going to take a little time off after I graduate though.

*I will graduate in either May or December, whichever that comes first. So, if I don't make it this school year, which will be photo finish, I think; then I'll just finish up when I come back.*

### **Lamar**

Lamar is an 18-year-old student enrolled in the Lanier Choice program and working towards his diploma. He had planned to graduate in May of 2013; however he did not complete the requirement for high school graduation. In reality, he will probably complete his degree in December. Lamar has 13.5 units of credit, but was enrolled in 8 classes during the 2012-2013 school year and if he earned credit in all 8 classes, would put him within reach of a diploma within one more semester. Attendance is not a significant issue for Lamar, but he does have a problem with discipline. Lamar's DRIVE teacher made the following observations of his classroom behavior:

*Lamar is reluctant to be actively involved in class unless continuously encouraged. He would periodically participate in discussions, but again if directly asked. Lamar would complete most of his assignments. His overall work quality was mediocre even though if he would have made an effort he could have excelled—he made a statement to me toward the end of the semester that being bright was not the way to be part of the group! Depending on whether he was actually working on activities and if he was having a “good” day, he was not disruptive—otherwise he would be argumentative when redirected.*

At a traditional school, Lamar had over 60 referrals usually dealing with disrespect, defiance, or disruption of class. Since coming to LCCA, Lamar has continued to have discipline issues with 11 referrals involving profanity, class disruption, and disrespect. When observed in

class, Lamar often seems disengaged with his head down on the table. He did not interact well with others in the classroom for the most part. Meet Lamar:

*I wake up, brush my teeth, my hair. Like probably yell at some people at my house--just because. Then I'll either get a ride to Bravo High or I'll ride the bus with my little brother. Get to school, I sleep. I sleep in the morning and then like, we go to math class and I sleep again in support and then I have to wake up. Then I go back to Bravo High to ride the bus home. And talk to some friends and stuff and then I go home and talk to me girlfriend all night--so. Sometimes we stay up till like 4:00. That is not the reason I sleep through my classes. I was like this before we ever got together.*

*I think I was sent to LCCA because they put me out of Bravo High they said I had too many tardies. They didn't really give me a reason--I thought it was like, I had too many tardies and then they told me I had an attitude problem. And I was like okay. Then they called my mom and told me that I had to come here and I was like whatever.*

*Actually, if I had a choice I would have stayed at Bravo High. But, they sent me here, and my mom was like it would be better anyway. I've been here since last year, probably the start of 2011. Ah man, like January--cause it was like after Christmas. It was 2011. It was like suppose to be my Junior year at Bravo High, so yeah it was 11. The principal, Coach Lancy, was the one that talked to my mom about me coming.*

*I have had a lot problems with my teachers. That's probably why too, cause I was in math for like three years. Cause the teachers were...gosh... Yeah, it was terrible. The teachers...two of 'em quit. It was like my freshman year. Their quitting was because of me and the other one, it was my sophomore year, and she was pregnant and she tried to blame her falling and killing her baby on me and I was like get out a here. Cause she liked walked into a*

*box and I was sitting at my desk so I had nothing to do with it. And then she like she almost fell and was freaking out and she yelled at the whole class and I was just like laughing cause I was like I didn't do anything. They always thought it would be funny to blame stuff on me--but whatever.*

*At Bravo High, I wasn't getting most of my work done because when I was in ISS there was a lot of people that I knew in there and we would talk a lot, and they said that I had an attitude problem, but I, I don't think so. I might but I don't like being talked to a certain kinda way by people. And I express myself very freely.*

*I think the biggest challenge to me being success in school is not letting stuff for my future hold me back. I let a lot of things get to me. I had a rough childhood. Part of that was probably when my dad passed away. My mom told me about it when we were at Chick-Fil-A and I had a hard time with it, it's probably the reason I didn't want to go to Bravo High anymore, cause I didn't feel like I should and, it was just, it was just hard. It was awkward. He was never there but, hearing that he was gone for good and that I was never going to meet him. It was just too much.*

*In my house now, there is four of us. My mom has high blood pressure, she is never there. She got another job because hers sucks. Excuse the language. It's just hard, it's hard on us cause when I had a job I was paying all the bills. My brother is 23, staying in our basement cause he lost his apartment and he is not even doing anything really. He is in college, but it doesn't show. He is working at Dairy Queen. Not bringing any type of money to the house. My mom is getting mad. She won't tell him. She wants me or my little brother to tell him. I don't got nothing to do with it cause I just want to leave. That's why I do not want to stay here. I have*

*had too much bad experiences in Georgia. It's stupid. I want to leave. Yeah, I need to forget about everything.*

*I didn't really care last year. Most of it was because of my dad dying--it was just like it did not matter anymore cause he was never going to come back. I didn't care. Died on like September, it was like nine days after my birthday when I found out. He was in Oklahoma.*

*Plus, my attitude has changed since I was seven. My grandma died. It was weird. Like after that I mean, I've never been the same. That's when my attitude yeah, went from wanting to be something to it really doesn't matter. That's when she died. I talked to her about everything. Even though I was little. She did not live with us.*

*It's like we have a dysfunctional family, but that's whatever. So I have two older brothers, me and a baby brother. My sister. She's 20, she will be 21 in October. My sister is out on her own, now she is.*

*I'm pretty motivated though, I think if I finish all the stuff that I have to do this year, I think I have like three more classes to take which is not, it wouldn't be that bad, but like if I could do it, like over the summer, graduate before the end of the year, it'd be alright. If I couldn't then my mom would be very upset with me. So, I got to figure out how I'm gonna do that. But I'll be 19.*

*I am actually very motivated to have a successful career because my sister had, my sister got her GED and she had got pregnant and we didn't even know, and she had her daughter and we went to her baby shower and everything, and my sister just got a job, like, not even three and a half months ago. Like, that she wants to keep, she's at Bojangles and she's got two kids. Um, ones about to be, one, one'll be, she'll turn 1 in ten days, and then my other niece she'll be 2 on February the 25<sup>th</sup>. My sister has my car because she doesn't have one, and she got kicked out of*

*my moms house so she's staying with my sister-in-law and some friends. I just don't want to end up like that.*

*But I am not graduating at the end of this school year. My family doesn't even know about it. And I really don't want to tell them cause they will freak out. My mom will probably threaten to kick me out and I am just going to tell her I am going to leave. My mom thinks I am going to graduate in May. I am like six classes short, cause like if I finish, if I get all the ones done like I am taking now then I have six left. I mean I look at it at least I am graduating. I get a diploma not a GED. Both my older brothers have diplomas. They were both examples until they became convicted felons and they want to tell me how to live my life. I don't listen to it. I was trying to be a better example to my little brother than they were but stuff just gets hard. That didn't really work. Cause he will be a freshman next year. We both are going to be in high school. It is going to be weird. But he is not going to see me--so I me guess like its whatever. He goes to Derrick Middle then he will be at Bravo High. Probably. If I was going to tell my baby brother something about school I would say don't play around, just get it done. It's what I tell him now. It is not easy, but you can do it.*

*I want to graduate, so I don't have to be like my sister and be a better example for my little brother than I am right now. I want to go to college and show my mom I could. I want to graduate and show my mom that I can actually do something with myself. So, cause my sister just got her GED, and I wanted to do more than that, and my little brothers going, my little brothers doing better in school than I am, but he gets in all the trouble, but his grades are better than mine were, not in middle school and I wanted to show her that I can do better than what I was showing her. But not a lot makes me interested in school. I mean, I see a lot of people I know, and I like interacting with other people, like, I'm very like, I wouldn't say like talkative,*

but I talk a lot. I just like being around a group of people but when it comes to like, doing my work I prefer to work alone. If I'm alone, I stay on task better. Yeah, because I have a hard time focusing say when I am around friends... that is why I am always in trouble. Can't keep my mouth shut--that's what my teachers say. And, math makes me dread coming to school, that is pretty much it.

At LCCA, a lot of people are starting to care more. Like last year, everybody that was here, they didn't really care, they didn't really do a lot, but like now people actually want to do something. The students and the teachers are like way more strict, and the students I think they want to do more because they realize that like, you can't get anywhere in life without a high school diploma. And it's important, I use to didn't think it was, because I figured if you had a job you had a job. Teachers are a little bit more supportive. I mean, I ask for space and I don't get it and that is why I always get in trouble. Like if, if I ask nicely, if I can go sit in the hall would you or would you not let me? That's how I think about it. Cause it's like I ask Mr. Sanders the other day, so like you know, I don't think I am going to be good in class so can I sit out in the hall. So he was like--we will see how you do. So he sent me out there. So I was like this is why I am always in trouble because y'all don't listen. I ask you nicely. I always do, cause I don't handle people well, especially when they start talking.

Bravo High they didn't really do stuff to help you. They expected you to know what you needed to know because we use, we had to take the bench mark a lot. So, they expect you to know more, like as you progressed like from your freshmen year your supposed to know it, cause you go, they repeat everything over again, like when you were in like math 1 you did stuff from like 8th grade math, and then when you go to math 2 you did stuff from math 1 so they expect you to know some of the stuff.

School has showed me a lot, because like a lot of stuff that I use to do, like when I went to Bravo High I never took notes, I never did my homework because I didn't like it, but now that I actually see that you can't do, you can't do a lot of things. Like when I was at work at Burger King and I don't want to do that for the rest of my life, so I figured that if I get my high school diploma and I do college then I'll be somewhere. Yeah, I don't want to be here for the rest of my life.

My next step is to apply for college after I graduate. I'm just probably going to stay around here. I was thinking about North Georgia. That's where my brother goes. He just got back in college at the Gainesville campus. I want to be some type of computer technician. We had to make websites in Mrs. Whitlock's class, so. I want to do something, I want to be better than what my dad was, pretty much. And, I want to be somebody my little brother can look up to.

I think classes are easier at LCCA. Very. I don't know but I think its because the classes are smaller than at like the other schools and like the teachers care more--it seems like that takes a lot of pressure off. But, I think the coursework is pretty much the same. That makes it easier, it is a lot more laid back. I don't know if that is a good thing or whatever.

The DRIVE Class was boring. I mean I learned a lot of stuff, but like at the same time I knew most of it. I mean it was not that much stuff that was new. It was just a lot of stuff that's like you're like welcome yourself into the real world. Like become a natural adult. So yeah. I learned that stuff from my family, my brothers They always wanted us to be someone. They like gave us life lessons for no reason.

I like most of the classes, like I had a lot of online classes last year and I like that now that we have like actual teacher taught classes cause it's easier online classes is just, it's difficult. Well... I wouldn't say boring but it's not like as good as having a teacher. I stay on

*task better with hands on stuff, online classes... um ugh, that's why I'm still taking Math I, it's terrible. I stay on task better if I'm alone. I have finally finished my online classes Math I class. I took it three years. It was terrible. I have a lot of teacher taught classes. I only have one online classes class this semester and that made me very upset. I need like two so I could get more of my work done cause 55 minutes isn't enough for three classes. Online classes could be more better if the lectures could be more fun and entertaining to watch. I think online classes is better than being in a teacher taught class for the most part. Because in online classes it is all there. Some of the teachers beat around the bush and they make you figure it out for yourself and I don't like being in a classroom. There is too many people. Uh, I mean it is blended pretty nice. Like I have teacher taught classes and online classes which is good because if you take all your classes on online classes your will be here forever. Unless, you're just like a genius.*

*But my math classes will help me with my future cause you have to know Math to calculate like computer stuff. Oh, when we were in Mrs. Whitlock's class and you know that little DRIVE thing we had to do to manage your budget and everything, well I've got to do that at home now cause my mom recently lost her job and they moved her to Hamilton Mill in a different like--I don't know how to say the word--different spot than what she was up here and I have to do all the stuff at the house. A lot of the visitors we had come talk to us they showed told us what they had to go through to get their diplomas and everything--made me think about mine. I use math lot at work, language skills would come in handy, cause I talk a lot at work, I speak to people, I take and stuff like that and I don't know about like history or any or that. Science could come in handy, but I don't know how. I like most of my classes, except math, cause I don't like math. No, numbers and letters what's the point.*

I felt successful well when I was in first grade my uncle told me that if I'd passed my spelling test he would take me out for ice cream and I barely past it, like, I got like a 75, and I was pretty upset cause I should of got an 80 but she missed one, but I was okay with it but I got ice cream for it I felt pretty successful then, and then when my mom told me that um, there was something that had happened. No, when I first when I got my job a Burger King actually, cause my brother called up there and set up my interview and things I went up there and then she gave me a call back and she said we are gonna need you to be here Monday and I was like; awesome. But I recently lost my job at Burger King. It's a long story. Very awkward.

My most memorable moment from high school was my first A+ in math--I made an A on a test that was probably the last one I got though. It was my freshmen year at Bravo High and my teacher was Mr. Parless.

I had a story one time when I got in trouble though, but I don't think I did anything wrong. I sat down and I was told to leave the room. Yeah. I don't know one that I did because I haven't really done anything good since I been here, is what everybody else says, but I don't agree, I've done most of my work. I've done my part. I just have trouble with staying on task and like, focusing.

Authentic--I forgot the definition of authentic--is it like different? I don't know--like a lot of posters--visual stuff, easier to see instead of writing on the board. I think authentic stuff would help, beneficial. I don't have an example. Not really--we had to fill out an application but, I don't know if that would be authentic in Mrs. Whitlock's class. Stuff like that is easier for me.

*But in DRIVE...I don't work well in groups. I do things alone, but if like I am forced to work in a group--then I don't have a choice. In a group, you are not doing it by yourself. The work is spread out like evenly. But if you don't get along with everybody it is bad. I have a hard time focusing say when I am around friends. But if teachers would put me in a corner, like I ask them to--but they never do. I guess it is something like they are not allowed to do. I would like to sit alone.*

*I think LCCA and DRIVE used a lot of hands on learning cause it is a lot of paper work that gets you ready for the real world. I think it would have been better to actually go, go to an actually workplace. Like go on a field trip. I don't know--maybe like figure out what the students want to do and have assignments based on that or like real life situations. That would be cool. Maybe more of a general preparation to go to college.*

*I don't know. I could do better. I could do a lot better than I am right now. I know that much. It is just personal. The school is doing everything they can just some kids want to do it their own way. I don't really--don't really try to establish relationships. I just try to do my work and get it over with and if the teachers like me--they like me and if they don't--they don't. I like the hands on, online classes...um ugh, that's why I'm still taking Math I. I could do Math I just choose not to. I'm smarter than I act. I figured that out over the weekend and my teachers say the same thing never really listened. I would already be out of high school if I paid attention and just applied myself. I don't want to go three to six because I can't I won't be able to make it, so if I go three to six I might as well just drop out, cause I can't make it. So I actually realize I've got to get my work finished. I don't wanna wear a white shirt everyday...feel like I'm in jail.*

*Motivation, something like--something that makes you want to do something--something that gives you encouragement--something you work for. I don't know when I feel pretty*

*motivated, just doing a lot of stuff by myself. Kind of makes me feel different than I did before. I like money...I like food too, like a lot of stuff--a lot of different things motivate. Like, like if I worked towards an A that could be something that would motivate me. Like getting an A, and I would get a prize--so to speak at home--like go out to dinner with my mom or something--that would be motivation. I don't get to spend a lot of time with my mom. Nothing should stop you from doing what you want to do.*

*If I could create my perfect high school, it would just have a lot of fun activities and like students actually, who actually want to do something with themselves. Like, the people that like waste their time and stuff they just I wouldn't allow them to come to school. Not to be rude or anything, but if you're not here to learn then what's the point of you being here? That would be mine.*

*But for me LCCA means education and a chance. In the DRIVE program I learned a lot more than I thought I did when I got an actual job. I was already there before the DRIVE program. It showed--like helped a lot. When I first came here I didn't really do to good. If I would have like applied myself I would only had to take six classes this year. Now I have to do the classes that I have right now and more next year and I won't graduate until probably December. I wish I had gotten serious cause I really don't want to be here next year. Yeah, this May is supposed to be when I graduate. But I will probably graduate in December. I don't know what it will be like when I graduate. In twenty years, I will remember probably my friends that pushed me to graduate.*

*I recently thought about the military. And get away from here. I don't want to be in Georgia anymore. It's too much. Yeah, I want to get away from my family most of all. It's probably going to go to the military. I have to go talk to a recruiter sometime this week,*

*actually. See what they are talking about. I am not going to signing up or anything. I just want to see what they are talking about.*

### **Josephine**

Josephine is a 16-year-old parenting student. She had been involved with a gang in the past and often wears gang colors still even though she professes not to be involved with gang activities currently. She has completed school a year early due to the flexible nature of the LCCA program and graduated with a high school diploma in May 2013. Early in the 2012-2103 school year, Josephine had some discipline issues from fighting with another girl who was in a relationship her baby's father. Josephine was also the victim of domestic violence in the fall semester from her boyfriend physically abusing her. The school reported the incident, however, she remained with the boyfriend. Josephine lived with her mother for a few months early in the 2012-2013 school year, but then moved in with her boyfriend by mid-year. She has little to no contact with her mother now and is emancipated to act as an adult.

Josephine was very engaged in her classroom and submitted quality work on individual and group projects. She was a quick learner. During the 2011-2012 school year, attendance was an issue for Josephine. For example, she missed 89 first period classes during the 2011-2012 time frame. Her attendance had a great improvement during the 2012-13 school year, however she still missed up to 30 class periods in her second period class. Josephine's DRIVE teacher shared the following observations:

*Josephine was very engaged in activities, asked questions, and made suggestions. If she was working on new software she had not used before she worked through it and quickly showed other students how to use it. She always completed her assignments even if it required having to come in to class to make-up assignments. She did hit a major bump in the road during the*

*semester, but was very determined to come up with solutions that would work for her. I recommended that she have an opportunity for an internship and she is the new example of how to succeed when presented with life's challenges. Wow, what a wonderful transition to have had the opportunity to observe. Josephine was an angry and defiant teenager the year before, but made some good decisions for herself that has opened many doors and hearts of teachers this year.*

Josephine has had four discipline referrals since coming to LCCA in 2011. However, Josephine had over 30 discipline referrals in a traditional high school that mostly involved disrespectful behavior and cursing. Meet Josephine:

*When I was coming to school and working, I would get up come to school. Sometimes, I would leave early and sometimes I wouldn't, just do work to get through the day. Then I leave exactly for work the days I worked and get off at about 11. Sometimes, I even work overnight which was till 6 in the morning and then come right back to school. So, there wasn't much to my day. I was working at McDonald's. I only had two days off a week so I did not get to see my son much. I like not working and people tell me you know that I don't have to work, but it is more myself, I want to work and stuff. But, like, now that I don't work, I get up, you know, he has more of a structured scheduled since he's at home all the time and he does not have to be back and forth at a day care--somebody's house and stuff. And, we go to bed at a decent time; wake up, feed him and we go play outside or something. You know, it is more to our day and interactive than just like when I get home I want to lay down.*

*Last year when I was 16, I moved to LCCA for the daycare for my son from High School D. I had already had my son the summer before. When I got here it was not that great of a year. Not so much with the education, it was just myself too, I wasn't very--I was still in some troubled*

times and stuff so. I wasn't as positive as I guess you could say as I have been this year. I did not think I was going to graduate last year, I--last year I only got two credits out of 8 classes that I had. I had so much with him, things like at one point I didn't have transportation for like two months and so I just kind of gave up. Just coming back this year and it was actually the school year--seeing that they have made changes now I think that if a lot of people knew like you, Mrs. G and even Ms. Buffington that have changed it up and more supportive and you know it's a more strict environment that made me not give up. I mostly changed because of my baby, because I was just tired of regular school. And I mean last year I didn't quite do much work. I only passed like, half of two classes, I only did half of two classes. This year, like, I like it a lot better.

A settled environment is why I come to school--not so much as the school itself but just like I don't know like I kind of like secluded myself just because of the fact that there are kids around here you know that I am not to--I don't get along with some of them and stuff. Lot of them are like I knew I couldn't associate with- with my trying to move forward and so kind of just--I don't know--I don't really have that motivation to come to school-but to finish.

Myself...that is my success story. I have gotten so much credits this year. At the end of this year, I would have earned 13 credits in a year. I only had 11 at the beginning of this year. I have been knocking out classes.

Just the thought of knowing that if I don't do this I can't move on further in life. And like, I only talk to a few people so I don't, kinda like drag myself into the other people around here, so I kinda can get through it better. It's a lot easier on me, to do my work and focus and stuff. My life is becoming more and more progressive. In, it's always a little set back, but like each time

*no matter what happens you--I progress a lot and I get set back a little but not so much where it just takes away all the progression it slowly progressing. I am making forward progress.*

*Motivation basically is something that inspires you or pushes you to do good or just advance and excel. I am very motivated more just like, kind of more just a personal thing as to you know how I've grown up and seen that I have the potential and I want to put it to use. The things that motivate me are my son. My family because none of them have been to college or even like had a good career so a lot of them kind of struggle just to make it by. I want to live my life with ease. It's more of like a personal feeling and strive to--just what I've come from you know just to see that--oh well it's just time to change that around. I have somebody dependent on me, you know. Like my mom--you know not like I'm putting her down--but I could not really depend on her for anything financially and stuff and I don't want to have my child going up like me. I have challenges with transportation and just staying focused, like keeping my motivation cause there's times when like, I'll feel like can I really do this? My greatest challenge, it's quite a few things but mainly just like negative, negativity like stuff that brought me down and not letting it defeat me. But a success is my child and knowing that I've made something on myself and I didn't let all the negativity in my life bring me down.*

*Last year was not real good. There was, mostly because there was a--kids mixed in with the behavior part and there was a lot of negativity around and teachers were always like so frustrated and worn out--as I see it now, you know--last year I didn't but teachers were very like overwhelmed themselves and you couldn't really get the focus you needed on each student.*

*But just the thought of knowing that if I don't do this I can't move on further in life. And like, I only talk to a few people so I don't, kinda like drag myself into the other people around here, so I kinda can get through it better. It's a lot easier on me, to do my work and focus and*

stuff. Now this year, I have earned 13 credits and I am graduating a year early. This year, like, I like it a lot better. So I graduate in May.

The classes taught me a lot. You know like with the online classes lab I've written down all my notes so that I'll have all of that stuff to keep with me for like if I go to college and take like core classes and stuff that'll help--kind of look over to refresh. Multicultural lit was really helpful cause it kind of got me to look at aspects of others people culture that I didn't look at in kind of you know--literature affects our community all in itself and math cause I plan on having a business so that helps in kind of a financial aspect with some things. But some things that make it not easier like you know people can get off task easier you know and it is kind of hard to focus on a computer all day like that when you are in online classes. I think that like that the mixture of teaching taught and online classes helps. The coursework here is a little bit harder, like to focus on and to get through as far as help and stuff like that and when it comes to the EOCTS that was my main problem cause they didn't kind of match up on the online classes with the EOCT standards. You learn more from teacher-taught classes.

Mostly I would say that I am interested in my classes. I really like literature. You see so many different things. Social studies was okay. We learned about our history and stuff. Math not too much. DRIVE teaches me a lot, like we have a lot of opportunities and like, with these jobs I can get experience and stuff to do more, um, when I graduate and stuff instead of just sticking to like, a normal job. The school has a lot of job opportunity, more career focused, a lot more support from like staff and teachers than it was last year. The fact that they don't have like, so many of the disciplinary kids kept in our environment so, there's not a lot of problems or major problems. The job opportunities and like the DRIVE class helped me a lot cause I learned a lot of stuff about like, businesses because I want to become like, go into the business

management field. I learned a lot, well, like, businesses that I would've never known at such early time. So when I do go to college for it, it'll be helpful cause I'll already be kinda knowledgeable about it.

I took the DRIVE class and then all online classes except my internship this past year. The DRIVE program changed my viewpoint when more of like when they had the speakers come in and like talked about graduating stuff it pushed me more toward graduating this year, sooner to get you know out and onto working--adult life faster. The people coming in to talk, the speakers and I like that, cause it gave us, it's not like just a teacher telling us that who doesn't really have experience in the work place, besides being a teacher, but people from different view points and, we see how they actually apply their skills to their job and stuff. When we did the, I forgot what it was called, we did it next door where we like had to do like the money--The Reality Check, cause it help like learning that you are going to have to be on a budget and that some things can come unexpected and stuff and prepare yourself for those things. I've learned a lot of work ethic skills in there. I think I will be a good employee. I would describe the DRIVE curriculum as very useful.

