

WHAT DO THE CHILDREN HAVE TO SAY?:
CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHILDREN OF DIVORCE INTERVENTION
PROGRAM

By

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CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF CODIP

Abstract

Divorce has serious implications for a child's social and emotional development (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Few of the child-focused interventions that have been developed to address the negative effects of divorce have been extensively evaluated to validate their positive outcomes. One school-based preventive program that has undergone in-depth evaluations with multiple treatment and control groups to document its efficacy among children of different backgrounds is the *Children of Divorce Intervention Program* (CODIP) (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). While many studies have documented the durability and generalizability of its positive outcomes, there is insufficient qualitative research exploring children's perceptions of the program. In particular, Pedro-Carroll, one of the program's developers, has identified a need to explore the active mediating aspects of the program, and the impact of age on children's perceptions of CODIP. Therefore, through a process evaluation study, involving approximately forty children of divorce who attend two elementary schools in a public school district in New Jersey, this study investigated children's perceptions of CODIP. The following research questions guided my study: (1) how do students describe their experiences in CODIP? (2) in what ways have students benefitted from their involvement in CODIP? (3) which components of CODIP contributed to students' positive outcomes? (4) which features of the program did students like the most/least? (5) how did participants' perceptions of the program vary across developmental age groups? My data analysis revealed three main findings: (1) children benefitted by learning how to express their feelings, solve divorce-related problems, and be part of a peer support system; (2) the positive group dynamics, strong relationships with facilitators, and experiential aspects of the program contributed to these benefits; and (3) participants offered constructive feedback about environmental conditions and their desire for more hands-on activities. The implications of these findings are considered for program developers and school counselors, and recommendations for modifications to the program and considerations for implementation are offered. While further research needs to be conducted to assess the generalizability of these outcomes, my study gives a voice to CODIP participants, as well as provides a foundation for the potential active mediating elements that account for the program's success.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Divorce has serious implications for a child's social and emotional development (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). It is a process, marked by instability, which consists of numerous family transitions, such as residential mobility, reduced contact with parents, remarriages among parents, and decreased standard of living (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). These transitions can often undermine an adult's ability to parent (Oliphant, Brown, Cambron, & Yankeelov, 2002), putting their child at an increased risk of experiencing strong feelings of anger and sadness (Pedro-Carroll, Sutton, & Wyman, 1999), as well as anxiety and depression (Oliphant et al., 2002). As a result, children of divorce often adopt unsuccessful avoidant coping mechanisms and have lower self-esteem (Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; Lengua, Sandler, West, Wolchik, & Curran, 1999).

The three most salient and enduring effects that divorce has on children are diminished psychosocial well-being, decreased cognitive functioning, and social difficulties. The psychosocial well-being of children of divorce is negatively correlated to the number of family transitions that they experience (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). They are at a greater risk of developing internalizing behaviors, such as feelings of anxiety and depression (Gilman, 2005), as well as externalizing behaviors, such as impulsivity and aggressiveness (Potter, 2010). In addition, children of divorce experience decreased cognitive functioning, as evidenced by a study conducted by Evans, Kelley, and Wanner (2001), which revealed that children of divorce get seven tenths of a year less education than their peers in intact families, which can persist for seven to eight years following the divorce (Jeynes, 2002). Finally, divorce can have significant ramifications on children's social development, as well. Many children from divorced families

are less sociable, have weak interpersonal skills, and experience difficulty trusting others in relationships (Demo & Acock, 1988; Jaynes, 2002; Kim, 2011; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004).

In response to a number of empirical studies that have documented a causal relationship between post-divorce stressors and increased mental health disorders in children of divorce (Sandler et al., 1991), over the past three decades numerous interventions have been developed to address the risk and protective factors associated with the divorce experience (Cookston & Fung, 2011). However, the majority of preventive programs lack evaluation data (Wolchik, Sandler, Winslow, & Smith-Daniels, 2005). The *Children of Divorce Program* (CODIP) is one of the few preventive programs that has undergone extensive evaluations with multiple treatment and control groups to assess its efficacy among children of different ages and socio-demographic backgrounds (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). In fact, since the program was established in 1982, six studies have documented the durability and generalizability of the positive outcomes participants experience as a result of the program (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