I would say DRIVE and LCCA used more hands-on stuff because they done, we did a lot of activities that we actually had to participate in and there was more group work and not so individual. We worked together in a group a lot of time like in the DRIVE class we did projects and stuff. Like one we had to do was improvement on the school and it help working in a group cause we had more--had everybody's ideas and we were able to test them and see which ones were more better. The benefit to groups is like having other people's perspective you know not to have to handle everything by yourself. The drawbacks to groups are disagreements and slackers. I hate slackers in a school setting.

*If teachers want to get my attention in a class they should not talk so much. They just, not all but some teachers, will like talk, talk and talk and they will talk so fast that you can't keep up. It's like you only get part of what they're trying to teach you. But I don't know how I can tell something is important when I am learning. Authentic learning actually, helps you in--I don't know--it provides like--I don't know how to say it when it comes to explaining. Like providing the fundamentals that we need for our future--but not for just our future but our every day life. Kinda like real life. Authentic learning is very much needed and it was in some and then sometimes it wasn't in others. An example is when like with the DRIVE class, they--we did projects like and stuff that were more like you said hands on and stuff so it actually helped us be like interacting with it, helped us getting to know what it's like instead of just being like, oh this is what's going to happen you know. I am more interested, definitely, when authentic learning is in a classroom because you can better--be more like not interactive--but more like uh involved and interested in what you are learning as for as if it's not--other people just push it to the side and doesn't really get learned. I would say to improve DRIVE would be to do more--like we were suppose to keep doing the reality check thing and working with it and we kind of just did it that one time and we didn't use more afterwards.*

*I worked as an intern in the Bistro. At first my internship was real good you know and I enjoyed overall I enjoyed the whole experience of it and the industry and stuff. There was this negative to it--as of people, you know I feel like sometimes they didn't really understand. I think you know they were just at a time, I felt like they were trying to get everything of Mrs. Sandy, but they tried to put it all on me. And all though, you know, I got a lot of it completed sometimes it was just like an overbearing day. The transition was overwhelming and very fast.*

*It's been good being a student at LCCA and I like the fact that you know it's more of a leeway like with me--people were very lenient and understanding so like my schedule and stuff and I was able to work around it and you know if I needed to leave early, I could go ahead and leave. I like coming to a small school because you get more you know you can get more of that support and help and people know who you are. You're not just another number student. Ten years from now I will say LCCA helped me advance a lot faster. In general how much LCCA has changed and the fact that the people are so supporting this year and giving so much opportunities has been good. Just knowing that there was people that support me--not just like a specific moment but knowing that when I needed the help it was there. I think, I didn't--you know there are some people like if we come to you, you guys help us out--like college information and stuff but sometimes it is not just like--it's like this is what you need to do. Yeah, more like think more of like informing us of deadlines and stuff. Like after college, they see we are more prepared to move on. Some of the kids is what I like least about LCCA.*

*In a perfect school, I wouldn't so much have like internet classes but I would have classes where like, they could work independently more independent study, and have a few more support systems like give them lots of opportunities to do clubs, add the sports and stuff in there activities.*

*I will remember that this was a good school and that teachers were very supportive and I was telling Ms. Whitlock that you know when I eventually get my business and stuff and how they have people who became successful come here, I would do that to. Just to show that no matter you know how far back you are there is always a way to push and do something if you actually have your heart set on doing it...if you have people in the school environment that will help you out. My relationships with my teachers are very important. The more I feel you know*

have--if you have a negative relationship with your teachers you don't really learn. Like math class was never very easy for me cause I did not get along with the teacher; but then when I did, I could go to them if I needed help with something.

There's a lot of choices, but right now I have it set on cosmetology. Since I'm graduating early I plan just to kinda wait out a year, so, and then do business management. I like all things like, that deal with creativity and, I'm very sociable. But I have always had my heart set on what I want to do. I want to be a business owner in cosmetology. As far as just like the whole cosmetology industry that's more of just a passion and something I like. As far as the businessmen management part like, people like letting me know like me see how the business industry actually is and, like giving me resources and stuff of how to go about that. I think my life will be good once I graduate. Steady, successful. When I graduate, I am going to cosmetology school first and I plan on opening my business while I am going to school for it, if I can so I will be able to work while I still want that business aspect to help me out, you know. You need somebody to teach you so you can teach somebody else. I sort of feel prepared to move onto the next phase of my life. I think physically and stuff I am prepared, but emotionally I'm kind of held back. I am just nervous. I am actually thinking about going to another cosmetology school, just because it's less time and I've looked--I have evaluated both of them and it's the same thing you know it's master cosmetologist degree. It's Area Barber and Beauty Academy.

I think you can get through to some people. I think it's more of a, you know, you can only help people so much and them at the end of the day it's their choice and their desire. But, if you look at, you know, it doesn't--you're in the last stage of moving forward--even if you don't go to college just having a high school diploma all in itself can help you in your future. You know, just look at your future cause like a lot of the kids that kind of come don't come back are more like

*into gangs and into the negativity as from coming from that stuff and seeing that stuff from other people around me it's like--it's not worth it and yeah, it's cool during the time but there is so much more to life than just that.*

### **Miguel**

Miguel is an 18-year-old student enrolled in the Project Forward program working towards his GED. Miguel has 8.5 units of credit with no units of earned credit in English or science. Miguel is a quiet student who is very mannerable. His attendance had been sporadic during the spring semester with 81 class absences during his 2<sup>nd</sup> period class. Many of his absences were due to a work schedule and his overriding need to earn money to support his family. His DRIVE teacher provided the following observation:

*Miguel is very willing to participate in class. He worked with the ESOL students so that they could participate and not get behind in class. Miguel did take ownership of his lack of motivation from last year and has made the decision that he wants to really apply himself this year so that he can take the GED test. He has made great efforts to produce quality work with little prompting.*

Miguel's reading teacher shared that she "loves this kid, but he just doesn't show the motivation (at least in my class) to get his GED completed." Miguel is still enrolled in the program and works in math and reading classes to gain a greater understanding of content knowledge to eventually take the GED test. Miguel has had a few discipline referrals while at LCCA for leaving campus without checking out or cutting classes. When enrolled at a traditional school, Miguel had 13 discipline referrals which included issues of fighting, cutting class, excessive tardies, and being disrespectful. Miguel is very artistic and when observed in the classroom, was taking ownership of the drawing aspect of a group project. Meet Miguel:

*I get up, get ready for school. Come to school, start early as possible, because the earlier you are here the more learning you get. So, after that I finish the class up here. I go straight to work at Little Caesars where I work seven days a week. I get off--since I got into a little problem so I have to get off at 9:00.*

*The reason why I came over here two years ago was because some bad mistakes my freshmen year. I messed up a lot like, the way I was I acted differently, I got into trouble. I was in a bad background and just a lot of stuff came in my head, so I guess my freshmen year I just started messing up, I started just getting into trouble and all that. It's like they, you know, told me how much credits I have and if I stayed there I was going to get out when I was 19 and I did not want that. I was not putting in effort, caring less. Just immature stuff, that's what got me over here from Apple High. I came over here when I was 17. They didn't make me come over here, but they really did not give me an option.*

*Well, I don't know if I should be saying anything this, but I went to jail...and that really hit me, you know, drugs, alcohol. There went everything. I looked at it and I was like that little bit can cause all this. My family, friends, my job, my school, you know it's not working. A big wakeup call. But as soon as I got to this school that's when I started changing, I mean, at first nothing was changed, as much, but then as the days progressed, like I started seeing myself like, nah, this ain't who I am, you know, I have to try, and so I did and right now, I'm doing pretty good, as far as I know and my teachers do. Last year, since I had my friends over here and like in the first month I was goofing around then that's when it hit me you know I was starting to see my friends disappearing because of their bad choices...so I thinking I don't want to be like that, you know. This is the last opportunity and I have to take advantage of it.*

*The move for me was really successful...well one part being here and that's one thing, and I think was successful to me, cause the way, I was back then I don't think I would have come over here, I think I would've just dropped out. The bad was when I was in Apple High school I always got in trouble, always get in fights--cause I have a short temper and the good about it though is now I control my temper--I don't snap.*

*My motivation to stay in school, well, I see my brother that he doesn't have papers and it just gets to me, you know, there's other people that have papers and have the opportunity to finish school or to do something with their self whether, and there's some other people that don't. That's one of the things why I like--like trying, cause he can't go to school cause he has no papers and sees no point in it so--to be one reason why I can't be selfish like that. What other people might have, I have to think about that. Well that's when I start figuring out, well I got to learn this to help me out later on in life. But reality made me change. You know, you just think about it--you can't goof off the rest of your life you are not going to get nowhere. If you want a high school degree, you want to have a good job, set your goals out and if you are slacking off you are not going to set your goals and complete them. You know so I was thinking, I got to try I want a better life for me and my family so my family could see that I could make it. So, pretty much my family. My big challenge was when my dad was gonna get deported, I had to, it was my dad and my brother both getting deported and I was concentrating more on my job to give money to my mom, to apply for the food, rent, electricity, basically the whole shelter, and it was only me and that was one big challenge I had. I do have a success story. There was this one time well we were in art class and we were just doodling with the clay and what not and I actually got second place even though I don't got first place--I got second place and that still made me happy and I thought that was a success for me. Oh, and also moving out at the age of*

*17 being independent. Even though it is not right and you are not supposed to do it. And my attitude, I have a more positive attitude.*

*But through that I stay focused on my school. It was all me--my parents are not going to tell me do this and that, this and that, cause they are going to tell me you are a grown man--you know guy--so yeah. They just give me that motivation to finish as soon as possible.*

*I always wanted to be an architect. That's one thing I wanted always do, and hopefully finishing this school will help me out with that career path. I love drawing, I love math, I love designing, I love all those stuff so, that's, I'd rather have a job that I like than I don't like. I don't want to be working like in a fast food restaurant for the rest of my life, you know, I want to make something of myself. I am very motivated to get my GED because, well, like I said I love drawing. I like drawing; I like designing. I like creating new ideas and yeah. And, I also want to show my mom that I can actually do it. I come to school everyday because I just don't want to be a normal person. I want to be out there--I want everyone to know what I do--what I love doing.*

*Motivation--well like my motivation is like something that is pushing you--like you know you want to stop but you just got to keep going--keep going. You got to think about the negative--like what happens when you stop right now- you know I don't want to be like that--I want to be someone above that. Motivation for me is like just keep moving--keep going--keep going.*

*My motivation is what I will remember about high school. And, reality, you just think about it--you can't goof off the rest of your life you are not going to get nowhere. You have to set your goals out and if you are slacking off you are not going to set your goals and complete them. You know so I was thinking, I got to try I want a better life for me and my family so my family could see that I could make it. So, pretty much my family is my motivation too. Well, I*

*see my brother that he doesn't have papers and I am a lot motivated to finish high school. I want to go ahead and just finish to get it over with. My biggest educational challenge though is, well, there's some words, you know, that get to me, like when I was a little kid, like they always had me in different classes where you know they teach you a slower way and I think that's one thing I'm scared of like, just my thing of visual and stuff. Oh, reading and stuff. I can do math though! But my classes have prepared me a lot. Back then I use to not read, but Ms. Chris she got me into reading--she is a good teacher--she knows how to you know show other ways of how to do them because there are different ways. There was one time when we were talking about how well like young drinkers and she told me like well our brains is developing until the age of 22 and it is like you try and create a house and your base is going to be messing it up--that's when you're better not drinking and stuff. Yeah, she is alright. Ms. Chris's class gave me reading skills. And that's when I start figuring out, well I got to learn this to help me out later on in life. The teachers teach me a lot of stuff and the education I need to get set, you know, where I want to be.*

*LCCA means a lot, you know. Teachers--I love the teachers here. Love the way they teach stuff. They don't give up on students that don't know nothing--they just keep trying. Doesn't matter how easy the thing you don't know, they just keep trying, so it sinks in your head. My teachers are my motivation. The DRIVE program means the same thing, a lot. It's a great opportunity to have a great class to be in to learn everything they have to tell you. It will benefit you later on in life. The classes and teachers, I like everything that's here, the thing about the ISS thing. I think it's a great idea because now that the bigger the consequences, the more consequences taking are half, you know, cause if you get into trouble now there's ISS, so you got to think twice about something you do bad. DRIVE is useful. The DRIVE class helped a lot*

because it was sending us like, just in case if, at one point, like you know, everything goes down, and you're going to be signing up for jobs what it taught me how to like, you know be more professional in an interview and how to talk to someone. Good, you know that's is from just like--the DRIVE program gets you for once you are out of here to real world. Stuff like making a resume, learning how to do good stuff, what not to do in a job and good work habits we should learn--have. It's good. I mean LCCA is you know when you think about it--it's your last chance. Like I got kicked out of the other school and other thing was here or just dropping out. Just work in a fast food restaurant--nobody wants that. It's been good. The thing I don't like about LCCA, well like I said some people. I can say, yeah, I'm going to fix everything, attend my classes, good teachers, well taught stuff, you know, and then, and some good people there's some people that like get you little moody with the stuff they say, the stuff they do. I wish there was more maturity in school.

I think my LCCA experience will impact my future a lot, because like uh the teachers taught me everything. Taught me how to be ready for situations like that--when you don't have a job--you go out and look for one. They prepared me for that and my GED as well--that's why I am ready. The only online classes I took were credit recovery classes but that was at Apple High. Online Classes are a good program to be working on--the lectures and everything--it's okay. I think the way it was going to impact you is you learn more. It is not just here do this and that--they give you a guide and explain it and stuff. But you can't ask a question that's the only thing that is wrong there. Overall, I think online classes are pretty good. You know some people that can't cooperate in class--then they can concentrate on a screen. I think it is good for people that want to finish early. But, I have been in mostly teacher taught classes with Ms. Chris. Teacher taught gives you a better experience so I feel pretty prepared to take the GED. LCCA

*used a lot of hands-on stuff because, I think it is better to be hands on than just talk, you know. Cause some people who probably are hands-on learn like that.*

*I think the classes are easier and I think it is the fact that there is discipline. If they are students that get in trouble they get kicked out, cause it is more strict like that--one mess up an you are gone--out a here. So that is why classes are easier. Plus you know everyone--like and the teachers are teaching well. Students know they have to be serious because basically this is the last chance. I think cause the class, how they are, you know, I mean there's not like a lot of people so you can communicate better with the teachers. There's not too less, you know, there's just the right amount to get the attention. It is more attention than a regular school. I like everything about it, I love how the teachers are, like I said before they're more talkative, they're more, they talk to you more, you know. They're not just like, do this lesson, do this and that, and then they, no they actually go step by step explaining everything. I think the coursework it is starting to be the same as other schools, cause like you know how they have ISS now for detention and all that stuff, I think it is going the same way as the other schools are.*

*My classes, they are interesting because, how everything works, how the teacher's teach, the stuff we talk about. My friends are going to hate me--but homework could increase my attention in a classroom. That's because some people already don't show up to school--because there is no homework. But when the teacher is teaching something that is important at LCCA, it's obvious, cause the teacher will tell me, like this is very important to know, and if it catches my attention, which is, which is mostly everything the teacher tells me. Authentic learning--I guess it is another way of learning--I guess, like, yeah, I mean, it is good cause like that's just getting people prepared. So they just wouldn't leave school and say what next? How do I get a job? What do I need to do? This type of learning makes me feel good, prepared. The DRIVE*

*class would be an example. Mrs. Whitlock was teaching us a lot--well all the vocabulary words she was teaching us was all how to do with that. It makes me more interested in class.*

*School has prepared my working habits. Like when we work in groups you communicate more and that just gets the people that are being shy it just takes them out. But it's just if that person is lazy then that's you know not going to work. And well, I like design, I like drawing and I like all that stuff and the teacher's, usually back then, I didn't like to read. Then Ms. Chris taught me how to get into books. The teachers have already prepared me, I think the challenge for LCCA is just to get students to know what they really want to be after high school--what you want to do. So the students just wouldn't come in here and do just work in a computer so they could find something you know--just get what they really like.*

*My future plans, hopefully, successful, that's what I want. I want life to be good. I am tired of getting into too much trouble. I got kinda serious in the last year. I want to go to go to Lanier Tech, like that one, just to get my associates degree and once I get my associates degree, I want to go for my bachelors degree working towards an architectural degree. Getting my GED is my next step. Then I want to get my associates degree at Lanier Tech in Drafting. Right now I am just going like stay here for a moment--not for that long, cause I want to go ahead just--I don't want to stay--be stuck--probably like in a month or so I will take my GED. I want to get my GED...that's what makes me want to come to school. My job, though, is what I dread when I get up each day. A job for me is like Little Cesar's--those kind of jobs, you know. And a career is something you want to keep going--you know like something you like not just a job--job--something you want to do the rest of your life.*

*When I see other people who are 17 or 18 years old and still goofing off, that's when you got to talk to them and tell them no--do you really want to goof off the rest of your life if you*

*think goofing off is going to do anything--you know it's not going to get you nowhere you know what I mean. For now, it's cool cause you are goofing off with your friends and you are in school, but you once you really think about it you are here at it's the last opportunity you are going to get. You know, after here is nowhere. So, I just tell them to try keep trying hard. Dream high.*

### **Tamara**

Tamara is a 17-year-old parenting student enrolled in the Lanier Choice diploma program. Tamara graduated in May 2013. She completed most of her classes by December of 2012 and only needed to complete an online class during spring semester of 2013 in order to graduate. Tamara was on-track to graduate at the end of last year, and although enrolled in the DRIVE program, probably experienced the least impact of the curriculum change. Tamara has had a moderate attendance problem missing over 30 class periods for her 5<sup>th</sup> period class. Tamara is a pleasant and funny student with a good outlook about life in general. In the classroom, she appeared to be engaged and working well with her classmates. Her DRIVE teacher provided the following observations:

*Initially Tamara produced quality work and was very willing to participate in class discussions. She started off the semester doing very well, however, she had some issues that caused her to miss a period of time. Towards the end of the semester she came in and completed her missing assignments.*

Tamara completed her last online class by working in the counselor's office rather than attending actual online classes during her last semester. In a traditional school environment, Tamara had multiple discipline issues ranging from cutting class to fighting. At LCCA, Tamara has never had a discipline referral. Meet Tamara:

*Well, I get off work at 8 am, then fall asleep till 2. Then I am with the baby for a little bit. He takes his nap, so I take another nap with him--and just play with him, feed him and just rest until it is time to go to work again. I work at--with Right Custom Products. They make hair spray, fragrance. It's in Gainesville, near you know Exit 24 or 22, 20. I like it cause I don't do anything, but it's like not what I want to do forever. It's challenging working 3<sup>rd</sup> shift, midnight to 8.*

*I never worked an internship, I just went straight to work. Work is horrible. God, especially third shift. Like having someone boss you around just pisses you off. It's horrible. It's not like at school that you say something to the teacher and yawl both shut up, it's...it's not my first job, but well I use to work at the store, but I was alone at the store...it's like nobody was after me--I opened when I wanted and I closed when I wanted and now it's like...this is less pay and more job.*

*I came to LCCA because I lost track at Delta High cause I had my child and that's the only reason why I came down here. So I could graduate earlier, cause I knew it was faster. And then, I heard about it cause my counselor at Delta High School told me about it, that it was faster to graduate. So, I came down here, and it was faster and I'm almost done.*

*I should be graduating this year--but like I don't have to go to school one whole half of the semester so my education was so much faster. But this should be my senior year. I don't know if I am prepared for college. It makes me nervous because I know it takes a lot of time and dedication and I have a kid which doesn't give you so much time. But he is your dedication, he is your motivation to it--but in the way he needs stuff so you just kind--though. But I do feel prepared for my future, I really do.*

*It's like before I used to think LCCA is not so like a regular school. It's just for bad people like ALC and then for people that just messed up and want to get back on track, but then again it's like a new alternative or like to keep going. You know your left behind, you've already messed up in your regular school and then you get to you know continue. But it's like a second chance.*

*I came here the year before and it was just like computer work, no DRIVE class, no teacher taught, no help, no nothing. You're just on a computer getting checks--sometimes. So it was much harder cause you had to actually pay attention to the lectures and like you, I mean you do now, but you don't have as much help in online classes, as like a teacher taught class. Cause your first semester is like a teacher taught class, so you have pretty much you have a handle--you have something you know about it. You have an idea about it and now it's like in online classes, then, you know, you have an idea of what you did and before it was just like your own your own. Now there's more activities, and they're more flexible, and...we have, I don't know it's just easier since we have taught classes, and it helps out more, and independent studies...they help.*

*It's good being a student at LCCA, cause I finished so much faster. I like 42% in one class being done. I come in here and do it. But it's language arts. Language arts is horrible on online classes.*

*I think teacher-taught classes are better and they've been very helpful to other students as well, cause you don't just sit in front of a computer you actually have somebody ask and they actually know about the questions and stuff. I guess I feel more, more motivated because there's somebody trying to help me out and it's not just a teacher sitting there watching what we're doing on a computer. A teacher taught class is easier because you can ask questions whenever*

*you want and about anything you want but in online classes it's really you have to pay attention to the lecture or cause there is nobody to ask questions about stuff.*

*But for online classes, I would get something from there. It'd be, yeah, I think sometimes it's better to have your own, like online classes, to work on that cause you work at your own speed and you have time for other stuff, but as well you have taught classes like for math, cause math isn't as easy to go through in, a computer than in a taught class. It showed me that. I think online classes is like you have to motivate yourself to do it, so I feel like if you really want to do it you show yourself that you can dedicate to something if you really want to. I guess, it's just nobody can motivate you. It's you and yourself on there. So online classes, it is good cause it helps you finish faster cause if you get your classes done--it's helping you out--I mean you have the--either you want to take notes or you don't take notes--if you need them or don't need them. And it's flexible too.*

*So it's good combined that we have both now. I think it is good cause before it was just online classes and in lab the whole day and now it is like you get tons--like if you are having trouble with a certain subject--you can get teacher taught or, you get the like the DRIVE class that helps you to move forward with life.*

*LCCA means a lot to me...I guess the internships that, you know, that they give you is what makes LCCA different. They help you out because they're being paid for something that another school doesn't do. Cause it's helping you with your career but it's also helping you economically. Their daycare...that helps also.*

*I get more interested in, like science, you get lab works--it's not just about writing and you know taking notes and stuff it is more like we hands on--you are doing something. Yeah, like I was cause some classes were interesting but when it was about language arts and stuff you're*

*just--ugh. I just want to finish. There was more hands-on learning this year. I just feel like the classes were more excited when there is stuff to actually do. When we were doing that check thing we were doing--that reality check. I would say the DRIVE class was more relevant to my life. I think DRIVE should be like an extra curriculum class--I mean cause y'all really don't have to do it but it is a way to help us and it really does cause it helps you be more professional. Like I said, have your resume--have that ready when you are done out of here and like have all the work skills that you need.*

*I am more interested when authentic learning is in my class. I guess cause every other county schools like is all the same stuff, I mean going to four classes and then you take an extra class just for like electives and here, I mean you have the opportunity to have your DRIVE class which helps you and like with your resume and with you know the reality check stuff and you can work at your own pace. I mean whatever--if you are really dedicated you are going to finish so much faster than if you are just sitting around.*

*DRIVE class was good. Now, I have a resume that I can use and it help me with my interview cause they ask you, they tell you what is going to happen in an interview. Especially, cause, somebody from Lake Lanier came in and told us what they expect from an interview. Honestly, I think my DRIVE class has helped the most. They help me with experience on like jobs, and my resume, and how to be polite at a job, and job interviews and everything. And, I like the DRIVE class as well, cause it helps you with a resume, and there's not many schools that help you with your career and what you want to do. DRIVE...it's pretty, it's better. I mean it helps in so many ways, like your manners, your school work, professionally.*

*Authentic--I think that is meant to be like different and unique and just different learning--authentic and unique way of learning. We had authentic learning in our classroom. That*

*reality check is an example of authentic learning. It made you see like what kind of career you get it's what you are going to go through and the necessary stuff that you need. I don't know education is different here, I guess you just have more liberty to go out now that you are out of school and stuff. You don't have to worry so much--but at the same time, your test are so much more important, the graduation tests are so much more important and your EOCT they are so much more important.*

*Working in a group has been part of DRIVE. Sometimes it is good, because both of you or all of you are dedicated but sometimes it is just people that just come to waste space and air? Group work is easier on you or sometimes and it is like I mean it shows you how to you are going to have to work with somebody at work--so showing you how to get along with people. I don't know what the drawbacks would be unless it is people just wasting air--not getting the job done.*

*Classes are easier at LCCA cause I mean that there's somebody there, you just know that they are not teaching it--just monitoring you but they still help if you need it. So, the home school is just you and yourself. The more support makes it feel easier. I feel like that our school has so much more to go over and here it is just the basics. I mean you have like a half of a semester because it is just the basics but it is what you need and down there it is just like a whole two semesters and two whole different stuff you know like you don't even need to know. So it's more relevant to get you where you need to be. Everything I learned I think I'll use it down there and I guess in college. And I like coming to a small school. Ah, it is so many less people. You have more time to go to the restroom you don't have to be waiting for everybody to move out or there is not so many people in a class--I mean there are but everybody is doing their own stuff it's not like oh can you repeat that again or tell me that again.*

I have a success story--I mean it is not really my success but my brother's success--like he went through the cancer but I feel like it was all of our success. I feel that it was all our success because honestly he was like, stop my chemo and we were like no, how were we going to stop this chemo--you know...it motivates you to see that life can end so quick and then on the other hand I was at the hospital like knowing that my son could die any minute cause his heart beat wasn't stable and it is like you know like you never think it will happen to you, but it happens and you got to see that like anything that people goes through, I mean like anything you can go through it--it is just have the motivation to do it. And like you have to go through it--it's life and you have to go through--you can't just give up. But the hardest time in my life was I guess, being pregnant and being at a children's hospital going through my brother's cancer. And, knowing that I was in one hospital having my child and he was in another hospital getting treatment.

My LCCA experience has impacted my future because I know that like you can do faster and you don't. I mean like yeah, you take it step by step, but like when that is like impossible you have to do something fast you do it. Motivation is something that is just pulling me to do it. My son and my mom have made me very, very motivated. Just like working on my own and making enough to just let her be home. My motivation is my son, my son's future and my future. And when I saw my brother in the hospital going through a lot because he had lymphoma...that is a cancer. I saw that you can lose your life any day, or your son can lose his life, or you can even lose your life. And if you're someone, then you have something to give to that person if you're not there anymore. If you were to pass away, he'll see what you've done, and you're gonna be somebody that will say; oh I look up to them. But some of my biggest challenges to being

*successful in my education is I guess just like, the limited time I have. And my responsibilities now as a mother.*

*I am really motivated to graduate. I don't know what my life will look like once I graduate. It's going to be crazy because I am moving to Wisconsin with my husband. I'm moving in June, so I am leaving everything. Wisconsin has fields, fields and more fields and cold and like winter all the time. It's a farm thing. But I don't know what I will be doing. There are a lot of jobs I can get because I am bilingual with a high school diploma. But, I kind of want to finish college down there too, like I want to start. Just me and my baby and my husband. He gets paid every 15 days and it's like \$1300-1500. It's year around. The animals don't care if it's winter or not when dairy farming in Wisconsin. I want to be successful, be somebody in life, and give my child the future that, the stuff that maybe I didn't have, but I can give him.*

*I want to be a pharmacist or pharmacist tech. My next step was to actually go to college at Lanier Tech. She called me by the way...the admissions person. But this career.... I don't know, just, I mean it is going to help me out with like financial support and it is something different. I mean I never thought about it, but it is like something different than I was expected to do. I was just like whatever, I will just go to college and do whatever and be an assistant but then you see that the assistant wants the same thing about somebody else. And if you are their assistant so you are doing what they want and when you could have your own assistant, you see that like you are your own boss. You know what you are doing, what you want to do, and you are not anybody's else's convince to what they need. But a job you get paid what they want. A career you it's what you want, because you see the opportunities to it and you can go bigger or stay where you're at.*

*People should really think about their future, honestly, finish school, get a career, don't depend on anybody. Don't let anybody boss you around--be their boss. Well, I mean I thought that you know like when you're young it's like, oh wow, you got to live your life and do whatever you want and live ever experience. The world's yours and you're going to eat it all up and then you find out hey you know you got to stop but then when you do that, it's kind of too late cause either your pregnant or in drugs or you just messed up everything in school. You haven't even finished your subjects or anything and then, you're just like okay you have a reason, why you want to do it. Either stop doing drugs to have a better future for you and your kid or to like you know, maybe something that's just makes you change--like an illness or there's something and you see that life has to--to have a meaning to it. Something has to happen so you can do it.*

### **Pat**

Pat is a representation of the data from the interviews with the faculty and administration of LCCA from the viewpoint of their observations of the students' experiences during the past year of curriculum change. The staff and faculty interviewed have been at LCCA for multiple years and have experienced the change in the curriculum from a total online environment to the current model in use today. Meet Pat:

*Obviously there have been a lot of changes that have taken place over the past several years and probably the biggest difference is that we used to be an evening school. We started out as the Hall County Evening School. It was a place for non-traditional students whom may have had families or who worked during the day to come at night and finish their high school diploma. Over the years that has evolved into a place where not only do we offer diplomas in the evening but we have diploma programs during the day and have tried to incorporate more career aspects to the curriculum and we are to the point now where we don't have an evening*

*program as such. The only program we have is the discipline program from 3-6 in the afternoon. So, at one point it was just a place to get your diploma; now it has turned into much, much more.*

*I have seen the school change from one that had a main focus of providing an avenue for students that had not graduated from a traditional high school, most were older students population and had a need to work because of being a single parent or their family needed the additional income thus going to school in the evening was necessary. The classes were mainly teacher taught with some classes offered online. The school, over a few years, moved toward a school that offered mainly online classes. With few options or direction for students--this was also at a point where there were very few teacher taught classes. The student population came mainly from other high schools and the demographics were truly more of an at-risk group. Then there was somewhat of a move toward creating an environment where there was recognition of how at-risk the population was and some discussions started about what could really make a difference for this student population to succeed. The greatest change has occurred this school year. A new curriculum was developed and implemented with the idea of what a school can do with limited resources to create an environment where students are given an opportunity to develop skills that improve their opportunity for success in continuing their educational or entering the work force.*

*Authentic learning in my mind is putting students in real life situations. There is a difference between seeing something in a book and actually using your hands or your mind or your body to accomplish something so in my mind authentic learning is being able to practice in a real life situation in which you have learned. Authentic learning is learning that is evidently purposeful to the student for their use in the non-school setting. Using skills such as: applying*

*knowledge, teamwork, independent/critical thinking, problem solving, intrinsic motivation, personal ownership and setting goals. When students are participants in the learning experience, develops a sense of inquiry hopefully where the student seeks more in-depth information/knowledge.*

*A big challenge, first and foremost, is student attendance. Attendance is a baggy here. Not that they are at risk because of their attendance, but it is hard to reach them if they don't come to school every day and that is one of our biggest challenges here at LCCA is getting students to come to school on a regular basis. Also it is, another challenge is that we don't always have, not that the parents aren't supportive, but the parents aren't always involved in their student's lives and without the guidance and leadership of their parents, we in effect we become their parents sometimes and that makes it tough. Probably another challenge I would talk about is getting the students to see the relevance of what they are doing and how it is going to benefit them later on in life. Obviously, we know that it important to the rest of their lives, but it is hard to get them to see that. A lot of the students are a single parents of one or more children when they are in their teens and they lack of intrinsic motivation; even if a student is motivated they may not be living in an environment that is supportive of the student graduating from high school. There are plenty of situations where students do not have their basic needs met on a daily basis--place to live, appropriate clothing, food or avenues for seeking health care if they are sick. They live in a cycle of a mentality that says, "I cannot succeed" and have a lack of knowledge what the "real world" expects/requires for success.*

*Well as far as attendance goes, I think that having our guidance counselor keep up with attendance a little bit more and to make a lot more contact with students and parents has helped. Having a full time counselor has been really helpful as far as that goes. The second challenge I*

mentioned was parent support--I think maybe and I think we have been in contact with parents a lot more regarding progress of their students and one of things that forced us to do that was being able to move kids to a different program and parents became a little more interested in the progress that their students were making because they did not want them to get moved to that program. But, I think that we have had a lot more parental contact this year regardless of the support we got, we have had more contact. And, I think of course I have to talk about the DRIVE program here--as far as relevance goes I think that has helped tremendously as far as the relevance piece goes; because they can actually see that what they are doing now can have an effect not only on their career but the rest of their life. The collaboration with the Goodwill organization and the resources that they are able to provide through a grant that provides support for at-risk students. Some of the resources include: paid/non-paid internships so that students can gain work experience, clothing for interviews, gas cards for the "get started" period for the students job and coaching.

I have one student in particular that I have dealt with were there were--it was hard to get the student here, the student was a special education student--the student had watched his dad beat the step mother up and cause her to go to the hospital and I think the illustration there is that it is hard to get students engaged--it is hard to give them a rigorous education experience, it is hard to get them to pay attention and be engaged when they are not even sure where they are going to go home to that night and where their next meal may come from- that is one very specific example of what I am talking about. But, if I--I often talk about I should have been keeping notes on all the situations over the years because I would be really able to write an interesting book at the end of it. That is just one example, that I could probably talk for hours and hours about specific examples, but I um, have had another one today where we had a defiant

*student. I just got off the phone with his dad a few minutes ago, uh, the dad was so supportive of us and was to the point of where he was begging us for help because he was at his wits end. He did not know what to do with the child and suspected he had--was on drugs, abusing alcohol, has become defiant at home--completely understood what was going on here but was just reaching out for help.*

*I think of another older student, a single parent of two small children that was also responsible for providing income for family members by having to work regardless if it meant not coming to class. The student had very little self-confidence and experienced cultural pressures from family members. By the end of the first semester, the student had gone through what seemed to be a great transformation. Completed all her classes, only needed to pass one graduation test, had an opportunity for full-time employment with a good company, had shown a more self-confident and dependency on the acceptance by her family. However, all was not what it seemed. The student made a decision to leave and move to another state. After, several conversations about the move and discussions about what was best for her and her children the student made the move. Even though the student had tremendous opportunities and a group of supportive non-family adults the end result left me with questions of what more was required or needed for the student to make better choices for a successful future for herself as well as for her children. I still do not know.*

*When I see student engagement this year or relevance, I guess the first one that comes to mind is our horticulture program--I know that there are certain students that are always the work horses of that class. They are the first ones to dig into the dirt, they're the first ones to volunteer to get the equipment ready and that seems to me that they did that without the teacher telling them to. They did it because they were interested in what they were doing and they*

wanted to get their hands dirty. That is the first one that comes to mind. Uh, is that good enough?

*When I think of collaboration among the students, I think of a student with a disability who was very open and willing to be part of a team that was involved in a project that required being in new situations that required skills that could have prevented her from wanting to participate. The student asked questions, sought out resources and played a key role in moving the project forward.*

*My hopes for the outcome--my biggest hope is that probably not so measurable--I want the attitude of students to be that when they come here--that when they are coming here it is for something that is not just a high school diploma but they are coming here for something that will be useful to them for the rest of their lives. I often share with students that um, everybody can go to school for as long as they want to but everybody's going to have to work eventually and they need to know how to do that so I hope that we impress on them how important it is for them to be a good employee and just for the earning power and financial reasons, but because that being a good worker and having good habits can mean having more opportunities and a means of advancement on done the line. So that is one of the things I hope for--it's probably not very measurable but I would also hope that we are able to place students in specific jobs when they leave here so that they are getting some uh, authentic learning and possible lead to more job choices down the road. Those are my two main hope for our new program here.*

*I would like to see the model continued with a buy-in from more individuals. Buy-in does not mean simple lip-service of going along but rather a real team effort. This requires taking an interest and making an investment. The importance of the success should be for the students. At times, I think that various staff were not sure of how the model could benefit students.*

*In summary--I do think that the atmosphere here is a little different around here this year. I think that it is a direct result of a little different expectation and a little bit more effort by teachers to meet the kids to where they are and give them some real life situations so that what they are learning is relevant and I think that the majority of them appreciate that. And, that is worth something when the students feel like they are getting something out of it and they feel like they can trust their teachers and have a good relationship with their teacher--cause I think those are some things that have emerged this year and would like to continue that.*

### **Conclusion**

The narratives from the participants in the DRIVE program allow us to see into the lives of the students as they experience day-to-day course work in the new curriculum model. Understanding where the students have been in their lives and where they hope to go in the future hopefully offers the reader a better understanding of the overall themes found from the research. The overall themes from the interviews, observations, and document analysis are discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### CREATING DRIVE: FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) described a combination of research methodologies where the researcher moved from the practices of a paradigm to the empirical results of the information gathered. The combined methodology approach has been used to reflect the blending of various methodologies when using more than one isolated perspective (Lai, et al, 2012). In Chapter 4, narratives of the individual participants in the study were used to provide a voice to the students as they have experienced this curriculum change at LCCA in the context of their everyday lives. Chapter 5 seeks to explore data from a different viewpoint by reviewing the overall body of data for the case study. In an effort to reveal common themes from the students' interviews, their work and classroom observations, Chapter 5 builds from a foundational understanding of students' viewpoints and ideologies to a framework established from the interviews to the emergence of codes and themes as they relate to current educational trends for effectively targeting at-risk students.

#### **Establishing Foundations: Student Ideologies and Work**

When students entered into the DRIVE program in the Fall 2012, all students in the DRIVE classes were given an anonymous survey to be completed in order to stimulate class discussion on topics related to work ethic, ethics, morals, and overall goals. Seventy-seven students completed the survey instrument. The only analysis completed on the survey was a tally of the student answers. Table 7 provides a brief overview of student answers to the demographic

questions from the instrument. The information in Table 7 is provided to give the reader a general idea of the student body participating in the DRIVE program.

Table 7

*Demographic Overview of Students in the Fall 2012 DRIVE Class*

Current Grade	9	10	11	12				
	11	20	25	21				
Gender	Male			Female				
	48			29				
Current Age*	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	0	1	13	36	16	4	2	0
Race	American Indian or Alaskan	Hispanic	Asian	African American	White-Not Hispanic	Other		
	1	34	1	13	26	2		
Grades in School*	Mostly A's	Mostly A's & B's	Mostly B's	Mostly B's & C's	Mostly C's	Mostly C's & F's	Mostly F's	
	2	21	4	31	10	8	3	
Personal Plan for Education*	Don't plan to finish high school	Plan to finish high school	Plan to go to trade school	Plan to attend college	Plan to graduate from 4-year college			
	3	39	1	28	12			
Highest Level of Education for Parents*	8 <sup>th</sup> grade or less	Some high school	High school diploma	Some college	Graduate of four-year college	I don't know		
	13	15	18	13	11	10		

*\*Due to respondents not answering all questions or answering a question with multiple answers, the total number of responses will not always equal 77.*

As part of the DRIVE class, students were asked to respond to 46 statements to determine if the statement was agreeable or not to their personal beliefs. Students were instructed that their responses were to be their own opinions and no answer was right or wrong. In addition to the 46 statements, students were asked to review 24 statements describing societal situations or issues in

order to gauge the students' understanding of social norms and appropriate responses to various situations. The breakdown of student responses to the survey can be found in Appendix F.

However, some interesting observations could be made from the overall student responses:

- Most students recognized what would be considered appropriate responses to social situations including how to interact with adults, respond to friends, and take responsibility for their own actions.
- Most students acknowledged the importance of honesty and good work ethic in our society.
- Most students displayed an appreciation of different cultural viewpoints and expressed a tolerance for those differences.
- Almost a third of the students did not see the benefit of voting in elections, paying attention to classmates in class or avoiding violence to seek a solution to a problem.
- Many students felt they could express themselves clearly and acted in ways consistent with their values and beliefs.
- Many students said they had a hard time making eye contact with others and asking adults for assistance when needed.
- Many students felt they could not recognize when they were stressed.

When asked to review scenarios or choose words that best defined a situation, students seemed to struggle a little more. Many students would not answer questions requiring a lot of reading (questions and/or answers were longer text). When presented with an actual description of a situation, the most appropriate response was not always selected by most of the students.

This phenomenon may be explained through a prevalent lack of reading comprehension among

the students, a cultural phenomenon or because when presented with an actual situation, the “best” answer was not as clear to the students based upon their understanding or comprehension.

The information gathered from the student surveys allowed for a big picture view of the LCCA students. As a researcher, I have often thought the student population might not have a common understanding of appropriate moral or ethical behavior. However, when considering answers to the short answer questions or statements, most of the students demonstrated the ability to select the “appropriate” answers that would most likely be accepted in society as the correct response. As noted previously, this observation would not accurately describe the students’ answers to questions describing authentic situations.

In order to gain a sense of the student work ethic in an authentic environment, I conducted a document analysis of sample student work from the DRIVE class. The sample work used was an online portfolio. Students in the DRIVE class were to complete an online portfolio by the conclusion of the semester-long DRIVE program. The portfolio was to include a resume, a list of references, a list of collaborative projects completed during DRIVE, a cover letter, and any other relevant information the student might use in becoming gainfully employed. The instructors for the DRIVE program chose an online website program called Weebly as the platform for the students to use to design their portfolios. The students created thirty-six student portfolios. The seven portfolios of the students who participated in all three interviews were reviewed. Even though students were expected to build the portfolio during class, the overall quality of work was minimal with most students not meeting the expectation of including a resume, cover letter, and references on the website. Table 8 summarizes the sample student work document analysis process.

Table 8

*Summary of Student Portfolio Completeness*

Student	# of Pages	Resume	Cover Letter	Sample of Work	Introduction	Grammar	Spelling	Overall Appearance
Megan	3	Page, no attached resume	None	Yes, Tagexdo	None	No issues	No errors	Simple, but incomplete
Jasmine	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Multiple issues	Multiple errors	Limited ability in written expression obvious
Michael	2	Page, no attached resume	None	None	None	Minimal issues	No errors	Template only, limited design
Lamar	3	None	None	None	None	--	--	Template only, incomplete
Josephine	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Several issues	Few errors	Overall good impression
Miguel	2	None	None	None	None	--	--	Template only, incomplete
Tamara	0	None	None	None	None	--	--	Never created

It is not surprising that the students who could be labeled the most successful from their own personal stories are the students who achieved the highest quality of work output in their portfolios. Interestingly some students expressed an interest in website design based upon their activities in the DRIVE class, even if they did not show a great output of effort from their final product on the portfolio. An example of this can be seen in Lamar's interview. Lamar was not necessarily considered to have a successful outcome as related to the DRIVE program, yet, from the activities in the DRIVE class, he seemed to have some future direction:

*Lamar: I want to do something with computers, I don't know what it is called though.*

*Like you want to program computers?*

*Lamar: No, not that.*

*You want to build computers?*

*Lamar: No, it's like apps for your phone but like on a computer- what is that called?*

*Like website design?*

*Lamar: Yeah, something like that.*

### **Scaffolding Foundations: Staff and Student Interviews**

Twelve students, one faculty, and one administrator participated in the original round of interviews. From the 12 students, seven participants were selected for two additional interviews based upon the following guidelines:

- *Miguel and Jasmine:* At least one student was a representative of the Project Forward program. Project Forward is the branded name of the GED preparation program.
- *Megan, Michael, Josephine, Tamara, and Lamar:* At least one student was a representative of the Lanier Choice program. Lanier Choice is the branded name of the program for students enrolled as high school students with plans to graduate with a high school diploma.
- *Jasmine and Lamar:* At least two students represented a current non-success of the authentic learning model. Students were identified as non-successes of the authentic learning model through the observation protocol identifying traits of engaged students, attendance records, and academic progress records.
- *Josephine and Megan:* At least two students represented a current success of the authentic learning model. Students were identified as successes of the authentic learning model through the observation protocol identifying traits of engaged students, attendance records, and academic progress records.

- *Michael and Tamara:* At least one student represented a neutral outlook toward the authentic learning model. The neutral outlook was determined based upon the interview data and observation protocol and represented neither a positive or negative experience to date with the change in curriculum.
- All selected students were willing to commit to the additional two interviews over the course of the 2012-2013 school year.
- All selected students were willing to be observed in their school setting.

All selected students also shared substantive information in the initial interview with rich data being provided when the researcher asked questions.

From the initial interview transcripts, I used line-by-line coding to label the transcripts based upon the topics that were covered on the interview protocol (Charmez, 2006). Since the initial interview protocol was developed based upon educational trends explored during the review of the literature, it can be stated that the initial codes were directly influenced by the literature. However, several codes that were not apparent from the literature were added to the code map during the initial coding process. The second interview protocol was developed to further explore the topics from the initial interviews. The third protocol was developed mainly to explore students' personal stories in greater detail and to fill in any gaps in the student's narratives.

From the initial transcripts, I had 29 various codes. After coding all of the initial interview transcripts, I grouped those 29 codes into headings based upon the educational trends for at-risk students revealed in the literature review. The educational trends are: adult relationships, sense of community, development of assets, respect for youth, multi-discipline curriculum, high expectations, authentic learning, and support and long-term follow-up (ACTE

Issue Brief, 2009; Borthwick, Bennett, Lefoe, & Huber, 2007; Cronin, 1993; deVincentis, 2010; Kerka, 2003; Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Lombardi, 2007; Lombardi, 2008; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993). I then used these groupings to discuss the aspects of the DRIVE program including the career academy format, alternative education strategies, authentic learning environment, and 21<sup>st</sup> century education/workforce development. Figure 6 represents the code map I used for the thematic analysis process.

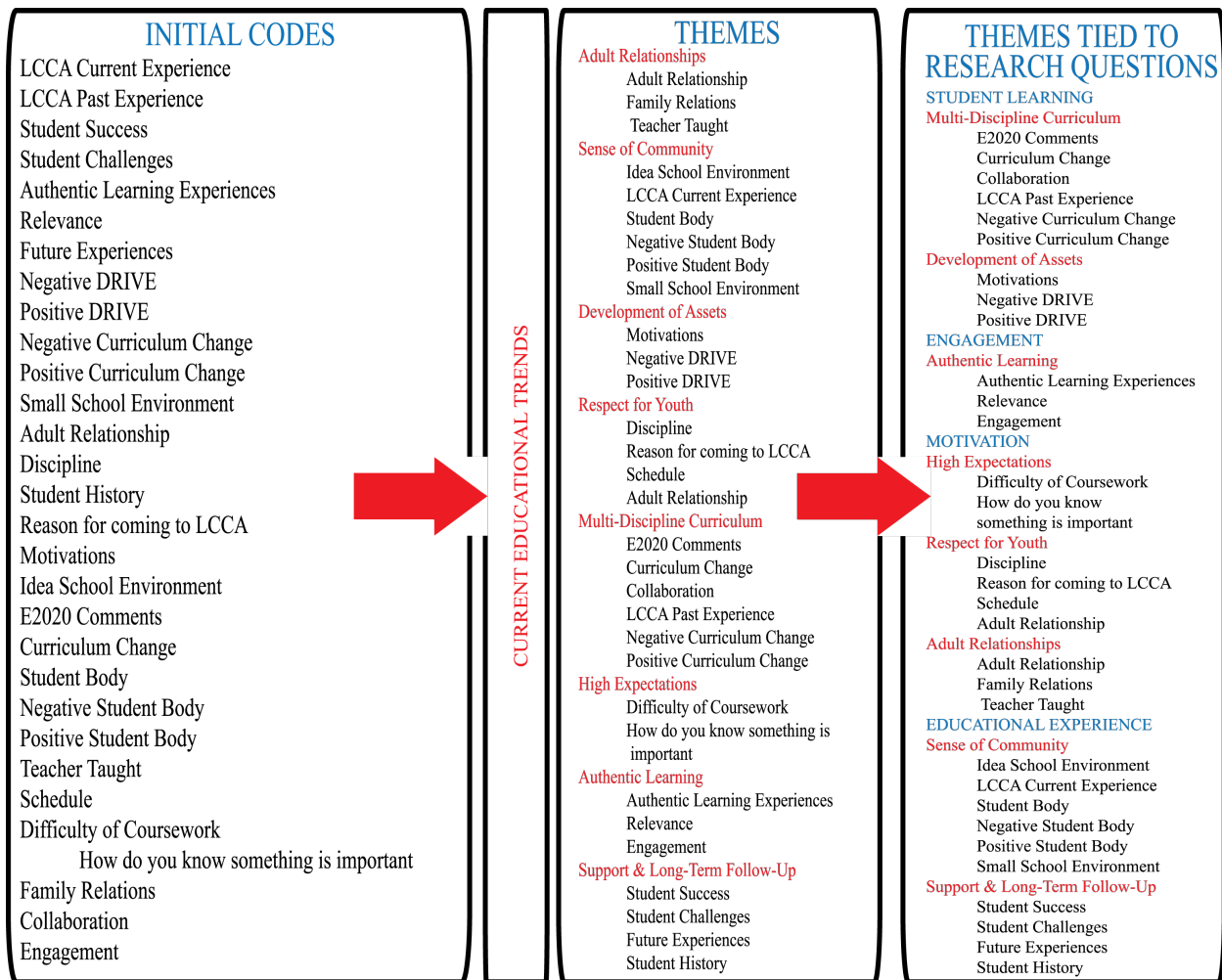


Figure 6: Code Map

For each of the eight themes, I wrote memos expressing overall impressions of the data from all of the interview transcripts. Positive and negative statements in the transcripts that supported or did not support the concepts of the theme were identified. The data was analyzed

using the online program, Dedoose. By utilizing the tools in Dedoose, I was able to see the frequency of the codes for each transcript based upon color analysis charts as well as a word cloud generated from the coded data. From the coded transcripts I generated memos of with the same coded data grouped together for consistency and coherency. Figures 7 through 10 are computer screen shots from the Dedoose program illustrating the use of the color-coding system, word cloud, and memos. Figure 7 the quantity of coded excerpts from the original transcripts.