The efficacy of CODIP has been largely based on five scales, designed to evaluate the perspectives of teachers, parents, group leaders, and children related to their adjustment in the classroom, problem-solving skills, behavior, and feelings about their families (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll, Cowen, & Emory, 1989). Comparisons of pre to post adjustment change have indicated significant gains for the program group, versus the non-program group from all four perspectives and across most scales (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll, Cowen, & Emory, 1989). Thus, while numerous evaluations have provided substantial evidence that CODIP works, there is a need for a study to address *why* it works. In fact, the developer of the program, Dr. JoAnne Pedro-Carroll, has identified “active mediating elements of the intervention” as an important area to address (Pedro-Carroll & Alpert-Gillis, 1997, p. 20). Subjective meanings and multiple

realities of the participants' experiences will begin to uncover specific elements of the program that contribute to its positive outcomes (Oliphant et al., 2002).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore children's perceptions of the *Children of Divorce Intervention Program* by addressing the following research questions:

- How do students describe their experiences in CODIP?
 - In what ways have students benefitted from their involvement in CODIP?
 - Which features (components) of CODIP contributed to students' positive outcomes?
 - Which features (components) of the program did students like most?
 - Which features (components) of the program did students like least?
 - How did participants' perceptions of the program vary across developmental age groups?

The aim of this research project is to offer feedback to the developers of the program, based on children's feedback regarding what elements of the program they perceive to be successful and contribute to positive outcomes. This study builds on current research trends to gather qualitative data to assess children's perceptions of the services they receive (Mo-Yee-Lee, 1997). According to Stake (1978), qualitative data provide rich and detailed information related to specific issues, such as children's perceptions (Oliphant et al., 2002).

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Divorce can negatively impact a child's social, emotional, and academic development (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Although many preventive programs have been developed to respond to these concerns, few of the programs are empirically validated and those that are often are not mandatory (Pollet, 2009). As a result, this leaves many students who are experiencing the negative outcomes of their parents' divorce with very little support to develop effective coping and resiliency skills. The students in the Greenboro School District are a prime example; they are not offered support by a court-based program nor a school-based program to specifically address their needs. Therefore, unless they have proactive parents who have the financial means to seek outside counseling and therapy, they are left to deal with their parents' divorce on their own, putting them at an increased risk for experiencing psychological distress, decreased academic performance, and poor self-concept (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Pedro-Carroll, 2005; Tartari, 2007). Given that no court-based programs are offered to them, these students need a school-based preventive program, such as the *Children of Divorce Intervention Program* (CODIP) to provide them with the support that they need.

The sections that follow describe preventive programs under each category in terms of their program context, goals, and any related evaluative studies.

Court-Based Programs

In an effort to reduce the negative outcomes associated with divorce, judges are increasingly decreeing that children and their parents attend programs to heighten their awareness about the effects that divorce may have on them (Oliphant, Brown, Cambron, & Yankeelov, 2002). While the court-based programs are better than nothing, they tend to be

short-term, locally-based, focused on the parents rather than on the child, not science-based, and lack evaluative data. Furthermore, they are not consistently implemented across the states.

According to Pollet and Lombreglia (2008), forty-six states in the United States have educational programs for divorcing/separating parents that are espoused by the courts, but far fewer are available for children. Furthermore, there are thirty-five states, including New Jersey that do not require a child, whose parents have recently separated or divorced, to attend an educational program (Pollet, 2009). In these states, the need for preventive programs offered in schools and community contexts is of heightened importance.

Programs Offered Outside of the Court

Preventive programs outside of the court are offered in a variety of service delivery contexts, including schools, universities, and community service agencies (Cookston, Sandler, Braver, & Genalo, 2007). Participation in these programs is voluntary, as opposed to many court-based programs, which are mandated (Pollet, 2009). Other common features of preventive programs offered outside of the court, include the following: they are school-based, designed to provide children with structured peer support, teach cognitive-behavioral skills, consist of experiential components, and are long-term. Each of these features will be discussed in greater detail below.

It is essential to provide children with a non-threatening and safe atmosphere, in which they feel comfortable sharing their most personal thoughts and feelings regarding their parents' divorce (Magid, 1977). Given the residential mobility that many children face as a result of divorce, as well as the interparental conflict that they may encounter at home, school is "the one place that may feel the most normal to them when their families are undergoing big changes" and "can be an important anchor" (Pedro-Carroll, 2010, p. 213). Also, providing preventive services

in schools normalizes the experience and provides children with an ongoing support system (Drake, 1981; Kalter, Pickar, & Lesowitz, 1984). Therefore, school-based preventive programs, such as CODIP, ensure for a non-threatening and safe atmosphere. In addition, given that one million children experience their parents' divorce each year (Pedro-Carroll, Alpert-Gillis, & Cowen, 1992), many children whose parents are separated or divorced and thereby, who may benefit from a preventive program, are found within schools.