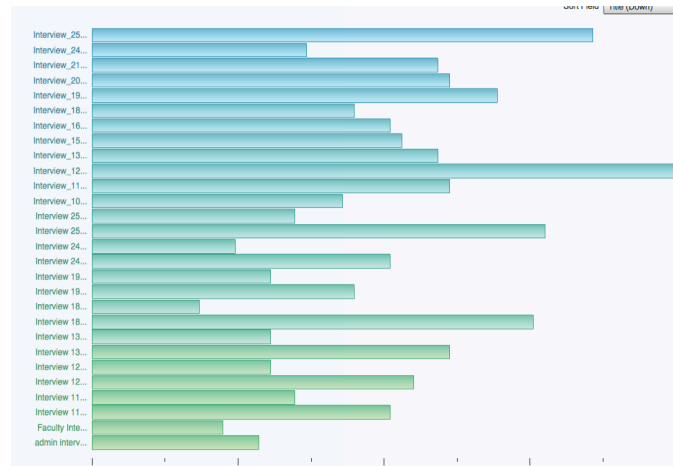


Figure 7: Dedoose Screenshot of Quantity of Excerpts from Transcripts

Figure 8 visually shows the frequency of a specific code in each transcript. The colors move from cool colors to represent low frequencies to warm colors demonstrating higher frequencies of a coded excerpt.

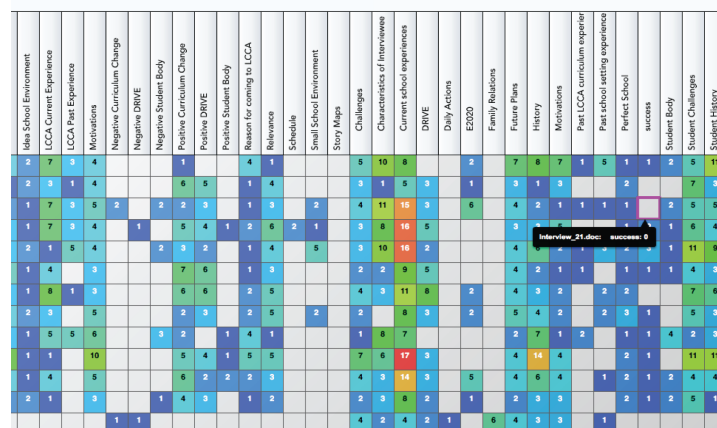


Figure 8: Dedoose Frequency of Coded Excerpts



Additional memos were created for each participant detailing attendance, behavior issues, grades, and credits earned.

### **Building DRIVE: Themes and Educational Trends**

The case study sought to answer the research question: How does the change to a curriculum delivery method that focuses on relevance, collaboration, and career-preparation in an authentic format impact (a) student learning, (b) engagement, (c) motivation, and (d) educational experience?

In order to answer this research question and provide a triangulation of data analysis for the completeness of the case study, I used a constant comparative method of analysis (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002; Charmez, 2006; Yin, 2009). The transcripts were coding with codes grouped into eight themes of at-risk strategies from the literature review. These themes were used to explore how the curriculum delivery method impacted four areas: student learning, engagement, motivation, and educational experience.

Figure 11 is a visual representation of the movement from the conceptual framework of the DRIVE program to the themes supported by the students' conversations, observations, and document output. When the DRIVE program was initially created, the foundations of the program were based in the practical concepts of authentic learning theory, situated cognition theory, and social learning theory. Teachers and students were to engage in the activity of learning through authentic activities in real (or as close to real world) settings with the teachers acting as modelers of the behaviors for students to replicate. From the conceptual idea of the DRIVE program, many of the student participants have reaffirmed the intended outcomes of the change in the curriculum model to the DRIVE program. As I grouped the codes into themes, based upon the literary findings, the overlap in the experiences of the students in each thematic

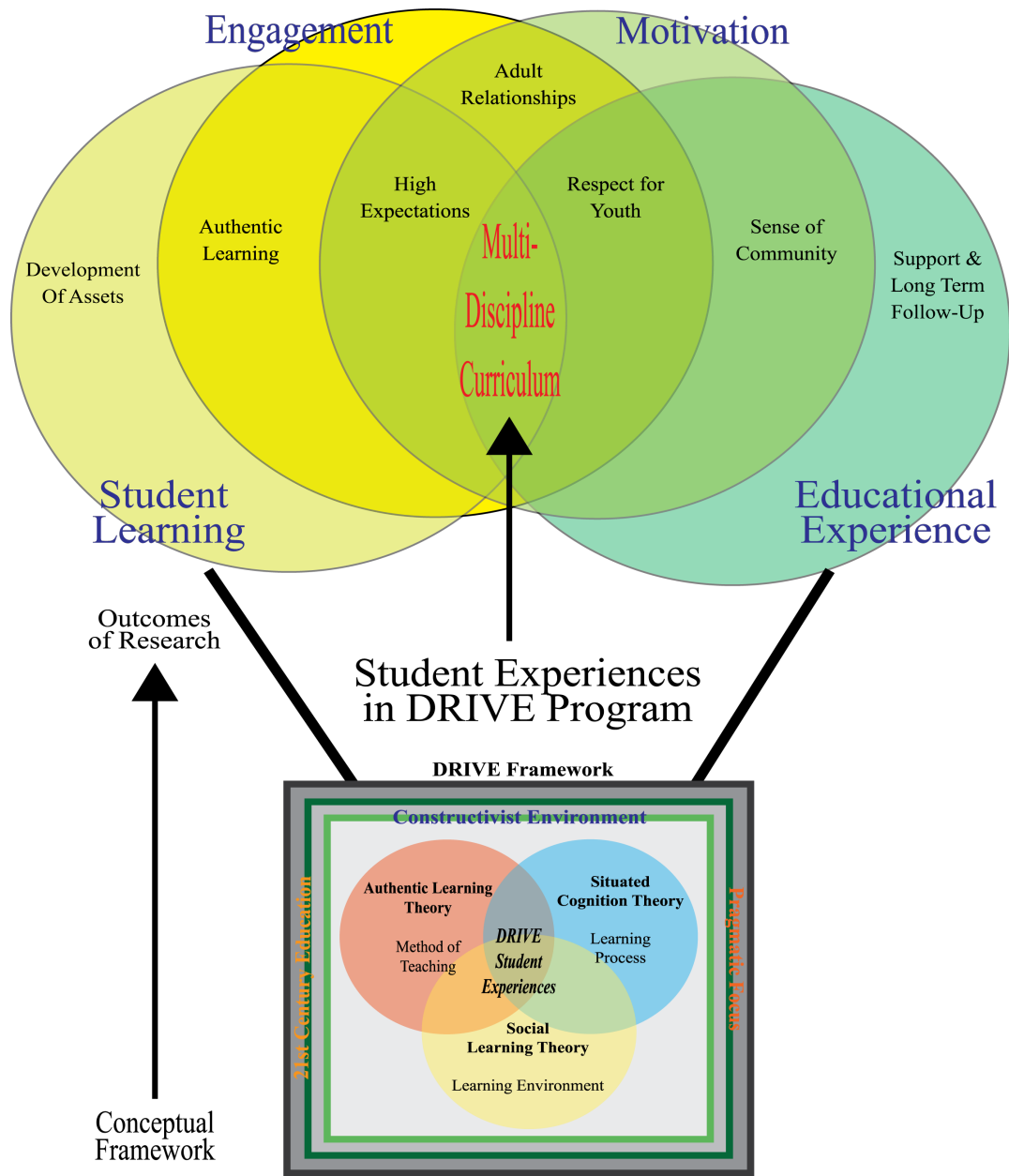


Figure 11: DRIVE: From Concept to Results

area became apparent. It is impossible, for example, to remove “adult relationships” from the “sense of community” and “respect for youth” themes. Figure 11 visually illustrates this overlap. Central to the effectiveness of a program like DRIVE, however, is the focus on distinct, multi-discipline curriculum that is understood by students, teachers, and administrators alike. In the following pages, I explore each of the four areas that were the focus of the research question

surrounding student learning, engagement, motivation, and educational experiences. Table 9 provides a summary of all twelve participants since all twelve student interviews were used for developing study insights.

Table 9

*Summary of Twelve Initial Participants in DRIVE Study*

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Program of study	Degree Option	2013 Status in school
Megan*	16	Female	Caucasian	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Graduated
Jasmine*	18	Female	Hispanic	Project Forward	GED	Dropout
Michael*	20	Male	Caucasian	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Enrolled
Lamar*	18	Male	African American	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Enrolled
Josephine*	16	Female	Caucasian/Hispanic	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Graduated
Miguel*	18	Male	Hispanic	Project Forward	GED	Enrolled
Tamara*	17	Female	Hispanic	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Graduated
Priscilla	18	Female	Hispanic	Project Forward	GED	Enrolled
Antonette	17	Female	Hispanic	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Enrolled
Patricia	16	Female	Caucasian	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Graduated
Stephanie	18	Female	Caucasian	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Graduated
Christine	18	Female	Caucasian	Lanier Choice	Diploma	Graduated

*\*indicates students participating in in-depth research study*

**Student Learning**

Student learning can and should be facilitated on multiple levels to achieve an overall effective result (Drake & Burns, 2004). Learning comes from a strong curriculum and a focus on the development of the assets in a child. The end goal of the learning process is to produce a viable addition to our society (Stasz, Kaganoff, & Eden, 1995). Through interactions with the students as well as observed actions of the students in the classroom, the combination of a well-

defined, multi-discipline curriculum and an intentional effort to support the overall development of the student seemed to produce the most successful results by common educational standards.

Megan experienced internships in multiple areas before deciding on her future career path. Providing authentic learning opportunities in the LCCA curriculum was an important factor in the educational plan of this highly motivated student:

*Interviewer: How do you think your experience at LCCA will impact your future or influence your future?*

*Megan: Just the fact that they have showed me what I want to do and gave me opportunities to do different type of things.*

*Interviewer: Okay*

*Megan: Like, I worked in the kitchen, worked in hospitality and now I have worked in Design 360 and now I've worked in the daycare, so.*

*Interviewer: And, you figured out which one fit for you?*

*Megan: Yeah, daycare cause children are awesome- just not when they are fussy.*

Most students recognized that LCCA's DRIVE program of LCCA was designed to develop assets, or valuable life skills, skills that would be important to them in the future when establishing of a career rather than just a job:

*Interviewer: And, anything that's happened this year that's impacted your decision about the future?*

*Jasmine: Um, yeah the job opportunities and, like the DRIVE class helped me a lot cause I learned a lot of stuff about like, businesses because I want to become like, go into the business management field. I learned a lot, well, like, businesses that I would've never*

*known at such early time. So when I do go to college for it, it'll be helpful cause I'll already be kinda knowledgeable about it.*

A common theme among the students was a feeling of motivation to complete their GED or earn their diploma. The presence of expressed motivation and motivating factors in their lives (family, children, teachers, desire for success) were key to students recognizing the development of assets in their lives through the DRIVE program:

*Interviewer: Okay, in your own words define motivation. What does that mean to you?*

*Miguel: Motivation- well like my motivation is like something that is pushing you- like you know you want to stop but you just got to keep going- keep going. You got to think about the negative-like what happens when you stop right now- you know I don't want to be like that- I want to be someone above that. Motivation for me is like just keep moving- keep going- keep going.*

*Interviewer: Okay, so in the last interview you said you were very motivated to get your GED. What do you think has caused you to feel this way?*

*Miguel: Well, like I said I love drawing. I like drawing; I like designing. I like creating new ideas and yeah.*

*Interviewer: Alright.*

*Miguel: And, I also want to show my mom that I can actually do it.*

Students need to receive emotional support from adults and friends in their lives, feel empowered to become part of a larger community, operate under a clear set of expectations and within well-defined boundaries, and engage in activities to create new skills as part of an effective learning process (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011). Through the conversations with the students, aspects of the importance of the development of assets of a student became

apparent. In the following pages, each aspect of the research questions will be reviewed and interview excerpts will be used to give the students' voice to their related experience at LCCA.

Students recognized the support for adults and friends in their lives:

- *And that's why you need some other outside encouragement. When you feel like it's, like you're coming up on something that's when the world bears down on you and it becomes too much, friends help you pick up.*
- *I think it is really important. Cause they are also a motivation for me- Yeah, especially Ms. Whallis, cause she is just always like - are you going to come to today, are you going to do this, do you need like a ride- yeah, I know but she is just caring- she is very, very caring- she is like a mom to me.*
- *For school, I want to graduate and show my mom that I can actually do something with myself. So, cause my sister just got her GED, and I wanted to do more than that, and my little brothers going, my little brothers doing better in school than I am, but he gets in all the trouble, but his grades are better than mine were, not in middle school and I wanted to show her that I can do better than what I was showing her.*

Students discussed the feeling of being empowered to become a part of a larger community in the future:

- *I want a better education, ugh, higher education, to make better money.*
- *A lot, cause I love drawing, I love math, I love designing, I love all those stuff so, that's, I'd rather have a job that I like than I don't like. I don't want to be working like in a fast food restaurant for the rest of my life, you know, I want to make something of myself.*

Students desired a clear set of expectations and well-defined boundaries:

- *True and that's because some people already don't show up to school- because there is no homework.*
- *I think they're good, especially for the ones that were slacking off now we can actually try hard and have a reason to work.*

Students mentioned the opportunities to create new skills:

- *That means that they are focusing more on how to get you a job and show you how to get a job, fill out job applications, get a resume together, everything about the jobs that you need to know.*
- *Oh, when we're in Mrs. Whallis' class and you know that little DRIVE thing we had to do to manage your budget and everything, well I've got to do that at home now cause my mom recently lost her job and they moved her to Houser Mill in a different like- I don't know how to say the word- different spot than what she was up here and I have to do all the stuff at the house.*
- *DRIVE I think is- this is just the way I see it- I think for that class for people that you know for guys that messed up on their past want to get their life corrected so it's way you go, you know. It's moving forwards and I think with the DRIVE class I learned a lot of stuff on the computer- like Prezi, Tagxedo a lot of stuff- I know how to use them all now- so the teachers taught me.*

The positive aspects of an emphasis on development of student assets were not seen in every student interviewed, or by any means, in the student body of LCCA if considered in its entirety. For many students, lack of motivation to actually attend school is a critical issue.

- *Honestly, I'm not super motivated, but I do push myself. I wake up, I try to get to school, I mean like, I know it has to get done, so, I'm going to try my best to get it done.*
- *I could do Math I just choose not to. I'm smarter than I act. I figured that out over the weekend and my teachers say the same thing never really listened. I would already be out of high school if I paid attention and just applied myself.*
- *Oh yeah, Cause sometimes I can definitely motivate myself to do things and then sometimes I feel like this is definitely going to lead to something so I kinda you know I kinda, I, I don't want to know. I don't want to expect what's coming but you know but if I keep looking, dude it's going to be fine, you know just keep going you know, and then you know I totally think this is going to be great you know, I'm right here, you know it back fires in your face you know.*

For other students, the need for a continued increase in structure for the LCCA program seemed to impact their personal focus on asset development.

- *I thing that you should take the kids that aren't really focused on it out just because they distract the kids who are focused are on it.*
- *All the students that were you know were doing negative stuff - some of the students that don't really want to be in the program.*

Central to student learning is a multi-discipline curriculum. Multi-discipline curriculum can be defined most simply as learnings across disciplines. Teachers combine together the common learnings from various disciplines to emphasize skills and concepts for the student (Drake & Burns, 2004). School systems operating career academies, offering career majors, utilizing student projects and other innovative career-related strategies have made integration of career-related curriculum and academic classes a key strategy for improving teaching and

learning (Stasz, Kaganoff, & Eden, 1995). Thus, the idea of multi-discipline curriculum becomes more in the DRIVE model than an aspect of student learning. Since the DRIVE program is based upon the parallel curriculum model where academic classes and workforce development classes complement and reinforce each subject material to lead to higher engagement, greater rigor, and increased relevance, the overall model is an example of multi-discipline curriculum (Tomlinson, et al, 2002). For this reason, the idea of multi-discipline curriculum becomes central to the success or failure of the DRIVE program. Teachers and administration have an understanding of the goal of the parallel curriculum multi-discipline model used at LCCA:

- *It's difficult to describe in non-educational common sense terms- but for me my understanding is developing a curriculum where attention is paid to a differentiated approach. You have a core of knowledge, avenues are created to show relationships; students have the opportunity to apply the acquired knowledge with the end result of a student finding what their interests are and using this for their next steps in either further their education or having a job.*
- *The bottom line is that to- the entire school uses the curriculum to, even though they are in different disciplines they're still trying to teach the same things and have the same end in mind for the students. And, I think it is, in short a way of having all the teachers on the same page.*

Students recognized the desire for a multi-discipline curriculum when they express complaints over the lack of relevancy of some classes:

- *But you know when it goes to like, oh you know, you're gonna learn Algebra 2 and you know like Advanced Geometry, and you know, Pre-Calculus. No, save that stuff for the,*

*when classes or when you know education actually requires Math. I mean like, if you're going out to be a mechanic you're not gonna need a whole lot of Algebra, you're only gonna need a certain type. And then, be like well, you know you need this type of Math to do this, well then no. Let him learn that type of Math to go into the job, not just learn it all in general in high school. Not all of us are gonna grow up to be, you know, a rocket scientist, or engineers, or you know, people who do mathematical algorithms. So don't, don't teach us the stuff now because that, that puts too much strain on us.*

- *I know it's going to impact my future, I mean like, it really depends if I know it's going to impact it but if it's going to impact it the way I want to I'm going to be very interested. If it's not I'm going to kind a shrug it off to the side.*
- *I like most of them, except math, cause I don't like math. No, numbers and letters what's the point.*

Students referenced activities illustrating outcomes of a multi-discipline curriculum in their comments:

- *I would say it would be the, whole reality check thing we had did cause it really like showed me how it really is out here- like buying a house, and the utilities you need, a car, car insurance, other important things like um, like insurance for yourself- health insurance. You know just like the little things, like all that money.*
- *Yeah the job opportunities and like the DRIVE class helped me a lot cause I learned a lot of stuff about like, businesses because I want to become like, go into the business management field. I learned a lot, well, like, businesses that I would've never known at such early time. So when I do go to college for it, it'll be helpful cause I'll already be kinda knowledgeable about it.*

A multi-discipline curriculum focus still needs to be expanded in the DRIVE program. Several students failed to experience much change from more traditional classrooms where lecturing is the primary strategy used by their educators:

- *Yeah, like I was cause some classes were interesting but when it was about language arts and stuff you're just- ugh, Why, cause you just want to finish. But why not, I mean cause you have to go through all those lectures and take notes.*
- *[Change to] learning that actually, helps you in- I don't know- provides like – I don't know how to say it when it comes to explaining...like providing the fundamentals that we need for our future- but not for just our future but our every day life.*
- *[Hands-on learning is] very much needed and it was in some and then sometimes it wasn't in others.*

## **Engagement**

The DRIVE program's goal was to increase student engagement through a relevant and authentic focus on developing the workforce. In order to achieve this goal, the DRIVE program's foundational class, DRIVE, was designed with authentic learning as a central tenet of the coursework. Once completing the DRIVE class, students were recommended for internships onsite at one of six businesses open to the public. The internship opportunities were designed for students to work side-by-side with mentors (instructors and job coaches) to model effective work practices and reinforces academic progress in a hands-on environment. Authentic learning typically focuses on real-world, complex problems and their solutions, using role-playing exercises, problem-based activities, case studies, and participation in virtual communities of practice leading to higher engagement levels for students (Lombardi, 2007). Engagement can be based upon behavior and attitudes in the classroom (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Engaged

students typically reflect low discipline problems and low absenteeism combined with high levels of task completion. Engagement is demonstrated in positive student attitudes towards learning and education (Hudley, et al, 2003). Faculty and staff at LCCA shared a common definition of engagement:

- *Student engagement means- to me- that both their body and their brain are into the subject at hand. Uh, you can always listen but that doesn't mean that you're engaged. Even if you are listening, you have to be, um, like I say using your brain and your body to be engaged.*
- *When students are participants in the learning experience. The student develops a sense of inquiry hopefully where they seek more in-depth information/knowledge.*

The faculty and staff also share a firm idea of idea of authentic learning.

- *Authentic learning in my mind is putting students in real life situations. Um, there is a difference between seeing something in a book and actually using your hands or your mind or your body to accomplish something so in my mind authentic learning is being able to practice in a real life situation in which you have learned.*
- *Learning that is evidently purposeful to the student for their use in the non-school setting. Using skills such as: applying knowledge, teamwork, independent/critical thinking, problem solving, intrinsic motivation, personal ownership and setting goals.*

The students enjoy authentic learning in the classroom, even if they do not always recognize it as “authentic” learning. Many times authentic learning in the students’ minds appear as fun and engaging instructional strategies. The DRIVE class and DRIVE program are generally recognized as beneficial, fun, engaging, and useful for the students’ future. The multiple references by students to their relationships with the teachers in the classroom are

indicative of the importance of strong, caring teachers in the classroom. Teacher-student relationships then become an aspect that cannot be separated from the authentic learning environment.

- *I guess cause every other county schools like is all the same stuff, I mean going to four classes and then you take an extra class just for like electives and here, I mean you have the opportunity to have your DRIVE class which helps you and like with your resume and with you know the reality check stuff and you can work at your own pace. I mean whatever- if you are really dedicated you are going to finish so much faster than if you are just sitting around.*
- *Yeah, they definitely need to do that. But I mean, like...with authentic learning you're gonna need to like... look at everything like... what jobs do this, this, and this and like just kinda need to expect generally around to find out what "knowledges" need to be known. Because I mean like, you don't need to know algorithm to flip burgers.*
- *I guess the internships that, you know, that they give you. They help you out because ....and they're being paid for something that another school doesn't do cause it's helping you with your career but it's also helping you economically.*
- *And like, going outside with Ms. Whallis, thinking about, if we could like, fix the school what would we do with the bad part of the building, where the grass is, like what would we do there, and doing stuff on the computers and that, I figured out I was really good in stuff like that.*

Not all students enjoy the collaborative nature of an authentic classroom. One student wanted isolation based upon his inability to avoid distractions in a classroom. Additionally, authentic learning in an at-risk environment could open up the teacher to a classroom control

issue with students not recognizing the educational benefits and becoming distracted through social relationships.

- *Put me in a corner, like I ask them to- but they never do. I guess it is something like they are not allowed to do. Yeah, I would like to sit alone.*
- *You're gonna be a bad student if your classes are like all the stuff you don't like.*
- *Uh, disagreements and slackers. I hate slackers in a school setting.*

Students consistently say they are more engaged when the classes seem relevant to their lives and their futures.

- *More [interested in class], definitely cause you can better- be more like not interactive- but more like involved and interested in what you are learning as for as if it's not- other people just push it to the side and doesn't really get learned.*
- *I, I learned a lot, I mean, oh my gosh, I had so much fun honestly, I remember having a school field trip, with you.*

## **Motivation**

As with the other factors explored in this study, motivation is intrinsically related to many facets of the LCCA DRIVE program. When reviewing the coded data, students' responses related to motivating factors in their lives were marked as such; however, in the larger scheme of the overall program, motivation became a much more convoluted topic with many areas contributing to Motivation rather than just motivating factors for a student. Motivation is often divided into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Brewster & Fager, 2000). Extrinsic motivations are external in nature often involving the gaining of a reward or the avoidance of a penalty. Intrinsic motivation is an internal drive to achieve a goal or desired outcome (Dev, 1997). Students who are engaged in school often select tasks at the border of their ability level,

show positive emotions towards education, and take opportunities to grow academically (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Students identified many factors that contributed to their intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors. Although for the purpose of this study, data specifically coded as motivation was grouped under the theme of Student Learning, a separate look has been given to groupings of data that lead to a larger viewpoint of Motivation as opposed to “my child,” “my mom,” “my dad,” etc. being labeled as motivations. Under the theme Motivation, I gathered coded data related to expectations for students, respect for youth, and adult relationships in the students’ lives.

High expectations for at-risk students are not something easily achieved by teachers nor the students themselves. According to a 2009 Civic Enterprises report, two-thirds of dropout students interviewed for the study said they would have worked harder if more had been expected of them. The same study revealed 75% of teachers and 66% of principals did not believe students at-risk of not graduating would actually work harder if more were demanded of them including higher academic standards, increased levels of studying, and homework (Bridgeland et al., 2009). From every area explored in this study, high expectations for students in the LCCA program was the weakest in evidential standards. Although the staff members shared an understanding of the idea of rigorous education, it may not be translating to the classroom.

- *My understanding of rigorous education experience is where students are challenged. Not simply acquiring knowledge to pass a test, but rather providing an opportunity to learn by experimentation. Given avenues to acquire the basic knowledge through some*

*introductory instructional lectures/information that has inquiry built in to the instruction. Students discover additional knowledge through their own experimentation.*

- *A rigorous education experience- rigor signifies to me that something is tough, it is hard, it is not easy. It is something that requires some effort. It is something that not all students are used to but it is something that is necessary if students are going to be prepared for the real world, they are going to have to realized that life is hard and working for a living is hard.*

Many of the students described academic situations that would represent lower-level thinking skills in the academic classes. Most students would relate responses regarding teachers pointing out what students need to pull out from the lesson in a very obvious manner when asked “how do you know something is important.”

- *I think it's, I think it's usually when the teacher tells me, or if, if I can tell that it's important then, or if I don't know it yet, then I guess that's it.*
- *My teacher says pay attention.*
- *Well, if the teacher repeats it a million times, then it's obviously important.*
- *Cause, well, it's obvious, cause the teacher will tell me, like this is very important to know, and if it catches my attention which is, which is mostly everything the teacher tells me.*
- *And, they're like make sure you write this down because you're going to need to know it; okay, thank you.*

Initially, I felt the smaller class size was creating the impression that the course work was easier at LCCA, but when taken in conjunction with the students' explanation of how they know something is important, rigor of instruction needs to be increased as the teachers become more

inclined to expect more from the students. Additional comments regarding the difficulty of coursework shows a view from the students as to the rigor of the coursework.

- *I would say that I think that the work was just easier.*
- *I mean let's see- they were easy, but then again you think about the students around you that may not understand that- what they are actually doing you know. Like I was in a class that students spoke only Spanish- so teachers would take their time and I would be patient- cause I understand that you know, yeah.*
- *It's [easier] here, at High School A, they didn't really do that. They expected you to know what you needed to know because we use, we had to take the bench mark a lot.*

The environment of LCCA as a small school with a low student to teacher ratio was referenced by several students as to the reason why classes were “easier” at LCCA.

- *Because I mean that there's somebody there, you just know that they are not teaching it- just monitoring you but they still help if you need it. So, home school is just you and yourself.*
- *I don't know, because the classes are smaller than at like the other schools and like the teachers care more- it seems like .*

Creating an environment of respect for youth is an area recognized as an effective strategy for at-risk students (Kerka, 2003). The relationship between the teachers and students in conjunction with the small school environment of LCCA create an atmosphere of respect for the students interviewed.

- *I like everything about it, I love how the teachers are, like I said before they're more talkative, they're more, they talk to you more, you know. They're not just like, do this lesson, do this and that, and then they, no they actually go step by step.*

- *A lot of job opportunity, more career focused, um, a lot more support from like staff and teachers then it was last year.*
- *I like that, cause it gave us, it's not like just a teacher telling us that who doesn't really have experience in the work place, besides being a teacher, but people from different view points and, we see how they actually apply their skills to their job and stuff.*
- *Each one of my teachers, just, they just know, and like they, they have patience, they have very, very good patience, and whenever I don't understand anything, I can like, I feel comfortable just to go up, just to go up to them and just tell them that, I don't understand this or maybe I need extra help in that.*
- *More I feel you know have [a good relationship it's better]- if you have a negative relationship with your teachers you don't really learn like math class was never very easy for me cause I did not get along with the teacher; but then when I did, I could go to them if I needed help with something.*

The students like the increased structure including the addition of an in-school suspension option for discipline during the Lanier Choice Day Program as well as the removal of the discipline-referred students from the day program. The discipline-referred students who exhibited on-going discipline issues were moved to the evening 3PM to 6PM program. The students have a fear of being sent to the 3PM to 6PM program. This fear is also a motivating factor for some of the students. Teachers who recognize the challenges, opportunities, and plans for the students contribute greatly to the atmosphere of overall respect for the youth of the school.

- *More stricter, the way y'all are preparing us for the real world instead of, last year, last year they really honestly, really didn't care.*

- *The fact that they don't have like, so many of the disciplinary kids kept in our environment so, there's not a lot of problems or major problems.*
- *The students and the teachers are like way more strict, and the students I think they want to do more because they realize that like, you can't get anywhere in life without a high school diploma. And it's important, I used to didn't think it wasn't, because I figured if you had a job you had a job.*
- *The first year I got here was very, very rowdy and, you know crazy and now, there was a lot of people that I didn't like, cause I mean, they were just like they acted all big and bad, and you know tough, and all that stuff, and you know; I was just like, and were trying to pick fights people, you know getting in peoples faces you know, being stupid, always getting in trouble, swearing in front of everybody you know, acting uneducated And so I mean like, now as the years go on, I mean like they've, the year after, yeah, no, yeah the year after; ugh they got stricter and I saw that some of the people that were you know rowdy that were last year were gone. You know they didn't come back, you know so I assumed you know, with their attitude they couldn't go back to normal school.*

The DRIVE students also recognized and appreciated the flexible schedule options offered to the student body. Students attend classes from 9AM to 2:30PM each day. Students can also opt to attend the evening program if the evening hours work better with the students' schedule.

- *The time, it's not like regular high school, you come in at a certain time, like 9 and get out at 2:25.*
- *Or you have another option to do 3 to 6.*

Several of the students' experiences from the traditional high school environment exposed the feeling of an increased respect for youth at LCCA.

- *I have a different experience here than I did at my old school it's more friendly environment.*
- *I wasn't getting most of my work done because when I was in ISS there was a lot of people that I knew in there and we would talk a lot, and they said that I had an attitude problem*
- *[LCCA] is a settled environment- not so much as the school itself but just like I don't know like I kind of like secluded myself just because of the fact that there are kids around here you know that I am not to- I don't get along with some of them and stuff. Lot of them are like I knew I couldn't associate with- with my trying to move forward and so kind of just- I don't know.*

As with so many other aspects of this study, adult relationships factor strongly into the creation of an environment of respect for the youth. Arguably one of the easiest themes to consistently see in the students' stories was the importance of strong relationship with the teachers. The relationships between students and teachers were also readily apparent in the observations of classrooms, hallways, and internships. A sense of belonging in a school environment indicates the student feels accepted and supported in the environment of the school (Goodenow, 1993). Since a proven strategy of at-risk education is to establish strong teacher-student or mentor-student relationships in a small school environment, the relationships with the students and teachers at LCCA is a definite point of strength for the organization (Kerka, 2003).

- *The fact that the people are so supporting this year and giving so much opportunities.*

- *I guess I feel more, more motivated because there's somebody trying to help me out and it's not just a teacher sitting there watching what we're doing on a computer.*
- *That's very good, very, very good, I feel like the, I feel like the teachers that I have are keeping me on track, staying focused, like forgetting the outside stuff just*
- *Each one of my teachers, just, they just know, and like they, they have patience, they have very, very good patience, and whenever I don't understand anything, I can like, I feel comfortable just to go up, just to go up to them and just tell them that, I don't understand this or maybe I need extra help in that.*
- *I will remember all my teachers. I remember this school. I'll remember you of course. I remember my experiences in my classes. Of course friends- can't forget about my friends. Ah, just everything that I have learned here and it's like I've experienced here at LCCA.*
- *My teachers are my motivation.*

As discussed earlier, not every student shared their appreciation for the relationship with the teachers. Some participants preferred e2020 online classes while one participant had no desire for a relationship with his teachers. Lamar's narrative from Chapter 4 shares the sentiment of a desire to avoid relationships with teachers and classmates.

- *I like e2020 so you can like, keep on your track and just do it at your own pace, but I also like the classes because they help you a lot.*
- *Teacher taught classes can be better but then you know, then it depends on the quality of the teacher. Some teachers can be mean you know, try to be controlling you know anti fun you know, and that would make e2020 seem like a blast cause you know you can just breeze through it you don't need to sit there and have a guy yell at you all the time....*

- *I don't really- don't really try to establish relationships. I just try to do my work and get it over with and if they like me- they like me and if they don't- they don't.*

The interweaving of an environment of high expectations, strong teacher to student relationships, and an overall attitude of respect for youth can result in a stimulating and motivational environment for at-risk youth (Kerka, 2003).

### **Educational Experience**

The final aspect explored in this case study was the educational experience of the student. Like most high schools, LCCA has a strong sense of community. Without the existence of school athletics stimulating a sense of school pride, students of LCCA have educational experiences that can be directly attributed to the sense of community within the school and the support and long-term follow-up found in the adult relationships with the students (Kerka, 2003).

Community means a group of people who share a common setting with a set of established norms (MacQueen, et al, 2001). From this definition, LCCA has a well defined set of processes and procedures. The introduction of the DRIVE program this past year resulted in a significant change in the processes of the school, but through a distinct branding process, the DRIVE program was interjected into the community of LCCA. DRIVE banners, signage, tee-shirts, awards, and special events all combined to make the concepts of DRIVE a mainstream idea of the school.

Students feel connected to the school through teacher relationships and friendships.

- *Just the thought of knowing that if I don't do this I can't move on further in life. And like, I only talk to a few people so I don't, kinda like drag myself into the other people around here, so I kinda can get through it better. It's a lot easier on me, to do my work and focus and stuff.*

- *There's more, activities, and, they're more flexible, and.. we have, I don't know it's just easier since we have taught classes, and it helps out more, and independent studies.*

The removal of discipline-referred students from the classroom has resulted in less distractions; however, several students expressed a continued need for improvement in the school environment in this area.

- *LCCA is kind of a good one. I mean, there's less people not so much drama for people to not be able to pay attention in class, and then you have your separate e2020.*
- *Well, I love helping people, so like, a lot of people here were... when they came here, you know, some people were emotional, you know had emotional problems, and, and I, I like helping people with that, and I'm very good at that*
- *Probably my friends that pushed me to graduate.*

The small school environment is a consistent theme described by the students and that image of the school is a definite contributing factor to the sense of community felt by the students.

- *I think it's easier over here, like, and there's less people.*
- *I don't know, because the classes are smaller than at like, the other schools and like the teachers care more- it seems like.*

The focus on career-related education is also a consistent theme in the students as they acknowledge the focus of the DRIVE program.

- *When, like with the DRIVE class, they- we did projects like and stuff that were more like you said hands on and stuff so it actually helped us be like interacting with it helped us getting to know what it's like instead of just being like oh this is what's going to happen you know.*

- *A lot of time like in the DRIVE class we did projects and stuff. Like one we had to do was improvement on the school and it help working in a group cause we had more- had everybody's ideas and we were able to test them and see which ones were more better.*

LCCA still has many opportunities to increase its sense of community. Establishing and improving a stronger school community can achieve many benefits. Distinguishing the instruction style, acknowledging the purpose of the school, and continuing to improve disciplinary standards can improve the sense of community.

- *In my experience it's just a little bit more [authentic]. Well I mean like, the last classes I had its still teachers lecturing and you know, we didn't really do a whole lot as stuff. And this year was like... you know, we, we go over to the other building and go do stuff, but mainly just sitting there in the classroom learning stuff.*
- *More like, you know...oh you're sent to LCA you're stupid. No, make it seem like oh you go to LCA this is, you know, this is, just like a school, although you know, we give you another chance.*
- *There are a lot of people who goof around and, ugh, they're not that bright, and you know, they're here to work, and they do work, but it's so much that you can tell that they're not, I mean like, they're not bright at all. I mean, they're gonna be here for a while.*

A contributing factor to the educational experiences of LCCA students is the support and long-term follow-up that is provided for a student. It was a notable characteristic of the school's environment. The opportunities for support of the students through business partnerships, post-secondary relationships, strong counseling, childcare services and a workforce development program with a job placement service are support mechanisms for the students. At risk

educational environments should encompass developmental services designed to reengage youth in order to remove barriers to an education (Root Cause Social Impact Research, 2010).

- *I had my daughter and I didn't think that I could do it at a regular high school anymore.*
- *coming to school and my daughter. Because at one point I couldn't get child care.*
- *I probably have to say the graduating part, cause I never had confidence in myself.*
- *Just cause the homework, and the staying up late, and getting up really early, and I heard about LCA and how they're more lenient with you, especially with a child, so I came here.*
- *I could do it on my own, cause I wouldn't of made it over at the other school.*

Through the DRIVE program, many of the students interviewed had definitive future plans. The students who were graduating at the end of the semester (or have already graduated) appeared to have more definitive career plans. The students who remained unsure of their educational future typically were also unable to clearly articulate career goals.

- *[I am supported] in a lot of different ways, because now cause, we have the DRIVE class and it prepares you for jobs how to do interviews and being professional.*
- *Because it shows you what you, the skills you need to know, and need to learn to be, in a work environment*
- *It just, it helps me, um, like, be ready to go to college and have a good job.*
- *Well as far as just like the whole cosmetology industry that's more of just a passion and something I like. As far as the businessmen management part like uh, people like letting me know like me see how the business industry actually is and, uh like giving me resources and stuff of how to go about that.*

## **Conclusion**

The interrelational aspects of the data from the study as well as the overview of the educational trends presented in Chapter 2 are best shown in overlapping circles. In order to create an effective environment for the at-risk students of the DRIVE program, LCCA staff had to focus on multiple areas. This study sought to explore the student experiences as they related to student learning, engagement, motivation, and educational experiences. Through the literature, interview protocols were developed to explore accepted trends in education of at-risk youth. Through the students' stories, classroom observations, document analysis of student work, and a general snapshot of student attitudes, beliefs, and morals, the conceptual framework of the DRIVE program developed into a practical look of outcomes from the experience of a student in the program.

From the wealth of the data, a good educational experience is being offered to the students of LCCA through the strong teacher relationships, established support systems, a respect for the youth and a sense of community about the school. As the DRIVE program continues to evolve in the future, a continued enhancement of the student learning process through additional development of assets for students, increased opportunities for authentic learning, and a raising of expectations for the students are all merited. The framework for the multi-discipline curriculum is established for the future development of the program.

## CHAPTER 6

### DRIVE: PLACING THE RESEARCH IN CURRENT CONTEXT

The phone rang in my office and a teacher asked if there was *anything* I could do for a student in her class. “Sabrina” was wearing shorts so tight and so short her butt cheeks were hanging out. The teacher also said she was wearing a see-through top with a polka-dotted bra. The other kids, she said, were all making lewd remarks. I asked her for a minute and headed to speak to Sabrina in the class.

When I first started my career as a teacher, I had been a business professional for years. My career began in an affluent, mostly white school, where almost all of my students in the Fashion Marketing program were cheerleaders, student leaders, and basketball or softball athletes. Only sporadically would I encounter a student identified as at-risk of graduating high school...college, maybe, but for the most part, they were all definitely on the track to graduate high school. When my co-workers heard I was moving to an at-risk campus, they all questioned me. Are you in trouble? Why are you going to work with *those* kids? Initially, I was going because it was an opportunity to open a new program focusing on career education, but I did not realize the challenges and rewards of dealing with a population of students who are academically-fragile, socially-challenged, and economically-depressed.

The first time I met Sabrina was in the classroom on the day the teacher asked for help with her clothing. As the Workforce Development Coordinator for the school, my job was to support the students as they transitioned from school to work and/or college and to support the teachers in facilitating the development of work-ready skills in the students. In reality, many

days my job became a catch-all requests like Sabrina's. When I met her, Sabrina was dressed in a way that definitely would make a conservative teacher blush. The shorts were way too short, way too tight. The top was way too see-through over, although not over a polka-dot bra, but rather a black and white dotted bikini top. To say Sabrina was violating the loosely defined dress code policy of the school was an understatement. On the surface, Sabrina was a student defying the dress code and acting like a "typical at-risk student." However, as the teacher shared with me, the clothes on Sabrina's body were all that she had to her name. Her parents...or rather her mom and step-dad...had kicked her out months ago when she was still 16 years old. She had moved in with her boyfriend's family, only for the entire family to be kicked out from failure to pay the rent. For the past several weeks, Sabrina and her boyfriend had been living in a tent on the shores of the lake. Hey, it was lakefront property...right?

Sabrina's attendance at school was sporadic. She managed to get to school two or three days a week. But when I spoke with her I knew immediately that her getting to school for even a couple of days was quite a feat. To get to school, she was taking a series of public buses, walking several miles, and then sometimes depending on the charity of strangers to get her to her destination...our school. I am not so sure I would have made the same effort she was putting forth to get to work, much less, school.

Through community resources, we were able to get Sabrina clothes, place her in a paying internship, and give her bus passes for easier transportation. Six months after I met Sabrina, she completed her requirements for high school graduation. In May, I had the opportunity to see her "walk" at the graduation ceremony.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to seek to investigate the results of the DRIVE program, an authentic learning environment infused with practical learning outcomes.

The new curriculum model was based in authentic educational experiences that were explored through the listening to the narratives of at-risk students and staff describing the students' experiences and participation in the DRIVE Program. Themes from the students' experiences were compared to existing literature regarding effective educational practices for at-risk youth.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the student experiences (from the viewpoint of students, faculty, and administration) resulting from creating a rigorous, authentic learning environment focusing on relevance, collaboration and career-preparation in an environment designed for an at-risk student population?
2. How does the change to a curriculum delivery method that focuses on relevance, collaboration, and career-preparation in an authentic format impact (a) student learning, (b) engagement, (c) motivation, and (d) educational experience?

The following chapter addresses each research question individually connecting the research findings to the theoretical concept of LCCA

*Research question one: What are the student experiences (from the viewpoint of students, faculty, and administration) resulting from creating a rigorous, authentic learning environment focusing on relevance, collaboration and career-preparation in an environment designed for an at-risk student population?*

The narratives of the student participants in the study shared the lives of seven young people as they have experienced life from an academic viewpoint over the past few years. Inseparable from their academic stories are the family relations, life challenges, and future ambitions for each of the students. From the narratives, the experiences of the students in the

LCCA environment can be heard. I use key words in the research questions to focus and fully articulate the answers to the research questions as determined by this research effort.

### **Rigor**

Rigor in an effective career academy is achieved by challenging core academic courses enhanced by a specific, pragmatic focus on career-oriented skills or classes (Brand, 2009). The theoretical concept the framework of the DRIVE program was created upon features a focus on pragmatic education of workforce skills achieved in a constructivist environment with students learning career-related skills through a hands-on, authentic learning environment that is enhanced through academic reinforcement. A progressive environment attempts to focus on the whole child through a focus on community and collaboration between students. Progressive education has the goal of creation of intrinsic motivation in students leading to deeper understanding of the material presented (Kohn, 2008). Real-world applications are central to a progressive environment in order to make long-term connections for learners (Marrapodi, 2003). Although most students refer to the relevance of the career instruction, the rigor of the overall instruction at LCCA is still a work-in-progress.

Many of the students interviewed expressed a feel for the easiness of the coursework at LCCA. Granted, this sentiment was often paired with an explanation of the benefits of the small school environment where teachers are able to focus more independently on student needs rather than having to address a large group of students with diverse abilities. The small school environment could and did attest to the feel of the ease of schoolwork on behalf of the students. Even though the academic classes follow the prescribed curriculum as determined by the GADOE, evidence of higher-order thinking skills of application and evaluation were not often described by the students in their discussions of academic experience. Although not specifically

addressed in the narratives from the students, the theme of high expectations for the students did arise when looking at the data as a whole. The need for increased rigor can be directly related to higher expectations for the students in the classroom and in the authentic learning environments of the business internships. When combined with faculty viewpoints of expectations for the students, the increase in rigor of instruction is an area of opportunity for LCCA as well as any classroom that focuses on challenging an at-risk student population to rise above what is “expected” of them.

As the first year of implementation is now complete, the coming school year should focus on a greater incorporation between academic classes and the actual creation of workforce ready skills through generic soft-skills development and specific career-related training using a progressive education model. Since career academies help students develop career and life skills in addition to creating an environment of academic achievement, practical career instruction is a vital part of a success academy in order to increase the relevance and rigor of the curriculum (Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Brand, 2009). The challenge could possibly arise from the viewpoint of teachers and students who expect the authentic classroom to be fun all of the time. The fear of the entertaining atmosphere of authentic instruction resulting in the movement away from a more rigorous instructional environment leaves an opportunity for traditional education to continue a strong foothold (Cronin, 1993).

### **Authentic Learning**

Authentic learning is an opportunity for classroom instruction to focus on real-world, complex problems using a variety of instructional tools to engage students in the solution of the problem (Lombardi, 2007). Through the narratives of the students, authentic learning opportunities were apparent in most of the discussions. From easy recall of authentic learning

events like the Reality Check financial literacy training days to completing applications for potential jobs, students shared their experiences from authentic learning. In theory, authentic learning is teaches students through collaboration, modeling, performance opportunities, and reflection (Herrington, 2005). Students shared their experiences, both positive and negative of collaboration in the classroom as well as the knowledge gained from the expert guest speakers in the classroom. Many of the students also shared how experiences in an authentic learning environment were impacting the current reality or the expected future needs.

Like rigor, few references were made to authentic learning opportunities outside of the DRIVE class. As often seen in secondary education, LCCA academic classes appear to follow a prescribed curriculum in a traditional style of instructional delivery, while the DRIVE career-oriented classes had a distinct authentic, hands-on feel.

The parallel curriculum framework of the DRIVE program expects a pairing of the academic classes with the DRIVE class curriculum with the goal of increasing relevance for the students through engaging authentic learning opportunities. Although evidenced to a minimal degree, the opportunity for increased expansion of ties between academics and workforce skill development exists for the coming school year at LCCA.

### **Relevance**

Pragmatic constructivists desire action rather than abstract reason as the source of knowledge (Larochelle, et al., 1998). The DRIVE framework was built upon the ideas of Dewey's pragmatic education ideas intertwined with the relevant 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills designed to extend the basic academic ideas of traditional education (Dewey, 1914; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2011). Constructivist describe effective learning as an active and creative process that is relevant to the outside world where learners have a vested interest in the learning

outcomes (Paris, 2011). The constructivist description of the effective learning environment is the prescribed format of the LCCA DRIVE program.

Through the student narratives, the pragmatic nature of the education could be seen in the students' discussions of career plans and the career preparation program of DRIVE. The students shared their experiences, especially in the DRIVE class, as creative activity that was directly related to preparing them for a career, not just a job. Although not always addressed from the narratives as presented, a common sentiment was among the students of what skills and abilities are needed to be a good employee as well as their desires to have a "career," not just a "job."