The majority of these preventive programs are child-focused interventions, in which children are grouped based on developmental factors, such as age. These factors directly impact how they respond to their parents' divorce and their ability to adjust during the postdivorce years (Grych & Fincham, 1992). For example, the CODIP groups children according to their age: kindergarten and first grade, second and third grade, fourth through sixth grade, and seventh and eighth grade (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Each group is provided with a different version of the program that takes into account their developmental and cognitive abilities (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

Often times, in the post-divorce years, children feel very alone and helpless. Tim Barnes is the guidance counselor at two of Greenboro's Elementary schools. In an interview, he shared, "I have had many kids come to me and say: 'I'm not positive, but I'm pretty sure that I am the only one in this school whose parents are divorced.'" However, being in a group with peers their age facilitates a "highly supportive group atmosphere" (Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985, p. 603). During a time when they are going through many transitions and everything seems to be changing, children are comforted in knowing that they are not alone. (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Peers provide one another with mutual support by sharing their experiences and feelings, as well as by clarifying misconceptions that they may have about their parents' divorce by asking

questions (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Children feel more comfortable discussing sensitive and personal issues related to their parents' divorce with peers who can relate, as opposed to in an individual setting with an adult (Grych & Fincham, 1992). The group format is also responsive to the literature related to how divorce negatively impacts children, by providing them with natural opportunities by which to improve their social skills and as a result, to improve upon their psychosocial well-being.

Preventive interventions outside of the court often directly teach cognitive-behavioral skills. Stolberg and Mahler (1994), the founders of the Children's Support Group (CSG), a fourteen-week school-based preventive program, theorize that teaching cognitive-behavioral skills is one of the key ingredients of any preventive program for children of divorce. Programs such as the CSG and CODIP are designed to provide children with opportunities to practice effective coping skills and to develop resilience (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

Finally, preventive programs based in schools and community service agencies tend to be long-term, when compared to those carried out in court-connected settings. Of the list of programs compiled by Pollet (2009), which is not exhaustive, but contains the prominent programs for children of divorce delineated by each state, community-based and school-based programs range from 4 to 16 weeks in length. Children need repeated practice, in which they can build skills and practice applying them, given a variety of different contexts and situations. Multiple opportunities for practice assures for greater skill transfer. Several programs, primarily the Children's Support Group (CSG), which expanded to become CODIP have been extensively evaluated to reveal that a preventive program of 14 to 16 weeks in length has shown "significant improvements in children's clinical symptoms in the skills and support conditions" (Pedro-

Carroll, 2005, p. 55). Follow-up studies have substantiated the maintenance of these improvements over time (Pedro-Carroll et al., 1999).

Conceptual Framework

Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP)

Pedro-Carroll and her colleagues developed the school-based preventive program, CODIP, which focuses on protective factors related to promoting resilience in children after divorce (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Since its inception in 1982, four separate versions of the program have been developed to accommodate the specific developmental needs of children ages kindergarten through eighth grade. Groups consist of no more than eight children and through a series of interactive components, including board games, role-playing, and writing, children are taught skills essential for solving problems, managing their anger, disengaging from potential loyalty conflicts, and tackling daily challenges (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Furthermore, ranging from 8 to 16 weeks in length, the long-term nature of the program offers participants repeated opportunities to practice applying skills in a variety of different contexts and situations, which assure greater skills transfer (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

Program objectives. While the main goal of CODIP is to diminish the social, behavioral, and emotional issues that transpire subsequent to divorce, the developers translated protective factors into the following program objectives:

- Promote an empathetic group environment
- Help children identify and express divorce-related feelings
- Clear up confusion related to misconceptions regarding the divorce and foster an understanding of divorce-related concepts
- Encourage children to develop positive views of themselves and their families (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll, & Cowen, 1989).

Program experiences. To meet the program objectives, CODIP is designed to provide children with opportunities to practice effective coping skills to manage daily challenges, such as

extricating themselves from loyalty conflicts as well as dealing with anger and sadness (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Pedro-Carroll (2005) describes how CODIP helps children distinguish between problems they can and cannot control by explicitly teaching them social problem solving and interpersonal skills. The group format also allows them to share their successes and failures in transferring these skills to their home environments with their peers, which serves as yet another learning experience (Pedro-Carroll, 2005; Stolberg & Mahler, 1994).