The students consistently described relevant coursework as the materials and knowledge helping with their future plans. Herrington & Kervin (2007) described relevant, authentic learning as activities with real-world relevance giving students the opportunity to examine tasks from a variety of viewpoints. An education that provides access to experts for modeling in a collaborative environment leads to a stronger relevance for the students' plans and lives and a greater the interest level in the coursework. From a theoretical concept, DRIVE was also to be focused on learning opportunities rooted in situated cognition. Situated cognition theory proposes all learning and cognition are situated within particular context and environments where learners have increased opportunity for application of the learning results in a productive outcome (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As students could see a greater relevance for the learning in the academic and DRIVE classrooms, the greater the students' emphasis on these learning opportunities in their narratives. The links to the students' futures often came from the hands-on activities of DRIVE as well as the expert guest speakers sharing their knowledge with the students.

## **Collaboration**

A survey of business executives found a strong preference for skills in collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication (AMA, 2010). These skills, known as the 4C's of 21<sup>st</sup> century education were considered in the original design and intent of the curriculum model for the DRIVE program (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). From a theoretical perspective, the authentic learning process emphasizes the use of real-world scenarios when teaching students through collaboration as well as modeling, performance opportunities, and reflection (Herrington, 2005). The social learning strategies are also found in the collaborative model with learners gaining knowledge through the interaction between observed behaviors, cognitive aspects, and outside environments (Bandura, 1971). The desired outcomes of the DRIVE program were a direct reflection of the creation of an environment to teach students to work effectively in a collaborative environment.

Students shared in their narratives the pains and the pleasures of working in a group. Learning to effectively negotiate group dynamics in a collaborative school environment leads to a skill set for career success (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). From the narratives a persistent idea could be seen with most of the students interviewed: (a) the students recognized the benefits of working in a group and creatively achieving solutions to problems presented in the classroom and the work environment and (b) students felt the discomfort and frustration when group members did not perform or uphold their responsibilities. Some students shared their successes from the collaborative activities while some shared their challenges in the stories they opted to recount.

Collaboration was most clearly identifiable in the DRIVE classroom. Few references were made to collaborative activities in academic classes. The move to a more collaborative

environment in the academic rooms however could easily be a by-product of an intentional addition of authentic learning opportunities in all classrooms.

### **Career-Preparation**

LCCA evolved to the present form through a grant from the Technical College System of Georgia. The grant moved the school from a career academy to a charter career academy with a greater focus on career preparation for students (DTAE, 2012). Most typical career academies have different structures than traditional schools with an end-goal of producing students with strong career preparation as well as a high school degree (NCAC, 2010). The DRIVE program was an continued evolution of the programs of the Academy with the addition of soft-skill training targeting the at-risk population.

If one theme or overall constant from the narratives of the students could be established as the strongest, the emphasis of the curriculum of the DRIVE program on workforce development would be that theme. All students recognized the skills taught, discussed and applied in the DRIVE program were preparing them for a better career following either graduation or attainment of the GED. By identifying a goal for the students of a specific career plan and assisting in the determination for the steps to achieve that career goal, teachers from the DRIVE program provided most students with a direction for their future. The students who shared in their narratives their indecision on their future were also the students who expressed the weakest level of motivation (either verbally or through their student work).

### **At-Risk Population**

An at-risk student is defined as any student, who for a variety of reasons, are in danger of not completing high school. Socio-economic conditions, race, past academic progress, literacy levels, and family support systems are all factors that can be used to determine the risk level for

student not graduating from high school (Siegrist, et al, 2010). Research and really common sense tells us at-risk students are in need of the most support, the most innovative teaching strategies, and the most engaging environments (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008.). The DRIVE program is an effort to create the supportive environment that is innovative and engaging.

From the student narratives, teacher relationships were clearly identified as a strong aspect of a support system desired by at-risk students. The innovative multi-discipline curriculum, although still in need of further expansion into the academic classrooms, provided a pervasive sense of engagement from the students' stories. The students expressed the need for an increase in teacher expectations as related to student output in subtle ways including mentioning of the lack of homework or describing the identification of how students knew material was important.

A 2009 Civic Enterprises report revealed two-thirds of dropout students interviewed said they would have worked harder if more were expected of them. Yet 75% of teachers and 66% of principals interviewed did not believe students at-risk of not graduating would actually work harder if more were demanded of them. The demands the staff members felt would not be achieved included higher academic standards, increased levels of studying, and homework (Bridgeland et al., 2009). By raising expectations, the staff working with the DRIVE program could prepare the at-risk population for their futures more effectively (Kerka, 2003).

Overall of the eight effective at-risk strategies identified by Kerka (2003), the narratives from the students revealed how the young people had experienced each aspect. Presence of caring adults, a sense of community, development of students' assets, a respect for youth, a comprehensive, multi-discipline curriculum, high expectations, authentic learning, and support

are all experiences shared by the students in their narratives. Many times these experiences resulted in positive educational outcomes.

From the narratives, the challenges in students' lives are clearly documented. It is these challenges that are leading the students to the "at-risk" designation. It is easy to think of an at-risk student as a statistic, but the voice provided by the narratives gives an insight into the surface image of a struggling student who may not attend school that often or seems to want to disrupt class more than learn. If educators could "hear" the voices of the at-risk student more often, perhaps it would lead to a greater sense of empathy on educators as a whole. Clearly from the narratives, the teachers of LCCA share a tremendous sense of empathy with the students.

*Research question two: How does the change to a curriculum delivery method that focuses on relevance, collaboration, and career-preparation in an authentic format impact (a) student learning, (b) engagement, (c) motivation, and (d) educational experience?*

### **Impact on Student Learning**

The theoretical concept of the DRIVE program involved an interweaving of authentic, social, and situated cognition learning theories. Faculty members of the University of Australia developed the authentic learning theory emphasizing the use of real-world scenarios when teaching students through collaboration, modeling, performance opportunities, and reflection (Herrington, 2005). Bandura's social learning theory explains how behaviors are learned through the interaction between observed behaviors, cognitive factors, and external environments (1971). The situated cognition theory seeks to explain learning as the point where thinking and learning make sense only within specific situations (Wilson & Myers, 1999). All learning and

cognition are situated within particular context and environments where learners have increased opportunity for application of the learning results in a productive outcome (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

As the theoretical concepts played out in the DRIVE program during the 2012-2013 school year, the movement toward this learning environment could be seen as the students described authentic learning situations inside the classroom and situated learning occurring through internships and expert guest speakers. The format of the DRIVE class most clearly engaged in the ideas of the social learning theory with students working along side business professionals and mentors to model appropriate behaviors in the workplace. Outside of the DRIVE class, relatively little experiences were shared by the students to support additional opportunities to see the theoretical concepts actually at work in the academic setting.

However, inside the DRIVE class and DRIVE program, students expressed recognition of relevance, engagement, and motivation. The question becomes does that expression translate to improved student outcomes, specifically graduation? It is impossible and impractical to make a blanket statement related to the impact of the curriculum change at LCCA on all students in a positive or negative manner. We can only listen to the students' experiences and see threads of ideas that might impact student learning. The lack of students expressing a preference for online classes, the consistent voice of students sharing specific learning opportunities that would be described as authentic in nature, and the consistent expression of the importance of teacher relationships to the students' learning process all support the literature. A hands-on, authentic, relevant learning environment facilitated by teachers in the role of mentors appears to produce learning retention and higher classroom engagement in this population of at-risk students.

## Impact on Student Engagement

Developing an understanding of student engagement levels in the learning process is a complex task that if successfully completed can lead to a much greater understanding of education models resulting in improved student achievement and overall student knowledge retention (Lagana-Riordan, et al, 2011). Many different aspects of an educational environment can influence engagement, but the DRIVE program specifically worked to stimulate engagement through a multi-discipline curriculum infused with relevance of the educational efforts.

As discussed earlier, the blending of the career-related curriculum of the DRIVE program and the academic coursework was not as evident in the students' expressed experiences.

Although the teacher and administrator had a good understanding of authentic learning and the parallel curriculum model, the blending of the academic- and career-focused courses was in an infancy stage. Students consistently shared their engagement level was higher when the course work "meant" something to them for their future. That meaning seemed to be more impactful if the relationship between what was being taught in the class was clearly tied to a future need as opposed to just general knowledge for success in life. One student described this phenomenon eloquently when he said, *"Not all of us are gonna grow up to be, you know, a rocket scientist, or engineers, or you know, people who do mathematical algorithms. So don't, don't teach us the stuff now because that, that puts too much strain on us."*

At-risk students can provide valuable feedback regarding public schools and impactful education policies that may lead to improving the United States school systems (de la Ossa, 2005). From the conversations with the students in this study, a general consensus could be seen that in increasing the relevance...answering the questions why do I need to learn this? and when will I use this? in the classroom everyday is an important implication. By answering these

questions, students can understand the relevance of education possibly leading to higher student engagement. Higher engagement results in a self-prorogating situation with engaged students often selecting tasks at the border of their ability level, showing positive emotions towards education, and taking opportunities to grow academically resulting in a successful educational momentum (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

### **Impact on Student Motivation**

Motivation in itself is a subject for an entire study the field is so vast and rich with theories and implications. However, for the purpose of the DRIVE program, student motivation was explored on a personal level (motivation) and a larger, more universal level (Motivation). Students consistently shared motivating factors that were personal in nature: family members, internal drive, children. Several students were honest about their motivation levels being moderate or even low. The students' class work coincided rather well with their own expressed motivation levels in most situations.

Overall student Motivation was explored through a look at high expectations for students, a respect for youth, and the impact of adult relationships in the lives of students. Students did not share many examples of high teacher expectations in their conversations, however, a consistent communication of respect and strong teacher relationships could clearly be seen. Only a few of the students mentioned immediate extrinsic motivating factors (paid internships) in their experiences, however, many students referred to intrinsic factors like family approval, teacher approval, internal drive (Dev, 1997). Kohn (2008) expressed the importance of intrinsic motivations leading to student understanding in his description of schools and educators who adhere to a progressive format in the learning process that tends to focus on the whole child,

involve community and collaboration between students, and instills a sense of social justice in learners.

Students in the DRIVE program expressed a mixture of the motivating and Motivating factors as described. At-risk programs could see positive results in exploring and capitalizing on students' personal motivation factors in combination with an educational environment of high expectations, strong teacher relationships, and a healthy environment of respect for the youth.

### **Impact on Educational Experience**

The practical construction of knowledge was an important aspect of the DRIVE program. Students through their shared experiences described in their teenage vernacular times where practical knowledge was being constructed when they shared accounts of the Reality Check financial literacy program, actual internships, and business professionals who came to class as guest speakers. When learners are allowed to construct their own knowledge and understanding of a topic, the role of the teacher is to help learners uncover their own facts, figures, and ideas of material and not to simply “teach” the material (Marrapodi, 2003). Clearly in the DRIVE program, this type of learning was taking place in many situations. As expressed earlier, the opportunity for pragmatic construction of knowledge can and should be emphasized in the academic classrooms of the school as well. Translated to a larger at-risk education role beyond the walls of LCCA, intentional development of this type of educational environment could lead to an effective system reaching at-risk youth.

In exploring the student experiences, the educational environment was described through a sense of community and the support systems in place for the students. LCCA, even without sports and traditional events of a high school, has a strong sense of community. The students consistently expressed the expectation of fond memories of high school at LCCA. Teacher and

friend relationships factored into the development of the community. The recognition of the focus on workforce development also enhanced the sense of community for the students.

Just as the story of Sabrina illustrated how support systems can result in removal of barriers to education for a student leading to successful outcomes, many of the students mentioned the support systems of LCCA. The daycare program for personal childcare, internships for hands-on learning, practical knowledge for successful employment and caring teachers for a support source were all mentioned by the students. Although not technical in their descriptions, the students related experiences that pragmatic social constructivists could understand as actions rather than abstract reason as their source of knowledge in their explanation of the educational environment of LCCA (Larochelle, et al., 1998).

### **DRIVE: From Theory to Practice**

Built from both pragmatic and constructivist philosophies, the DRIVE program was created from the premises of the authentic learning theory along with aspects of the Bandura's social learning theory and the situated cognition theory. The DRIVE program of LCCA was an attempt to direct at-risk students to a roadmap leading to a productive future including high school graduation, employability skill development, and workforce and/or post-secondary readiness. Through both the narratives of the students and the thematic ideas generated from a constant-comparison review of the data, the aspects of the theories can be seen in initial outcomes of the program.

Educational literature provides ideas of effective strategies, trends, and theories with the purpose of engaging and challenging students with relevant knowledge. The DRIVE program was created with the outcomes and recommendations of the current literature as the guiding principles of the program's design. Based upon the findings from this study, the actual practices

of the DRIVE program are reflective of the literary and theoretical foundations upon which the program was designed. As the DRIVE program continues to develop, faculty grow more comfortable with an authentic learning environment, and students rise to the established bar of high expectations, additional successes will ideally be achieved.

Figure 11 is a visual representation of the conceptual foundation of the DRIVE program as the collected data was analyzed through the filter of the education literature. Creating an environment using pragmatic, constructivist principles with authentic learning opportunities offered in a social learning environment focusing on situated cognition learning processes, resulted in distinctly positive experiences for many of the participants. Student learning, motivation, and engagement were demonstrated in the conversations with the student participants. The overall educational experience of the DRIVE program appeared to result in a more positive and supportive environment for the students.

### **Implications for Practice**

The DRIVE model reveals the practical outcomes of several theories and research-based strategies. From the research, three areas present as more prominent for current efforts targeting creating successful outcomes for at-risk youth. As demonstrated in the students' narratives, the importance of the multi-discipline curriculum, teacher relationships, and sense of community within a school should be considered when working with a population of at-risk students.

Multi-discipline curriculum focuses on student learning across disciplines with teachers emphasizing skills and concepts for the student (Drake & Burns, 2004). Career academies tend to utilize student projects and other innovative career-related strategies through the integration of career-related curriculum and academic classes. Research has determined the focus on career-related education in a multi-discipline curriculum as a key strategy for improving teaching and

learning (Stasz, Kaganoff, & Eden, 1995). Repeatedly, students noted the importance of the multi-discipline curriculum through the references to relevant topics of instruction, career-related projects, and the importance of authentic learning in the school environment. As indicated in the model in Figure 11, the multi-discipline curriculum is central to the success of the DRIVE model and worthy of consideration in designing programs for at-risk students.

Students demonstrated the importance of the teacher relationships throughout the series of interviews. In addition to the verbal descriptions of the importance of teacher relationships, classroom observations revealed the on-going dialogues between students and teachers where the relationships became apparent. Students referenced a sense of belonging in the school environment through the relationships with teachers often describing the student-teacher interaction in a familial sense. Belonging in a school environment helps the student feel accepted and supported (Goodenow, 1993). A research-based strategy of at-risk education involves establishing strong teacher-student or mentor-student relationships in a small school environment (Kerka, 2003). The relationships with the students and teachers at LCCA are a definite point of strength for the organization and worthy of consideration when designing programs for at-risk youth.

A sense of community within the LCCA organization was clearly seen in the student narratives. Students consistently shared they would remember LCCA in a positive light when they recalled LCCA in the future. The design of the DRIVE program featured a direct connection between core curriculum instruction and real world applications leading to extensive and sustained personalized contact between teachers, students, and community members. This design created a strong, defined image of LCCA and the DRIVE program. Creating a sense of

community within a school environment is an effective at-risk strategy and should be a priority in designing a program for at-risk students (Kerka, 2003).

### **Opportunities for Future Research**

This study has brought forth several interesting aspects that I find further investigation is warranted. A narrative discourse between the reality of the teacher and the reality of the student would be rather interesting. Many times over the course of this study, I saw significant discrepancies between how the teacher viewed the academic progress of a student and how the student viewed their progress. An example would be Jasmine, who in reality is a high school dropout. However, from Jasmine's narrative, she did not view herself as a drop out, but rather viewed her withdrawal from school as a step forward in her life.

A second area of interest is the lack of perceived success on behalf of the students in their own lives. When asked to share a success story, most of the participants struggled to deliver a story. If and when a story was shared, often the story would be from much earlier in their lives, or would be a "minor" success. An example can be seen from Lamar's narrative. Lamar's success story involved a time when he was in elementary school and made a grade high enough on a math test for his uncle to take him to get ice cream. I wonder at what point in time, in an at-risk student's life, does the expectation of success become elusive and an atmosphere of expected failure emanate.

A third area of potential research is to continue to observe the progress of the DRIVE model in the second, third, and consecutive years of the model's operation. The model will evolve as the LCCA organizational members adapt to the new paradigms. As teachers become more efficient in authentic learning and as the multi-discipline curriculum becomes more

pervasive in the organization, what results can or will impact student learning? Engagement? Motivation? Educational environment? Other areas?

### **Conclusion**

Incorporating pragmatic and constructivist philosophies, the DRIVE program was created on premises of the authentic learning theory along with aspects of the Bandura's social learning theory and the situated cognition theory. This qualitative case study offers the opportunity to hear student voices through their narratives of their shared lives and experiences during the past year of transition at LCCA as they experienced the focus on authentic learning in a pragmatic sense.

The DRIVE program was an attempt to guide at-risk students to a productive future including high school graduation, employability skill development, and workforce and/or post-secondary readiness. Through an exploration of themes generated from the students' stories, experiences, observations, and coursework, the information gathered illustrated a practical outcome of current literary trends of what seems to be effective for at-risk youth.

The DRIVE program, this study, and the implications from this study were completed in an effort to create an improved future for at-risk students like Sabrina. Sabrina was a below-average student by any educator's definition, but with an above average motivation to earn her high school degree. Her ties to the school and the staff kept her from giving up in a world where every other adult had said forget about you. The flexible times and course scheduling allowed her to graduate when the rigid format of a traditional school would have resulted in her not having a chance. The community resources and support provided for her basic needs so she could focus on education without having to worry where she was going to sleep that night. An integrated, multi-discipline curriculum gave her job skills while she earned the diploma so that

she could move into a job upon graduation. It is for the students like Sabrina, the ones we need to see past the issues on the surface, and peer into their challenges, their needs, their hopes, their dreams, and their futures that this study was conducted.

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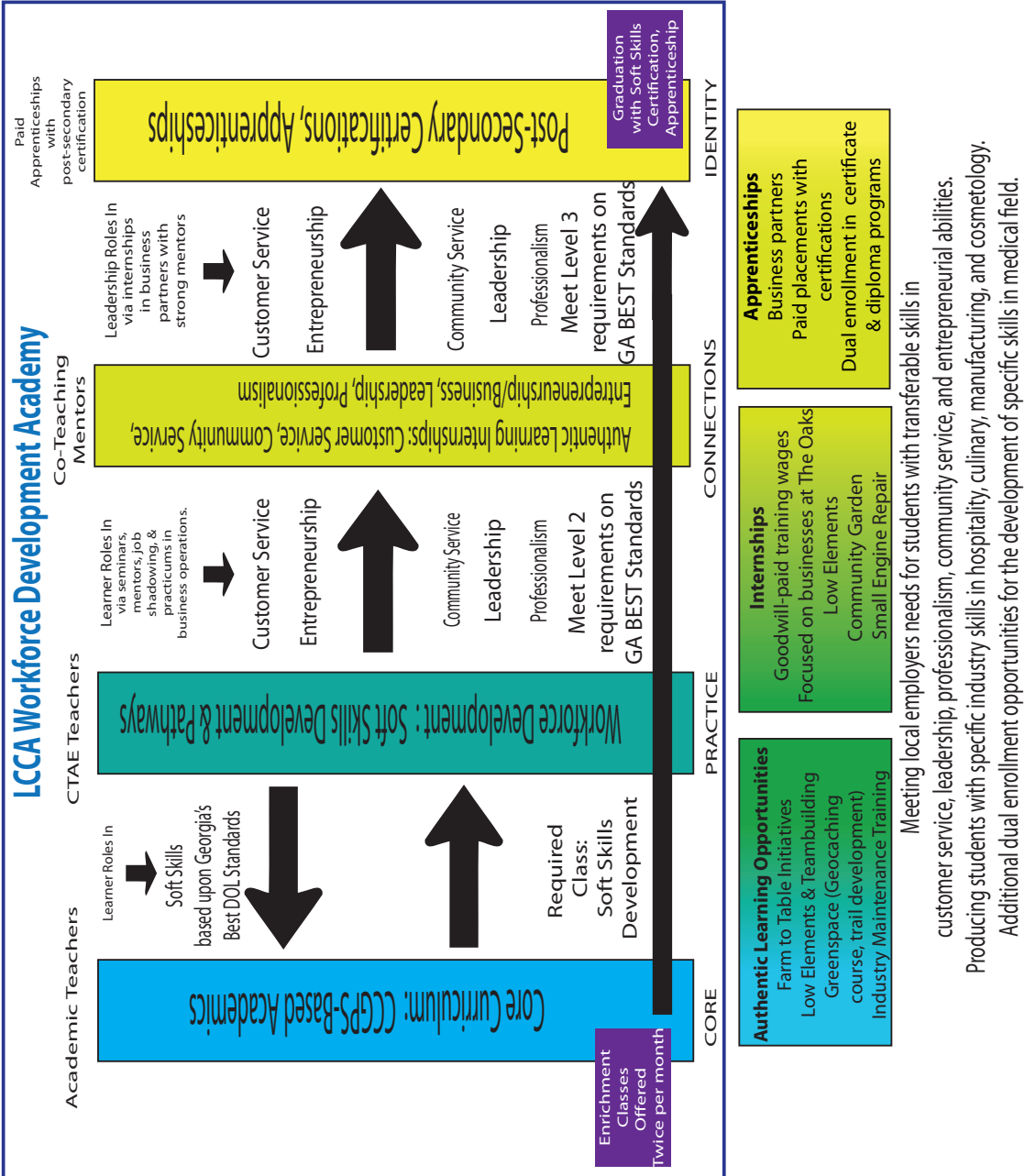
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# APPENDIX A