Preventive programs engage children in acquiring cognitive-behavioral skills through the use of experiential activities, including role-play and games. Many programs for younger children are grounded in play therapy, in which children use role-playing techniques, puppets, board games, and other exercises to self-regulate their emotions and feelings regarding divorce through concrete experiences (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll, & Cowen, 1989). For example, CODIP employs activities such as the Feelings Grab Bag game, in which children practice identifying their emotions and develop empathy toward others and the Red Light-Green Light Game, in which they learn to distinguish between aspects of their parents' divorce that they can and cannot control (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Older children may engage in an expert panel, providing "callers" in their audience with expert advice related to coping with divorce (Kaduson & Schaefer, 2006). This activity allows children to reinforce problem-solving and coping skills to deal with transitions related to their parents' divorce (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). These types of experiential activities provide children with concrete opportunities to self-regulate their emotions, develop empathy, establish healthy coping mechanisms, and identify ways to transfer these coping skills to real life experiences (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

Program outcomes. Serving thousands of children in the Netherlands, United States, Canada, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Cyprus, and South Africa, CODIP has been used by

more than 500 schools (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Numerous controlled studies find that CODIP provides children of divorce with skills and benefits to promote their “resilience and healthy adjustment over time” (Pedro-Carroll, 2005, p. 59). Findings of children’s positive adjustment are consistent across all four perspectives: teachers, group leaders, parents, and children (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

Five measures that have been used to determine the efficacy of CODIP are: the Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS), the Group Leader Evaluation Form (GLEF), the Parent Evaluation Form (PEF), the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC), and the Children’s Attitudes and Self-Perceptions (CASP) (Pedro-Carroll, Sutton, & Wyman, 1999). Studies have revealed evidence of significant gains across most of these measures, indicating improvement in children’s attitudes towards their parents’ divorce and enhanced abilities to discuss personal concerns with their parents, to solve conflicts, and to advocate for themselves (Pedro-Carroll, 2005; Pedro-Carroll & Alpert-Gillis, 1997). Furthermore, after participating in CODIP, children demonstrated fewer internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). These findings underscore the importance of explicitly teaching children effective coping skills to reduce family-related stressors (Wadsworth & Compas, 2002).

Suggested rationale for program efficacy. CODIP’s theory of action is grounded in the belief that children’s adjustment to their parents’ divorce can be promoted through the implementation of evidence-based preventive interventions (Pedro-Carroll & Jones, 2005). Such interventions promote wellness by reducing potential divorce-related risk factors that increase the likelihood of negative outcomes, and increasing protective factors, which conversely increase the chances of positive adjustment (Pedro-Carroll & Jones, 2005; Leon, 2003) (see Table 1). To that end, the developers of CODIP drew upon research of risk and resilience, play-based therapy,

group therapy, and cognitive-behavioral skills, in designing the program. They theorize that the program features that contribute to its efficacy are: structure of peer group, cognitive-behavioral play therapy components, and the long-term nature of the program.

Table 1. Risk and Protective Factors

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Interparental conflict	Contact with non-custodial parent
Parental conflict	Social support
Mentally ill parent	Parental warmth and support
Inconsistent discipline	Parental responsiveness
Poor quality of parenting	Maternal education
Low socio-economic status	Positive maternal emotional well-being

(Leon, 2003; Pedro-Carroll, 2005; Rolf, Masten, Cicchetti, Nuechterlein, & Weintraub, 1993)

Structure of peer group. The group format of CODIP where children are divided into groups on the basis of age, offers them a “highly supportive group atmosphere” (Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985, p. 603), in which they are comforted knowing that they are not alone (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). In addition, peers provide one another with mutual support by sharing their experiences and feelings, as well by clarifying misconceptions that they may have about their parents’ divorce by asking questions (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Children often feel more comfortable discussing sensitive and personal issues related to their parents’ divorce with peers who can relate, as opposed to in an individual setting with just an adult, like a therapist (Grych & Fincham, 1992). The group format also allows them to share their successes and failures in transferring these skills to their home environments with their peers, which serves as yet another learning experience (Pedro-Carroll, 2005; Stolberg & Mahler, 1994).

Cognitive-behavioral play therapy (CBPT) components. According to Drewes and Green (2014), play provides children with opportunities to make meaning of their experiences, communicate with others, as well as work through traumatic events such as their parents' divorce. More specifically, cognitive-behavioral play therapy, which was introduced by Susan Knell, "is based on behavioral and cognitive theories of emotional development and psychopathology" (Drewes & Green, 2014, p. 21). Thus, play is used to explicitly teach children coping skills and addresses instances of cognitive distortion by cognitive restructuring (Knell, 1998).

Interventions premised on CBPT usually utilize the following techniques to promote positive adjustment: modeling, systematic desensitization, behavior rehearsal, and identifying maladaptive beliefs and replacing them with constructive beliefs (Knell, 1998). Given that modeling is effective in strengthening, weakening, or acquiring behaviors, CBPT interventions often reflect modeling through play, using puppets or characters in books (Bandura, 1977). In CODIP, each session begins with a model. For example, children learn how to use the three steps in the social problem-solving cartoon, by first watching a model presented with puppets (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). The technique of systematic desensitization replaces internalizing behaviors like anxiety with adaptive responses (Knell, 1998). Children are provided with opportunities to act out situations, in order to gain mastery in handling them (Knell, 1998). CODIP participants act out common divorce-related problems and facilitators help them to determine effective ways to solve these problems (Children of Divorce Intervention Program, 2015). In addition, behavioral rehearsal helps children to identify and address social skills deficiencies. Frequent role-play and puppet play in CODIP allows for behavioral rehearsal and facilitators coach participants with more adaptive responses (Fazio-Griffith & Ballard, 2014;

Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Finally, helping children to modify maladaptive beliefs often leads to a sense of empowerment and personal understanding (O'Connor & Braverman, 2009). In CODIP, children distinguish between problems they can solve and those that they cannot, such as parent reconciliation. Grounded in cognitive-behavioral play therapy, CODIP was designed with the goal of utilizing the aforementioned techniques to facilitate cognitive change and the acquisition of developmentally appropriate behavioral skills (Knell, 1998).

Long-term nature of program. According to Fall (1999), intensive CBPT sessions are effective if implemented for a half hour each week for at least six weeks. Children need repeated practice applying skills in a variety of different contexts and situations as a way to develop them. Multiple opportunities for practice assures greater skill transfer (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). The developers of CODIP have found that older children benefit from one-hour sessions over the course of 12 to 16 weeks, while younger children benefit from 45 minute sessions over the same number of weeks (Pedro-Carroll & Jones, 2005). Several programs, primarily CODIP, have been extensively evaluated to reveal that a preventive program of 8 to 16 weeks in length contributes to "significant improvements in children's clinical symptoms in the skills and support conditions" (Pedro-Carroll, 2005, p. 55). Follow-up studies have substantiated the maintenance of these improvements over time (Pedro-Carroll, Sutton, & Wyman, 1999).

Missing link. While statistical analyses of multiple general measures have validated the efficacy of CODIP, there is a lack of research describing the participants' perceptions of the intervention and the program features that they attribute to its positive outcomes. In fact, beyond these general measures, very little is known about *how* CODIP impacts children's understanding of their parents' divorce (Ebling, Pruett, & Pruett, 2009). Qualitative studies can provide insight

into how the participants experience the program and to analyze their perceptions (Stake, 1978; Oliphant et al., 2002).

A qualitative study of CODIP, using methods like focus groups and open-ended surveys with participants will provide an opportunity to link program features with specific positive outcomes. Sewell (1999) suggests that these are the most useful methods for understanding the meaning of the program to its participants; open-ended methods allow participants to describe the components of the program that are most important or meaningful without being limited to predetermined categories. A qualitative study of CODIP will not only address limitations of previous studies, but also, serve as a basis for precisely linking specific program features with documented positive outcomes. Furthermore, it will provide grounds for analyzing how consistent children's perceptions are across the three different age groups (1st grade, 2nd & 3rd grade, and 4th & 5th grade).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Given that the purpose of this study was to understand what components of the program children contribute to its documented positive outcomes to offer feedback to the developers of the program, I employed a qualitative process evaluation design. In this section, I will begin by describing the research design, which was derived from the results of an earlier pilot study. Then, I will describe the setting, in which the study was carried out. The selection processes for choosing the facilitators and recruiting participants will then be clarified. After that, I will explain how the program was modified to be adapted to the restrictions imposed by the school calendar. Next, I will describe the data collection process, including the role I played as a researcher. Finally, I will explain the data analysis process, as well as precautions that I took to ensure that potential research bias was minimized.

Research Design

A process evaluation research design was selected for this study, as my intent was to focus on how the program was being implemented, as well as how the participants perceived its implementation, in order to provide useful feedback to the program developers. According to Ross, Lipsey, & Freeman (2004), process evaluation studies focus on formative evaluation and are designed to offer valuable feedback to program managers and sponsors. Furthermore, by analyzing program processes, process evaluation studies determine the relative degree of effectiveness of specific program components, as well as barriers and facilitators that have an impact on the implementation of the program (Joseph et al., 2015). To that end, one of the two major roles that process evaluation studies play is to build on the work of an outcome evaluation, which has deemed a program to be effective to examine factors of implementation responsible

for its positive outcomes (Ross, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). Therefore, process evaluation studies do not only serve to explain the rationale for a program's efficacy, but also suggest areas, in which the program can be improved to make it even more successful.