## LANIER CHARTER CAREER ACADEMY MODEL



## APPENDIX B

### GEORGIABEST RUBRIC

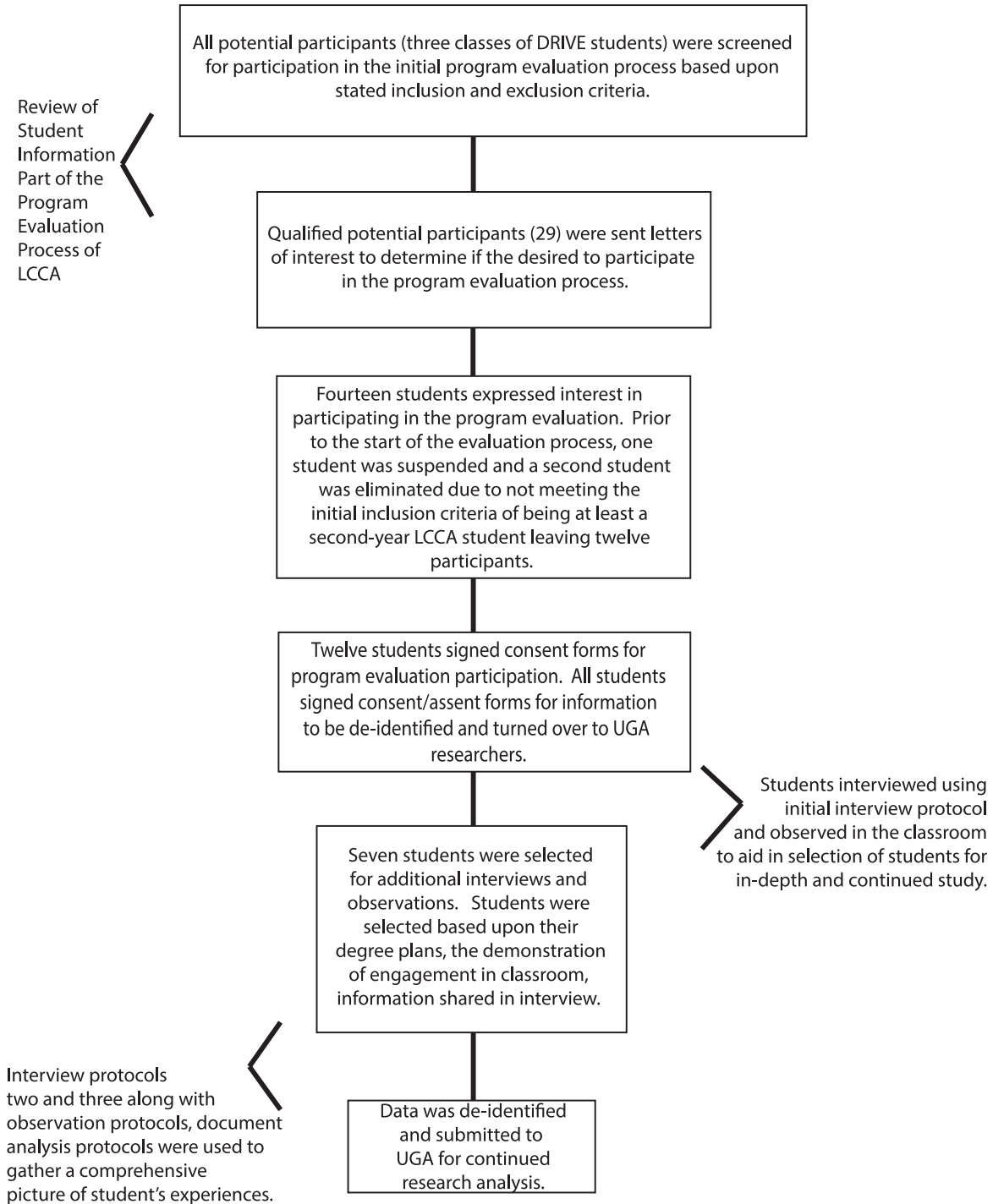
Student's Name:				
<b>Discipline and Character</b>	<b>3 Points:</b> No discipline referrals during the grading period	<b>2 Points:</b> There has been one discipline referral during the grading period	<b>1 Point:</b> There have been no more than three discipline referrals during the grading period	<b>Student's Points:</b>
	<b>3 Points:</b> Student has maintained an attendance rate of at least 95 percent	<b>2 Points:</b> Student has maintained an attendance rate of at least 90 percent	<b>1 Point:</b> Student has maintained an attendance rate of at least 85 percent	<b>Student Points</b>
	<b>3 Points:</b> Student has completed 8 hours of job shadowing or community service	<b>2 Points:</b> Student has completed 6 hours of job shadowing or community service	<b>1 Point:</b> Student has completed 4 hours of job shadowing or community service	<b>Student Points</b>
<b>Productivity and Academic Performance</b>	<b>3 Points:</b> Student has an overall grade point average equivalent to an A	<b>2 Points:</b> Student has an overall grade point average equivalent to a B	<b>1 Point:</b> Student has an overall grade point average equivalent to a C	<b>Student Points</b>
	<b>3 Points:</b> Student always demonstrates strong personal management, time management and flexibility	<b>2 Points:</b> Student often demonstrates strong personal management, time management and flexibility	<b>1 Point:</b> Student sometimes demonstrates strong personal management, time management and flexibility	<b>Student Points</b>
	<b>3 Points:</b> Student always demonstrates respect to students, teachers and administrators	<b>2 Points:</b> Student often demonstrates respect to students, teachers and administrators	<b>1 Point :</b> Student sometimes demonstrates respect to students, teachers and administrators	<b>Student Points</b>
<b>Attitude and Respect</b>	<b>3 Points:</b> Student always demonstrates respect to students, teachers and administrators	<b>2 Points:</b> Student often demonstrates respect to students, teachers and administrators	<b>1 Point :</b> Student sometimes demonstrates respect to students, teachers and administrators	<b>Student Points</b>
	<b>3 Points:</b> Student always demonstrates team cooperation, has work completed on time, fosters team spirit	<b>2 Points:</b> Student often demonstrates team cooperation, has work completed on time, fosters team spirit	<b>1 Point :</b> Student sometimes demonstrates team cooperation, has work completed on time, fosters team spirit	<b>Student Points</b>
	<b>3 Points:</b> Student always demonstrates team cooperation, has work completed on time, fosters team spirit	<b>2 Points:</b> Student often demonstrates team cooperation, has work completed on time, fosters team spirit	<b>1 Point :</b> Student sometimes demonstrates team cooperation, has work completed on time, fosters team spirit	<b>Student Points</b>

<b>Self management and Time Management</b>	<b>3 Points:</b> Student always utilizes time wisely, turns in all assignments, shows leadership skills	<b>2 Points:</b> Student often utilizes time wisely, turns in all assignments, shows leadership skills	<b>1 Point :</b> Student sometimes utilizes time wisely, turns in all assignments, shows leadership skills	<b>Student Points</b>
<b>Oral and Written Business Communication Skills</b>	<b>3 Points:</b> Student is always able to communicate accurate information through emails, calls, letters; listens attentively; makes eye contact	<b>2 Points:</b> Student is often able to communicate accurate information through emails, calls, letters; listens attentively; makes eye contact	<b>1 Point:</b> Student is sometimes able to communicate accurate information through emails, calls, letters; listens attentively; makes eye contact	<b>Student Points</b>
<b>Appearance and Professional Image</b>	<b>3 Points:</b> Student always appears self-confident, presents neat and clean appearance, dress appropriately	<b>2 Points:</b> Student often appears self-confident, presents neat and clean appearance, dress appropriately	<b>1 Point :</b> Student always appears self-confident, presents neat and clean appearance, dress appropriately	<b>Student Points</b>

## APPENDIX C

### SUMMARY AND SEQUENCE OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

#### Steps in the Selection of Research Participants



**APPENDIX D**

**PROTOCOLS**

**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL**

**PARTICIPANT SCREENING**

Participant ID: \_\_\_\_\_

*Lanier Charter Career Academy Program Evaluation*

Date:

Place:

Evaluator: Rachael McClain

*Study Description: The Lanier Charter Career is engaging in a significant change in instructional strategy in the 2012-2013 school year focusing on offering authentic learning opportunities to at-risk students in order to impact student engagement for both successful short and long term results. In order to investigate the phenomenon occurring at LCCA this year, a series of interviews with administrators, faculty, and students will be conducted throughout the year.*

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>DNM</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Enrolled in LCCA 2011-2012 School Year			
Enrolled in LCCA 2012-2013 School Year			
Age			<b>Candidate Age:</b>
Credits			<b>Total Credits:</b>
Anticipated graduation within 18 months			
Enrolled in DRIVE			
Project Forward			
Lanier Choice			

**Potential participant \_\_\_\_\_ chosen \_\_\_\_\_ not chosen to receive introductory letter for participation in the research study.**

**INTRODUCTION LETTER**

{DATE}

Dear {potential participant}:

During the 2012-2013 school year, Lanier Charter Career Academy will be conducting a program evaluation on the campus of Lanier Charter Career Academy.

The purpose of the program evaluation will be to investigate the results of the DRIVE program from the perspective of the students, teachers, and administrators. Students enrolled in either the Lanier Choice Day Program or the Project Forward GED Preparation Program are eligible to participate. Lanier Choice students will be at least 16 years of age, attended Lanier Charter Career Academy (LCCA) in 2011-2012 school year and are currently enrolled at LCCA as full time students with plans to graduate in the next 18 months. Project Forward students will be at least 17 years of age, attended LCCA in the 2011-2012 school year and are currently enrolled at LCCA in the GED preparation program. Students in the Project Forward program should have less than 10 credits completed. A review of the student's information on Infinite Campus has determined you meet these qualifications and are eligible to participate in the evaluation if you desire.

Students interested in participating in this evaluation may be asked to participate voluntarily in the following activities:

1. Meet with Ms. McClain to discuss the process and sign a statement agreeing to be involved in the evaluation.
2. Agree to be observed in the classroom and work sites by Ms. McClain.
3. Participate in up to three separate one-on-one interviews that will last 30 minutes to an hour during the school year.
4. Allow Ms. McClain to view student work including your personalized Road Maps.
5. Allow your de-identified information to be submitted to the University of Georgia for research analysis.
5. Review information gathered from the study to be sure that the researcher is correctly understanding the student's opinions, ideas, and motivations.

All selected participants will remain confidential, however information from the research study may become part of a published research study regarding authentic learning.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please submit your name to Rachael McClain, Workforce Development Coordinator, by {date}. Thank you for considering being a part of this research study.

Sincerely,  
Rachael McClain  
Workforce Development Coordinator  
Lanier Charter Career Academy  
PhD Student, University of Georgia

**STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL #1**

*Lanier Charter Career Academy: A case study exploring the impact of authentic learning on student engagement levels in an environment targeting at-risk youth*

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Rachael McClain

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

*Study Description: The Lanier Charter Career is engaging in a significant change in instructional strategy in the 2012-2013 school year focusing on offering authentic learning opportunities to at-risk students in order to impact student engagement for both successful short and long term results. In order to investigate the phenomenon occurring at LCCA this year, a series of interviews with administrators, faculty, and students will be conducted throughout the year. This is the first interview in a series of three, each of which should last about an hour.*

## **INITIAL INTERVIEW**

1. Tell me about your experience as a student at Lanier Charter Career Academy and describe how and when you came to LCCA as a student.  
(Why are you here?)
2. Describe what makes you interested in school? When do you feel like you are learning something that is important? What is your motivation for being at school?
3. How does school prepare you for your future?
4. What are your biggest challenges to being successful in school?
5. What are some changes that you have noticed at LCCA this year? How do you feel about these changes? Will the changes that you have notice impact your decisions about your future plans?
6. Please share a story that demonstrates a success in your life?
7. Please share a story that shows your greatest challenge in your life?
8. What are your hopes for the future?
9. How motivated are you to finish high school? Get a job? Have a successful career?
10. Describe your perfect educational environment that would be most effective for you.
11. Please share a story about why you like LCCA? A story about why you do not like LCCA?
12. How does your classes now get you ready for a successful future? How important is education and/or a high school degree to you and your future?

## **ADMINISTRATOR/FACULTY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL #1**

*Lanier Charter Career Academy: A case study exploring the impact of authentic learning on student engagement levels in an environment targeting at-risk youth*

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Rachael McClain

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

*Study Description: The Lanier Charter Career is engaging in a significant change in instructional strategy in the 2012-2013 school year focusing on offering authentic learning opportunities to at-risk students in order to impact student engagement for both successful short and long term results. In order to investigate the phenomenon occurring at LCCA this year, a series of interviews with administrators, faculty, and students will be conducted throughout the year. This is the first interview in a series of three, each of which should last about an hour.*

### **INITIAL INTERVIEW**

1. Tell me about your position at the charter school and describe what you do there.
2. How many years have you worked at LCCA? Describe the changes you have seen take place at the school during your tenure at the school including previous instructional strategies.
3. What is your understanding or how would you define each of the following instructional strategies:
  - Authentic learning?
  - Student engagement?
  - Parallel curriculum model?
  - Rigorous education experience?
  - 21<sup>st</sup> century skills?
4. What are some of the biggest challenges to engaging students considered at-risk of graduation?
5. What are some actions that have been taken so far this year to deal with these challenges?
6. Please share a specific story that illustrates the challenges of being an educator in an at-risk youth environment?
7. Please share a specific story that illustrates when you knew a student was engaged in learning. Describe the setting and the outcomes.
8. What are your hopes for the outcomes from the new instructional model at LCCA?

**STUDENT OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

*Lanier Charter Career Academy: A case study exploring the impact of authentic learning on student engagement levels in an environment targeting at-risk youth*

Time of Observation:

Date:

Place:

Researcher: Rachael McClain

Participants:

Position of Participant:

*Study Description: The Lanier Charter Career is engaging in a significant change in instructional strategy in the 2012-2013 school year focusing on offering authentic learning opportunities to at-risk students in order to impact student engagement for both successful short and long term results. In order to investigate the phenomenon occurring at LCCA this year, a series of interviews & observations with administrators, faculty, and students will be conducted throughout the year. This observation will last up to a 55-minute class period.*

<b>ID</b>	<b>Behavior Observed</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Behavior Observed</b>
	Student exhibiting eye contact with teacher.		Student asleep in class.
	Student nodding and showing body language of engagement.		Student off-task.
	Student responding verbally with teacher in a positive manner.		Student causing disruptive behaviors leading other students to be distracted.
	Student working collaboratively with classmates.		Student displaying disrespectful attitude.
	Student working in hands-on, authentic learning project or activity.		Student working in traditional manner (worksheets, textbook, non-collaborative)

**OBSERVER NOTES**

<i>TIME</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>

**STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL #2**

*Lanier Charter Career Academy: A case study exploring the impact of authentic learning on student engagement levels in an environment targeting at-risk youth*

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Rachael McClain

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

*Study Description: The Lanier Charter Career is engaging in a significant change in instructional strategy in the 2012-2013 school year focusing on offering authentic learning opportunities to at-risk students in order to impact student engagement for both successful short and long term results. In order to investigate the phenomenon occurring at LCCA this year, a series of interviews with administrators, faculty, and students will be conducted throughout the year. This is the first interview in a series of three, each of which should last about an hour.*

### **DRIVE Experiences:**

1. Tell me about an experience you have had at LCCA this year in the DRIVE program that will positively impact your future. Any negative impacts?
2. Tell me about an experience you have had at LCCA this year in the DRIVE program that has made you have a different viewpoint towards graduation? future plans? career choices?
3. LCCA & DRIVE is using a lot of hands-on learning this year. Do you agree or disagree with this statement and why?
4. From your DRIVE classes, what would you say makes a good employee?
5. What changes would you recommend regarding the DRIVE class?
6. What is your understanding of the overall DRIVE program?

### **e2020 Experience:**

7. Tell me about an experience you have had at LCCA in the e2020 program that will positively impact your future. Any negative impacts?
8. How do you feel towards e2020 classes?
9. What is the best use for e2020 classes?

### **Rigor:**

10. In your first interview, you mentioned the classes at LCCA were \_\_\_\_\_. Why do you feel that way?
11. How do you think the coursework compares to other schools?
12. Would you describe the curriculum of DRIVE as useful? Why?

### **Relevance:**

13. Think about all of your classes. How do you think you will use these classes in the future?
14. Which classes do you feel is more relevant to your life? Why?

**Authentic Learning: (use prompt after student gives definition defining authentic learning)**

15. Define authentic learning.
16. How do you feel about authentic learning in your classrooms?
17. What is an example of an authentic learning lesson from your classes this year?
18. Are you more or less interested when authentic learning is present in classrooms? Why?

**Career-Preparation:**

19. Do you think there is a difference between a career and a job? Why or why not?
20. You want to be a \_\_\_\_\_. What has prepared you to be successful in this career?
21. What are your next steps to achieve your career goal?
22. What else could be offered at LCCA to better prepare you for a future career?

**Collaboration:**

23. Describe a time at LCCA when you have worked with a group? What was the outcome?
24. What is the benefit of working in groups?
25. What is the drawback to working in groups?

**Student Learning:**

26. How would you describe the overall quality of your education at LCCA?
27. Do you think you are prepared to move on to the next phase of your life? Why or why not?
28. Compare the quality of education/learning from an e2020 class to a teacher-taught class?

**Motivation:**

29. Define motivation.
30. You said in your last interview, you were \_\_\_\_\_ motivated. What has caused you to feel this way?
31. What are some things (actions, people, etc) that truly motivate you to do something?

**Engagement:**

32. Are you interested in your classes? Why or why not?
33. What could a teacher do to increase your attention level in a classroom?
34. What would make you look forward to coming to school?
35. What would make you dread coming to school?

**General:**

36. Share a success story.

37. Share your most memorable classroom moment from high school (good or bad).
38. In 20 years what do you think you will remember about your high school career.
39. How important to you is your relationship with your teachers? Why?
40. Do you like coming to a small school? Why or why not?

### **STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL #3**

*Lanier Charter Career Academy: A program evaluation exploring the impact of authentic learning on student engagement levels in an environment targeting at-risk youth*

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Rachael McClain

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

*Description: The Lanier Charter Career is engaging in a significant change in instructional strategy in the 2012-2013 school year focusing on offering authentic learning opportunities to at-risk students in order to impact student engagement for both successful short and long term results. In order to investigate the phenomenon occurring at LCCA this year, a series of interviews with administrators, faculty, and students will be conducted throughout the year.*

#### ***Section One:***

***Goal: What has been the essence of the student's experience in the DRIVE program this year?***

Describe a typical day in your life – from the time you get up in the morning until you go to bed at night.

What is it like to be a student at LCCA?

What was it like being in the DRIVE class this year?

What was it like last year to be a student at LCCA?

What do you think your life will be like once you graduate from LCCA?

What has your experience been this semester after completing the DRIVE class?

What has been your experience in your internship or work-related classes?

#### ***Section Two:***

***Goal: Get students to reflect on their experience.***

Have any changes occurred in the last few years (personally, educationally, professionally)?

How will your experience at LCCA impact (or influence) your future?

What does LCCA mean to you? How will LCCA impact you?

What does DRIVE mean to you? How will DRIVE impact you?

#### ***Section Three:***

***Goal: Complete student narrative as needed. These questions will be used to complete the students' narratives as related to the case study. These questions may not be used in every situation. The use of these questions depends upon previous interview data.***

From our previous talks, you have said these things about your experience at LCCA:

*(unique to each participant)*

What would you like to add or explain in greater detail in your story?

*Additional questions will be asked as needed to add details to the students' experiences at LCCA over the past year.*

**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL**

*Lanier Charter Career Academy: A program evaluation exploring the impact of authentic learning on student engagement levels in an environment targeting at-risk youth*

Date:

Researcher: Rachael McClain

*Description: The Lanier Charter Career is engaging in a significant change in instructional strategy in the 2012-2013 school year focusing on offering authentic learning opportunities to at-risk students in order to impact student engagement for both successful short and long term results. In order to investigate the phenomenon occurring at LCCA this year, a series of interviews with administrators, faculty, and students will be conducted throughout the year.*

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Document Type:**    \_\_\_ **Student Webpage/Portfolio**  
                               \_\_\_ **Student Information System Record**  
                               \_\_\_ **Other**

**Authorship:**        \_\_\_ **Student**  
                               \_\_\_ **SMS**  
                               \_\_\_ **Other**

<b>Student Webpage/Portfolio</b>		<b>Information System</b>	
Number of Pages		Attendance	
Resume		Discipline Issues	
Cover Letter		Major Discipline	
Sample of Work		Total Credits	
Introduction		Overall Grades	
Grammar			
Spelling			
Overall Appearance			

**General Impressions:**

## APPENDIX E

### CONSENT/ASSENT FORMS

#### **Program Evaluation Consent Form for Students**

January 7, 2013

Dear Student,

Based upon your number of years as a student at LCCA, your plans for completion of your high school career, and your total number of credits earned to day, you are invited to participate in a program evaluation of the new curriculum model of LCCA.

For this evaluation, Rachael McClain will be conducting interviews, observing classroom activities, and collecting data to examine students' experiences in during the 2012-2013 school year at Lanier Charter Career Academy.

The purpose of this evaluation will be to explore the students' experiences in learning in an authentic learning environment. Data gathered during the evaluation may be used in future studies; however, all information obtained will be treated confidentially

For the evaluation, you may be participating in a series of up to three interviews with questions regarding your experiences and opinions of learning or working in a Charter Academy. Your answers will be recorded digitally and written notes will be made regarding your comments. You can choose not to answer any question that makes them uncomfortable and/or choose not to have any or all of their answers recorded. I will also be observing you in the classroom. You may be observed up to five separate times during the school year. I will make written notes regarding the observations. Additional information may be gathered using your school attendance records, previous and current grades, classroom work, and your career and college plan records.

You are free to withdraw your participation at any time should you become uncomfortable with it. Your decision to participate or not participate in this evaluation will not impact your academic standing in anyway. You are not expected to encounter any risks during this evaluation, however, as a faculty member in a high school, I am obligated to report to the school counselor or administrator any issues of abuse that may be revealed during our conversations. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Rachael at 770-287-5156.

I hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share your experiences and viewpoints with us. Thank you very much for your help.

**I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this program evaluation.**

**Print Name of Student** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Student** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
Day/month/year

**I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the program evaluation, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.**

**Print Name of Evaluator/person taking the consent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Evaluator/person taking the consent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
Day/month/year

Please sign both copies, keep one copy and return one to the evaluator.

Sincerely,

Rachael McClain  
Workforce Development Coordinator  
Hall County Schools

## **Program Evaluation Consent Form for Parents/Guardians**

January 7, 2013

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Based upon the number of years your student has attended LCCA, his/her plans for completion of the high school career, and their total number of credits earned to day, your student is invited to participate in a program evaluation of the new curriculum model of LCCA.

For this evaluation, Rachael McClain will be conducting interviews, observing classroom activities, and collecting data to examine students' experiences in during the 2012-2013 school year at Lanier Charter Career Academy.

The purpose of this evaluation will be to explore the students' experiences in learning and teaching in an authentic learning environment. Data gathered during the evaluation may be used in future studies, however; all information obtained will be treated confidentially.

For this evaluation, your student may be participating in a series of up to three interviews with questions regarding his/her experiences and opinions of learning in a Charter Academy. Your student's answers will be recorded digitally and written notes will be made regarding his/her comments. Students can choose not to answer any question that makes him or her uncomfortable and/or choose not to have any or all of the answers recorded. I will also be observing the student in the classroom. Your student may be observed up to five separate times during the school year. I will make written notes regarding the observations. Additional information may be gathered using school attendance records, previous and current grades, classroom work, and career and college plan records.

The student is free to withdraw his/her participation at any time should they become uncomfortable with it. Your decision to allow the student to participate or not participate in this evaluation will not impact their academic standing in anyway. Students are not expected to encounter any risks during this process, however, as a faculty member in a high school, I am obligated to report to the school counselor or administrator any issues of abuse that may be revealed during the conversations. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Rachael at 770-287-5156.

I hope the student will enjoy this opportunity to share experiences and viewpoints with me. Thank you very much for your help.

**I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to allow my son/daughter to voluntarily to be a participant in this program evaluation.**

**Print Name of Student** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Student** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name of Parent/Guardian** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Parent/Guardian** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day/month/year**

**I confirm that the student was given an opportunity to ask questions about the program evaluation, and all the questions asked by the student and/or parent have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.**

**Print Name of Evaluator/person taking the consent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Evaluator/person taking the consent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day/month/year**

Please sign both copies, keep one copy and return one to the evaluator.

Sincerely,

Rachael McClain  
Workforce Development Coordinator  
Hall County Schools

## **Program Evaluation Consent Forms for Faculty/Staff**

January 7, 2013

Dear Faculty,

Based upon your number of years as a staff member at LCCA, you are invited to participate in a program evaluation of the new curriculum model of LCCA.

For this evaluation, Rachael McClain will be conducting interviews, observing classroom activities, and collecting data to examine your opinion of student experiences in during the 2012-2013 school year at Lanier Charter Career Academy.

The purpose of this evaluation will be to explore the students' experiences in learning in an authentic learning environment. Data gathered during the evaluation may be used in future studies; however, all information obtained will be treated confidentially.

For the evaluation, you may be participating in a series of up to three interviews with questions regarding your experiences and opinions of student learning in a Charter Academy. Your answers will be recorded digitally and written notes will be made regarding your comments. You can choose not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and/or choose not to have any or all of your answers recorded.

You are free to withdraw your participation at any time should you become uncomfortable with it. Your decision to participate or not participate in this evaluation will not impact your standing in anyway. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Rachael at 770-287-5156.

I hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share your experiences and viewpoints with me. Thank you very much for your help.

**I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this program evaluation.**

**Print Name of Faculty** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Faculty** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Day/month/year**

**I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the program evaluation, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.**

**Print Name of Evaluator/person taking the consent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Evaluator/person taking the consent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Day/month/year

Please sign both copies, keep one copy and return one to the evaluator.

Sincerely,

Rachael McClain  
Workforce Development Coordinator  
Hall County Schools

## Consent/Assent Form for Research Participation for Students

### Consent/Assent Form

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled **Creating DRIVE: A case study on the impact of authentic instruction in an alternative education environment**. This research hopes to find out whether a change to teacher-taught, authentic learning curriculum at Lanier Charter Career Academy (LCCA) has influenced your academic experience. Your participation will involve allowing the researchers to use the information/data that were collected through your participation in a program evaluation of the DRIVE program at LCCA. You don't have to do anything else. The information from the program evaluation would include: transcripts from the interviews, observation notes, and copies of your coursework, grades, and attendance records.

Your participation, of course, is voluntary but would be greatly appreciated. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent at anytime without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. If you agree to the use of your information/data for this research project, please simply sign on the line below; if you don't agree, none of your data will be included in the research and you can still participate in the program evaluation. The decision to take part or not to take part in the study will not affect your grades in school.