The research design and methods for this study were derived from the results of a pilot study conducted in the spring of 2015, which employed qualitative research methods on a small scale (N=6) with the intent of refining the data collection strategy for the actual study, which took place on a much larger scale (N=38). A process evaluation study explored the perceptions of six third grade students, by means of focus groups, observations, and semi-structured interviews with parents. The results of the pilot study and correspondence with the lead program developer, Dr. JoAnne Pedro-Carroll suggested several ways to revise the data collection strategy to more effectively answer the proposed research questions with a larger group of students (personal communication, April 20, 2015).

A process evaluation study was conducted, intending to understand the inner workings of CODIP from the participants' perspective (Patton, 1990). Over the course of eight weeks, I met with a group of third graders and served as both a facilitator and a researcher, in carrying out the CODIP curriculum, as well as collecting field notes of my observations, conducting focus groups with the participants and interviews with parents. Ultimately, analyzing this data led me to the discovery of two key themes: according to participants, the positive outcomes of CODIP, included a greater willingness to share feelings and concerns, an enhanced ability to respond to divorce-related stressors, and feeling less "stuck in the middle"; and the three program features responsible for these positive outcomes included providing participants with a safe place, establishing shared experiences, and having multiple opportunities to develop coping skills. Hence, the pilot study led me to the conclusion that the program features that participants

perceived to contribute to these outcomes matched up closely with what program developers theorized to be responsible for CODIP's efficacy (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

The pilot study helped me to revise my research design. First and foremost, I realized the need to delineate my role as a researcher to avoid potential bias among the research subjects; I recognized that they may feel coerced to respond in a certain way, given their previous relationship with me, as their teacher. Therefore, in my actual study, other teachers served as facilitators and I maintained a separate role as a researcher. Also, during the data analysis phase of the pilot study, I realized that the majority of data were collected at the end of the study. This runs counter to the formative nature of process evaluation studies; therefore, I integrated more types of formative data collection methods into my actual study, such as pre- and post-open-ended surveys (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). Undoubtedly, the results of the pilot study helped me to assure for greater success in the execution of my actual study.

Setting

This study was conducted in a suburban school district in northern New Jersey, known as the Greenboro School District (pseudonym). While Greenboro is comprised of one high school, one middle school, five elementary schools (grades 1-5), and two primary centers, my research was carried out at two of the elementary schools: Mountainside Elementary School and Riverdale Elementary School (pseudonyms used). The site was selected, as I am a third grade teacher at Mountainside Elementary School.

- Mountainside Elementary School is medium-sized school for students in grades 1-5. There are 362 students who attend the school, of which 70% are White, 14% are Hispanic, 5% are Asian, 4% are Black, and the remaining 7% are multiracial. The

majority of students come from families of middle to high socioeconomic status with only 14% of the student body eligible for free/reduced lunch.

- Riverdale Elementary School is a smaller-sized school for students in grades 1-5. There are 224 students who attend the school, of which 47% are White, 29% are Hispanic, 4% are Asian, 7% are Black, and the remaining 13% are of mixed race. The majority of students come from families of low to middle socioeconomic status with 34% of the study body eligible for free/reduced lunch.

Presently, no curriculum or program is provided to directly address the specific needs of the hundreds of children of divorce in the district. While an after-school program has been offered in the past at two of the five schools (Mountainside and Riverdale), which follows a modified version of the *Rainbows* curriculum, the children of divorce that have attended this program were among peers who were experiencing an array of other family-related issues, such as abuse, loss of a parent, or incarceration of a family member. In addition, the objective of the *Rainbows* curriculum is to provide children with a safe space to express their feelings about their loss; the curricular materials are not specific to the needs of children of divorce (www.rainbows.org).

Furthermore, support offered to this population of children on behalf of guidance counselors is limited. While the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a ratio of 250 students per every one guidance counselor, in the Greenboro School District, the ratio is approximately 600 students per every one guidance counselor, as two guidance counselors are shared among five elementary schools. Therefore, minimal support is offered to children of divorce who attend the Greenboro School District.

Participants

Participants in this study included 38 students, as well as one guidance counselor, one instructional aide, and eight teachers, who served as facilitators. The recruitment process for both student participants and facilitators is described in detail below.

In an effort to draw a purposive sample, students were recruited, by means of a program announcement sent via email in September (Appendix A) to all parents of students in grades 1-5, who attended the two elementary schools. In addition, due to the fact that the guidance counselor had a personal relationship with many children and families experiencing divorce, he personally reached out to these families to recruit them for participation in the study, as well. All students whose parents consented to their participation in the program and fulfilled the criteria of being in grades 1-5 and having divorced or separated parents were eligible for participation.

At the end of September, the guidance counselor and I met to review the list of thirty-one children, whose parents had expressed interest in having them participate in the program. In addition, he shared with me two cases in which one parent wanted the child to be involved and the other did not. He was able to talk both families into having their children participate. Once we had a comprehensive list, parent consent forms were sent home with the students in their backpacks (see Appendix B). Over the next week or so, parent consent forms were returned to the guidance counselor. Also, he received initial forms back for seven additional children to participate in the program.

On October 5th, we met to discuss how to group the children, based on their grade level into mixed-gender groups of no more than six students. In doing so, we encountered several issues, such as disproportionate numbers of children signing up at each grade. For example, at Mountainside Elementary School, only one first grader and one second grader signed up for the

program. Therefore, although the curriculum is designed for students in grades K-1, these two students were grouped together and were administered the K-1 curriculum. Likewise, thirteen fourth and fifth graders signed up at Mountainside Elementary School, so groups were formed, by taking their experiences as children of divorce and personalities into account to form mixed-grade groupings.

Facilitators were selected by the guidance counselor and in most cases, were teachers who had previously served as facilitators for the *Rainbows* program and were therefore familiar with the role. However, all facilitators, regardless of their level of experience received eight hours of training in September to understand their role as a facilitator, as well as the contents of the CODIP curriculum. Training was provided by the Director of Programs and Services from the Children's Institute and addressed the experiences of children of divorce, explained how the program is designed to address their specific needs, and provided facilitators with opportunities to role-play specific issues that may arise and the means by which to most effectively address them. Please note that one facilitator could not attend the training, due to childcare issues, so I met with her individually after the training took place to provide her with the necessary information.

In October, once the guidance counselor and I had formed the groups, we assigned each facilitator to a group, taking into consideration the age group with which they were most comfortable and/or had the most experience. The participant staff subjects, job title, CODIP curriculum they implemented, school at which they work, as well as grade and pseudonyms used for the students in their group are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Facilitators and Participants involved in CODIP Groups

Facilitator	Job Title	CODIP Age Group	School	Students
Bob Williams	3 rd grade teacher	2 nd /3 rd	Mountainside	-Mary Beth (3 rd) -Richard (3 rd) -Susan (3 rd) -Ines (3 rd) -Colleen (3 rd)
Jillian Campbell	Resource room teacher	4 th /5 th	Mountainside	-Anna (5 th) -Juan (5 th) -Marco (5 th) -Maria (5 th) -Jose (5 th)* -Hope (5 th)
Tim Barnes	Guidance counselor	1 st	Mountainside	-Chloe (1 st) -Becky (2 nd)
Marisa Scott	2 nd grade teacher	4 th /5 th	Mountainside	-Ashley (4 th) -Brie (4 th) -Christina (4 th) -Diego (4 th)
Angela Baker	Basic skills teacher	4 th /5 th	Mountainside	-Sally (5 th) -Cristina (5 th)** -Lillian (4 th)* -Rebecca (4 th) -Sasha (4 th)
Evette Hill	Instructional aide	4 th /5 th	Riverdale	-Robbie (4 th) -Billy (4 th) -Suzy (4 th)
Ingrid Hugh	Multi-age teacher	1 st	Riverdale	-Gabe (2 nd) -Alicia (2 nd) -Nancy (1 st)
Joan Martin	Multi-age teacher	1 st	Riverdale	-Sarah (1 st) -Kyle (1 st) -Andrew (1 st) -Sean (1 st)
Shan Nelson	3 rd grade teacher	2 nd /3 rd	Riverdale	-Michael (3 rd) -Chris (3 rd) -Natalie (3 rd) -Larissa (3 rd)
Bella Gonzalez	5 th grade teacher	4 th /5 th	Riverdale	-Rachel (5 th) -Lucia (5 th) -Amy (4 th) -Cameron (4 th)

*Indicates a student who joined the group late, due to a change in family dynamics.