The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifying information will not be used. While the primary risk of any study is a breach of confidentiality, the researchers will remove all identifying information from the program evaluation data before it becomes part of the research data. All individually-identifiable information will be held confidential, unless required by law. You will have no direct benefits from participation in this study, however society could benefit through the students' insights that may provide significant information for educational systems serving at-risk students. Authentic learning environments may result in an improved outcome for at-risk student populations. Educators may also use this research to review what the students at LCCA thought about the different style of teaching this school year. Since LCCA will be identified as the location of the study in the research findings, this may increase the chance that a research participant may be identified.

The researchers conducting this study are: Elaine Adams and Rachael McClain. Please contact them with any questions you have now or later:

Elaine Adams  
University of Georgia  
adamsje@uga.edu  
706-542-4204

Rachael McClain  
Lanier Charter Career Academy  
Rachael.mcclain@hallco.org  
770-287-5156

Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).



## **Consent/Assent Form for Research Participation for Parents/Guardians**

Your child is being invited to participate in a research study entitled **Creating DRIVE: A case study on the impact of authentic instruction in an alternative education environment**. This research hopes to find out whether a change to teacher-taught, authentic learning curriculum at Lanier Charter Career Academy (LCCA) has influenced your child's academic experience. Your child's participation will involve allowing the researchers to use the information/data that were collected through your child's participation in a program evaluation of the DRIVE program at LCCA. You don't have to do anything else. Your child's participation in the program evaluation involves interviews and classroom observations with your child along with a review of their class work, grades, and attendance.

Participation in the research study, of course, is voluntary but would be greatly appreciated. You do not have to allow your child to be in this research study if you do not want to. Your child may choose not to participate or to stop taking part at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw your child from the study, the information that can be identified as your child's will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. The decision to take part or not to take part in the study will not affect your child's grades in school. Please indicate below whether you agree or don't agree to the use of your child's information/data for this research project. If you don't agree, none of your child's data will be included in the research and your child can still participate in the DRIVE program and the evaluation of the DRIVE program.

The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name or any identifying information will not be used. While the primary risk of any study is a breach of confidentiality, the researchers will remove all identifying information from the program evaluation data before it becomes part of the research data. All individually-identifiable information will be held confidential, unless required by law. Your student will have no direct benefits from participation in this study, however society could benefit through the students' insights that may provide significant information for educational systems serving at-risk students. Authentic learning environments may result in an improved outcome for at-risk student populations. . Educators may also use this research to review what the students at LCCA thought about the different style of teaching this school year. Since LCCA will be identified as the location of the study in the research findings, this may increase the chance that a research participant may be identified.

The researchers conducting this study are: Elaine Adams and Rachael McClain. Please contact them with any questions you have now or later:

Elaine Adams  
University of Georgia  
adamsje@uga.edu  
706-542-4204

Rachael McClain  
Lanier Charter Career Academy  
Rachael.mcclain@hallco.org  
770-287-5156

Questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

- I give permission for my child's information to be used for the above-described research
- I do not give permission for my child's information to be used for the above-described research

**Please choose an option above, sign both copies, keep one, and return one to the school.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Child

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Consent/Assent Form for Research Participation for Staff/Faculty

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled **Creating DRIVE: A case study on the impact of authentic instruction in an alternative education environment**. This research hopes to find out whether a change to teacher-taught, authentic learning curriculum at Lanier Charter Career Academy (LCCA) has influenced your academic experience. Your participation will involve allowing the researchers to use the information/data that were collected through your participation in a program evaluation of the DRIVE program at LCCA. You don't have to do anything else. The information from the program evaluation would include: transcripts from the interviews.

Your participation, of course, is voluntary but would be greatly appreciated. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent at anytime without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. If you agree to the use of your information/data for this research project, please simply sign on the line below; if you don't agree, none of your data will be included in the research and you can still participate in the program evaluation. The decision to take part or not to take part in the study will not affect your role in the school.

The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifying information will not be used. While the primary risk of any study is a breach of confidentiality, the researchers will remove all identifying information from the program evaluation data before it becomes part of the research data. All individually-identifiable information will be held confidential, unless required by law. You will have no direct benefits from participation in this study, however society could benefit through the students' insights that may provide significant information for educational systems serving at-risk students. Authentic learning environments may result in an improved outcome for at-risk student populations. Educators may also use this research to review what the students at LCCA thought about the different style of teaching this school year. Since LCCA will be identified as the location of the study in the research findings, this may increase the chance that a research participant may be identified.

The researchers conducting this study are: Elaine Adams and Rachael McClain. Please contact them with any questions you have now or later:

Elaine Adams  
University of Georgia  
adamsje@uga.edu  
706-542-4204

Rachael McClain  
Lanier Charter Career Academy  
Rachael.mcclain@hallco.org  
770-287-5156

Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

**Statement of Agreement:**

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this form for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

## APPENDIX F

### DRIVE STUDENT SURVEY RESPONSE

#### DRIVE Student Survey

**1. Circle your current grade:**

	9	10	11	12
11	20	25	21	

**2. Circle your gender:**

Male	Female
48	29

**3. Circle your current age:**

	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
0	1	13	36	16	4	2	

**3. Circle the group that describes you best?**

<b>American Indian/Alaska</b>	1
<b>Mexican/Hispanic/Latin</b>	34
<b>Asian</b>	1
<b>Pacific Islander</b>	0
<b>Black/African American</b>	13
<b>White—Not Hispanic</b>	26
<b>Other (specify)</b>	2

**5. Circle the grades you usually get in school?**

Mostly A's	2
Mostly A's & B's	21
Mostly B's	4
Mostly B's & C's	31
Mostly C's	10
Mostly C's & D's	8
Mostly D's	0
Mostly D's & F's	3

**6. Circle your plan for your education:**

I don't plan to finish high school	3
I plan to finish high school	39
I plan to go to trade or	1

vocational school	
I plan to attend college	28
I plan to graduate from a four-year college	12

**7. Circle the highest level your father/mother (or guardian) completed in school?**

8th grade or less	13
Some high school	15
Graduated from high school	18
Some college	13
Graduated from a four-year college	11
I don't know	10

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
People should be willing to accept the consequences of their actions.	49	27	0	0
It is not that important to keep promises to friends.	6	16	27	28
People should be honest with one another.	43	25	4	2
Completing chores at home is a good way to show how responsible a person is in other areas of their life	33	39	4	1
People should follow through and do what they say they will do.	38	39	1	1
It is important to turn homework in on time.	41	31	1	1
It is good for people to listen to other's opinions, even if they are different from their own.	33	37	7	0
It is good for someone to act differently so that people will like him/her better.	5	18	27	27
It is okay to stand up for what a person thinks is right, even if others might	43	25	6	1

disagree or make fun of that person.				
It is not that important to really pay attention to what other students are saying during classroom discussions.	9	13	38	15
People should try to get to know others who have a different religion or ethnic background.	27	38	6	5
It is okay for people to talk behind other people's back once in a while.	4	8	28	36
People should find things they like about others and tell them how much they appreciate those things.	30	35	12	1
When someone seems to have a problem, it is best to wait until they ask for help to do anything.	8	21	40	10
It is important to go out of the way to help someone in need.	21	41	9	4
Young people should <i>not</i> get involved in local politics or issues.	6	22	32	14
It is best to get all the facts before "taking sides."	31	37	5	0
Volunteering in the community is a good way to spend time.	27	35	13	1
If someone is a good athlete or student, it is okay for him/her to get by the rules some of the time.	4	15	35	23
It is better to seek out peaceful solutions to a problem than to fight about it.	24	32	16	5
It is a waste of time to vote in elections.	10	16	37	13
Rules should be applied equally to everyone.	42	35	3	2
When someone seems				

upset, it is good to take time to listen to his/her concerns.	32	38	3	1
It is important to find ways to contribute to the community or neighborhood.	24	39	8	3

<i>Are these statements similar to you or different from you?</i>	<b>This is similar to me.</b>		<b>This is different from me.</b>	
	<b>Very Much</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Very Much</b>
I can say what values are important to me.	36	34	5	1
I can act or behave in ways that fit my own values.	41	34	3	2
I can tell when my own feelings might affect my behaviors.	37	28	7	4
I can take responsibility for my own actions.	47	20	2	1
I can speak clearly and calmly to someone when I explain my opinions.	32	31	8	4
I have a hard time looking directly into someone's eyes when I speak to them.	13	25	13	25
I can stand up for things I think are important.	47	21	4	3
It is hard to express my opinions to others.	12	27	12	19
I can find ways to make the community a better place.	16	28	22	6
I am not sure how to ask a caring adult for help when a friend is in trouble.	9	23	27	13
If I see a student being teased by other students, I can do something to stand up for the student being teased.	39	25	7	3
It is hard for me to tell				

when I feel stressed out.	15	26	15	20
I know when to ask an adult for help when I need it.	31	24	7	5
I can see a situation from another person's point of view	31	28	10	2
I can obey school rules to make school a better place for everyone.	35	27	10	3
When friends tell me about their troubles, I know when to keep it secret and when to tell an adult.	47	25	5	2
If I think a rule is unfair at school, I know how to clearly express my feelings about it to a teacher or administrator.	28	29	13	5
I know who I can ask for help	39	26	3	3
I can understand how someone else feels, even if I do not agree him or her.	38	27	8	0
I have a plan for making my behaviors follow my own values each day.	29	32	12	3
I can tell when I am showing positive character traits	40	27	8	2
I can follow my own plan for acting on the values that are important to me.	40	28	7	1

**1. A belief that a person has and is willing to act on during his or her life is a(n):**

- a. Character trait (20)
- b. Value (33)
- c. Ideal (11)
- d. I don't know (10)

**2. When someone consistently acts a certain way, they are said to have:**

- a. Character traits (47)
- b. Ideals (4)
- c. Empathy (14)
- d. I don't know (10)

**3. When someone starts to feel angry, s/he might notice physical signs such as:**

- a. Slowed breathing (10)
- b. Rapid heart rate (57)
- c. Tiredness (4)
- d. I don't know (4)

**4. Which response to anger is least likely to make the situation worse?**

- a. Ignore your feelings (17)
- b. Walk away (32)
- c. Withdraw and let the anger simmer (19)
- d. I don't know (8)

**5. An effective listener will do which of the following things in a conversation?**

- a. Interrupt the other person who is speaking in order to ask them questions (5)
- b. Look away from the other person who is speaking (8)
- c. Restate what the person has said to you using their own words (45)
- d. I don't know (17)

**6. Which type of communication is *most* helpful in being respectful toward yourself and others?**

- a. Aggressive (4)
- b. Assertive (31)

c. Passive (30)

d. I don't know (12)

**7. Which of these behaviors describes someone who is behaving aggressively toward you?**

a. Pointing and waving a finger at you (40)

b. Giving you direct eye contact (9)

c. Being fidgety (16)

d. I don't know (10)

**8. Which of these behaviors describes someone who is behaving assertively toward you?**

a. Talking in a soft voice (10)

b. Speaking to you clearly and calmly (26)

c. Having a stiff posture (26)

d. I don't know (13)

**9. Which of these behaviors describes someone who is behaving passively toward you?**

a. Using a loud voice (11)

b. Avoiding saying directly what they think, feel, or want (39)

c. Making demands or threats (11)

d. I don't know (14)

**10. A person in a position of authority might be labeled unfair if they have done which of the following?**

a. Treated people consistently (14)

b. Checked out some, but not all, the facts in a disagreement (30)

c. Was impartial (14)

d. I don't know (17)

**11. What is the best way to demonstrate good citizenship?**

- a. Doing something to benefit the common good (53)
- b. Doing something to benefit only myself (9)
- c. Doing nothing until someone asks me to do it (6)
- d. I don't know (5)

**12. Which of these may be least helpful in making choices to reach a desired outcome?**

- a. The choice follows your personal values (12)
- b. The choice is similar to what you have seen on TV (35)
- c. The choice shows respect for yourself and others (15)
- d. I don't know (12)

**13. If someone is acting responsibly, which of the following things is she or he *most likely* to do?**

- a. Doing chores at home after being asked several times (15)
- b. Turning in homework on time (39)
- c. Thinking nice things about someone (10)
- d. I don't know (11)

**14. A person that acts in a caring manner is *most likely* to show which of the following behaviors?**

- a. Accepting the consequences of his/her actions (16)
- b. Talking positively about others (36)
- c. Completing homework assignments early (9)
- d. I don't know (12)

**15. If someone is acting respectfully toward another person, which of the following is she or he *most likely* to do for that person?**

- a. Show consideration for their privacy (54)

- b. Pretend to be their friend (4)
- c. Do their homework (5)
- d. I don't know (11)

**16. If someone is said to be trustworthy, which of the following behaviors is she or he most likely to demonstrate?**

- a. Being active in student government (14)
- b. Showing favoritism (10)
- c. Not gossiping (42)
- d. I don't know (10)

**17. Someone who treats people fairly, might do which of the following?**

- a. Do volunteer work for a community organization (11)
- b. Avoid treating people differently because of who they are or how they look (44)
- c. Finish their chores (8)
- d. I don't know (13)

**18. A person who displays citizenship is likely to do which of the following?**

- a. Say nice things about other people (12)
- b. Participate in a community service activity (49)
- c. Complete homework assignments on time (5)
- d. I don't know (9)

**One day at school, Chris overhears his friend, Rob, talking about starting a fight this weekend with some other students. What do you think is the most responsible thing that Chris could do in this situation?**

- 1. Tell other students about Rob's plan to see what they think he should do. (7)
- 2. Talk to a trusted teacher or parent about the situation to get their help. (45)

3. Wait until after school and yell at Rob for trying to cause trouble. (5)
4. Stay quiet and decide not to talk to Rob because it might ruin their friendship. (9)

**A new student, Sophie, has joined Karen's class. Sophie had polio and now walks with a bit of a limp. Some of Karen's friends are making a big deal about her limp. Which of the following things do you think Karen can do to show the most caring toward Sophie?**

1. Watch her make her way slowly to the teacher to ask where she should sit. (6)
2. Say nothing today, but talk with her friends later at lunch to decide whether or not she should talk to Sophie tomorrow. (7)
3. Give Sophie a friendly smile, instead of laughing at her like Karen's friends are doing. (46)
4. Stay in her chair and be careful not to make any eye contact, especially when she limps. (7)

**Shalonda is a sophomore transferring into a new high school. At her old school, students and teachers treated each other with respect. Shalonda's new high school is very different, and her new friends talk back to the teachers and laugh behind their backs. What should Shalonda do to show the most respect for others in this situation?**

1. She should go along with her new friends and laugh behind the teachers' backs and make sure the teachers never hear about it. (5)
2. She should quietly turn away from her new friends when they treat the teachers badly to show them they are acting inappropriately. (22)
3. She should not laugh with her new friends, and explain to her friends why she feels it is important to treat teachers with respect and hope that her new friends will see a better way to treat others and perhaps change their minds. (30)
4. She should forcefully tell her friends that they should stop acting so rudely or she will tell the teacher about their behaviors. (9)

**Rosa and her good friend, Ann, have joined a group of girls at lunch and Rosa is telling the girls a very funny, but rather embarrassing story about Ann. As Rosa is telling the story, she notices that Ann is beginning to look very uncomfortable and starts to turn away from the group to leave. Rosa immediately stops her story and calls out to Ann, "Ann, I'm just teasing." Rosa can tell that Ann feels very differently. What do you think is the best thing Rosa could do to show that she is trustworthy?**

1. Turn back to the group and finish the story about Ann, since she didn't think it was such a big deal and Ann was just feeling overly sensitive. (12)

2. Tell the group that she can't finish the story because Ann is feeling badly about it and run after Ann to tease her about being "too sensitive." (15)
3. Tell the group that she should not have told the story and that she will apologize to Ann after school. (26)
4. Tell the group that she will "catch them later," and run after Ann to apologize for telling the story in the first place. (11)

**Antonio is a senior and the head of the school newspaper. He is responsible for assigning articles for people to write. The newspaper staff this year is mostly freshmen and Antonio does not know any of them well. Steve and Spencer are both freshman and would like to be assigned to write the lead article for the first issue of the newspaper this year. Antonio has noticed that Steve is really popular with students in the school, including some of Antonio's friends, and that Spencer is pretty quiet and keeps to himself. What should Antonio do about this decision to be the most fair?**

1. Given the short deadline for getting the article done, he should assign the article to Steve since he seems more confident and better able to get along well with people. (10)
2. He should talk to his friends to find out what they know about Steve and Spencer to see who might have better information for writing the article. (10)
3. He should talk to some of their classmates to find out how well Steve and Spencer write in their classes. (15)
4. He should ask Steve and Spencer to provide a sample of their best writing so he can determine who is better suited to write the lead article for this first issue. (34)

**Carlos and his friends have felt very frustrated that they have no place to skateboard in their community, especially since the community put up new signs saying that they cannot skate on public property. Which of these actions do you think is best for Carlos and his friends to do in order to be a good citizen?**

1. Continue to skate on the steps at the library, but make sure it is after hours when no one will see them. (6)
2. Keep quiet about their frustration and see if they can get a ride to go to the public skate park an hour away in a nearby city. (16)
3. Visit the nearby public skate park to find out how other students helped to bring the skate park to their city, so that they can learn what they might be able to do in their own city. (42)
4. Spray paint the "do not skate" signs as a way of protesting the new rules. (4)

APPENDIX G

IRB APPROVAL



Office of The Vice President for Research  
DHHS Assurance ID No. : FWA00003901

Institutional Review Board  
Human Subjects Office  
612 Boyd GSRC  
Athens, Georgia 30602-7411  
(706) 542-3199  
Fax: (706) 542-3360  
www.ovpr.uga.edu/hso

APPROVAL FORM

Date Proposal Received: 2012-10-02

Project Number: 2013-10301-0

Name	Title	Dept/Phone	Address	Email
Dr. Elaine Adams	PI	Workforce Education 206 Rivers Crossing 4809 706-542-4204		adamsje@uga.edu
Ms. Rachael McClain	CO	Education, Workforce Education 770-287-5156	6614 Station Drive Clermont, GA 30527	rmcclain@uga.edu

Title of Study: Creating DRIVE: A case study on the impact of authentic instruction in an alternative education environment

45 CFR 46 Category: Expedite 7.5

Parameters:

Reviewed per Subpart D (46.404): Permission of one parent may be sufficient;  
Approved for Institutions with Authorization Letters on File;

Change(s) Required for Approval:

Revised Application;  
Revised Consent Document(s);

Approved : 2013-01-15    Begin date : 2013-01-15    Expiration date : 2014-01-14

NOTE: Any research conducted before the approval date or after the end data collection date shown above is not covered by IRB approval, and cannot be retroactively approved.

Number Assigned by Sponsored Programs:

Funding Agency:

Your human subjects study has been approved.

Please be aware that it is your responsibility to inform the IRB:

- ... of any adverse events or unanticipated risks to the subjects or others within 24 to 72 hours;
- ... of any significant changes or additions to your study and obtain approval of them before they are put into effect;
- ... that you need to extend the approval period beyond the expiration date shown above;
- ... that you have completed your data collection as approved, within the approval period shown above, so that your file may be closed.

For additional information regarding your responsibilities as an investigator refer to the IRB Guidelines.

Use the attached Researcher Request Form for requesting renewals, changes, or closures.

Keep this original approval form for your records.

Chairperson or Designee,  
Institutional Review Board



# The University of Georgia

Office of The Vice President for Research  
DHHS Assurance ID No. : FWA00003901

Institutional Review Board  
Human Subjects Office  
612 Boyd GSRC  
Athens, Georgia 30602-7411  
(706) 542-3199  
Fax: (706) 542-3360  
www.ovpr.uga.edu/hso

## APPROVAL OF RENEWALS / CHANGES

**Request Date:** 2013-02-15

**Project Number:** 2013-10301-1

Name	Title	Dept/Phone	Address	Email
Dr. Elaine Adams	PI	Workforce Education 206 Rivers Crossing 4809 706-542-4204		adamsje@uga.edu
Ms. Rachael McClain	CO	Education, Workforce Education 770-287-5156	6614 Station Drive Clermont, GA 30527	rmclain@uga.edu

**Title of Study:** Creating DRIVE: A case study on the impact of authentic instruction in an alternative education environment

**45 CFR 46 Category:** Continuing Review

**Renew :** No

**Change(s) :** Receipt and review of second interview protocol;

**Parameters:**  
APPROVAL OF ABOVE NOTED CHANGES.  
Approved for Institutions with Authorization  
Letters on File;

**Approved :** 2013-03-06 **Begin date :** 2013-03-06 **Expiration date :** 2014-01-14

*NOTE: Any research conducted before the approval date or after the end data collection date shown above is not covered by IRB approval, and cannot be retroactively approved.*

**Number Assigned by Sponsored Programs:**

**Funding Agency:**

Your request for approval of renewal and/or changes has been approved.

You must report any adverse events or unanticipated risk to the IRB within 24 to 72 hours. Refer to the IRB Guidelines for additional information.

Use the attached Researcher Request Form for requesting renewals, changes, or closures.  
Keep this original approval form for your records.

Chairperson or Designee,  
Institutional Review Board



# The University of Georgia

Office of The Vice President for Research  
DHHS Assurance ID No. : FWA00003901

Institutional Review Board  
Human Subjects Office  
612 Boyd GSRC  
Athens, Georgia 30602-7411  
(706) 542-3199  
Fax: (706) 542-3360  
www.ovpr.uga.edu/hso

## APPROVAL OF RENEWALS / CHANGES

**Request Date:** 2013-03-29

**Project Number:** 2013-10301-2

Name	Title	Dept/Phone	Address	Email
Dr. Elaine Adams	PI	Workforce Education 206 Rivers Crossing 4809 706-542-4204		adamsje@uga.edu
Ms. Rachael McClain	CO	Education, Workforce Education 770-287-5156	6614 Station Drive Clermont, GA 30527	rmclain@uga.edu

**Title of Study:** Creating DRIVE: A case study on the impact of authentic instruction in an alternative education environment

**45 CFR 46 Category:** Continuing Review

**Renew :** No

**Change(s) :** Added data from survey instruments;  
Submitted third interview protocol;

**Parameters:**  
APPROVAL OF ABOVE NOTED CHANGES.  
Approved for Institutions with Authorization  
Letters on File;

**Approved :** 2013-04-18 **Begin date :** 2013-04-18 **Expiration date :** 2014-01-14

*NOTE: Any research conducted before the approval date or after the end data collection date shown above is not covered by IRB approval, and cannot be retroactively approved.*

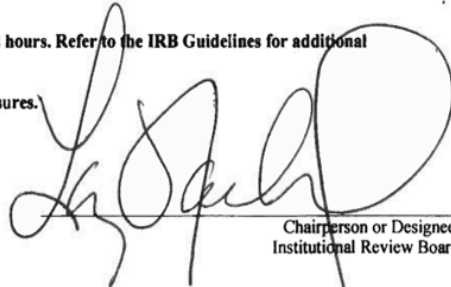
**Number Assigned by Sponsored Programs:**

**Funding Agency:**

Your request for approval of renewal and/or changes has been approved.

You must report any adverse events or unanticipated risk to the IRB within 24 to 72 hours. Refer to the IRB Guidelines for additional information.


Use the attached Researcher Request Form for requesting renewals, changes, or closures.  
Keep this original approval form for your records.



Chairperson or Designee,  
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX H

HALL COUNTY SCHOOLS APPROVAL

  
**Hall County Schools**  
CHARACTER • COMPETENCY • RIGOR FOR ALL

711 Green Street, N.W.  
Gainesville, Georgia 30501-3333  
770-534-1100  
FAX 770-535-7400

ELOISE T. BARRON, Ph.D.  
ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT  
FOR TEACHING & LEARNING

WILLIAM S. SCHOFFEL  
Superintendent

Research Proposal Approval/Denial Form  
Hall County School System


November 6, 2012

Dear Ms. McClain:

Your research proposal entitled ***“Creating DRIVE: A case study on the impact of authentic instruction in an alternative education environment”*** has been reviewed by representatives of the Hall County School System. The representatives have agreed on the decision as indicated below. Please contact Dr. Eloise Barron at the Hall County Central Office if you have any questions about this decision.

Proposal Approved  
 Proposal Denied  
 Proposal Approved with Stipulations

Comments/Explanations:

  
Eloise T. Barron, Ph.D.  
Assistant Superintendent, Teaching and Learning  
Hall County Schools  
711 Green Street  
Gainesville, GA 30501

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