**Indicates a student who left the group, due to a familial reconciliation.

Modifications to CODIP

While implementing CODIP within a school setting provided me with access to many children of divorce (Pedro-Carroll, Alpert-Gillis, & Cowen, 1992), it also presented me with numerous challenges. First, the program is designed to be carried out over the course of 12 to 14 weeks; however, it was difficult to identify a 12 to 14 week continuous period, uninterrupted by holiday recesses or standardized testing. In addition, while it would have been ideal to implement the program after school to allow for at least a full hour, I realized doing so would significantly reduce my sample size and number of facilitators. My sample size would be limited because many children of divorce come from families, in which parent(s) are already struggling to deal with increased responsibilities and driving their children to/from an additional after-school activity would only contribute to this stress (Pedro-Carroll, Alpert-Gillis, & Cowen, 1992). Furthermore, it would have been difficult to select a day that did not interfere with the children's other activities, such as sports and clubs, to assure for the greatest participation. Likewise, because the facilitators were serving on a voluntary basis, I realized that holding the program after-school would possibly conflict with other jobs, such as tutoring, or pose childcare issues, as many of them are parents. Thus, along with the guidance counselor, I decided for the program to take place during lunch/recess periods over the course of nine weeks.

To assure for the greatest fidelity of implementation in modifying the program, I consulted with the Director of Programs and Services for CODIP at the Children's Institute. I discussed how to most efficiently collapse or combine sessions and develop modified schedules for each age group. After getting input from the facilitators at the training in September, as well as the guidance counselor, I developed modified schedules, so the program would last nine weeks, as opposed to 12 to 14 weeks. In mid-September, I sent the schedules (see Appendix C)

along to the Director of Programs and Services to confirm that all essential elements were included and that the program's fidelity would not be jeopardized. She suggested creating summary sheets for facilitators to complete after each session, so I was aware of any impromptu changes that were made, as well as to collect their feedback on a consistent basis of elements of the program, as well as those that were unsuccessful (see Appendix D).

The program commenced in mid-October and concluded directly prior to the district's holiday break at the end of December. All sessions took place during the students' lunch/recess and were planned in such a way to accommodate their involvement in band/orchestra, as well as extra academic help sessions. In some instances, facilitators had to change the day of implementation or conduct two sessions in a single week to adapt to their own meetings, absences, and/or half day schedules, due to holidays and parent-teacher conferences. Overall, the facilitators all carried out nine full sessions, beginning on the same week of October 19th and ending on the same week of December 21st.

Data Collection

In order to address my research questions related to students' perceptions of CODIP, components of the program that they linked to its positive outcomes, and how participants' perceptions varied, if at all, across developmental age groups, I carried out twenty-seven observations, administered pre- and post-surveys, obtained feedback from parents, transcribed audio recordings from focus groups conducted by facilitators, and collected student work samples. The timeline over which I collected the data and each of the data sources are described in detail, below.

Timeline

Data collection took place from October 2015 through to December 2015 (see Table 3).

Fortunately, I was able to adhere to my proposed schedule. However, throughout the course of the study, one student left the group, as her father returned home and her parents agreed to work on their marriage. She spoke with the guidance counselor about this and based on his jurisdiction, she left the program. On the other hand, two students joined the group (see Table 2) after week 4, due to unforeseen events that took place in their families. While I realize that their participation in the group was helpful to ameliorate the distress they were experiencing regarding their families, I have excluded them from the study in my final analysis. Therefore, while 38 students participated in the program, only the data collected relating to 35 have been included in the study.

Table 3. Data Collection Timeline

October	November	December
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Completed assent and consent forms collected -Weekly observations of Bob, Angela, & Ingrid's groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Weekly observations of Bob, Angela, and Ingrid's groups -Pre-open-ended survey administered during week of November 2nd (after third session) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Weekly observations of Bob, Angela, and Ingrid's groups -Parent feedback collected via email sent on December 15th -Post-open-ended survey administered during week of December 21st (after final session) -Focus groups conducted during week of December 21st (during final session) -Student work samples collected -Facilitator summary sheets collected

Observational field notes. According to Patton (1990), observational fieldwork is advantageous in understanding the context of a group and gaining insight into participants'

perspectives that may not appear in written surveys or focus group transcripts. Also, process evaluation studies “are aimed at elucidating and understanding the internal dynamics of how a program, organization, or relationship operates” (Patton, 1990, p. 95), which can only be understood by means of close observation. In October, once all participants were recruited and groups had been formed, I randomly selected three groups to observe on a weekly basis: one group implementing the K-1 CODIP curriculum, one group implementing the 2nd & 3rd grade CODIP curriculum, and one implementing the 4th-6th grade CODIP curriculum. See Table 4 for a description of the aforementioned groups.

Table 4. Description of CODIP Groups Observed on a Weekly Basis

CODIP Age Group	School	Facilitator	Grade	Participant's Name
K-1	Riverdale	Ingrid	1	Nancy Anderson
K-1	Riverdale	Ingrid	2	Gabe Wilson
K-1	Riverdale	Ingrid	2	Alicia Chong
2 nd & 3 rd	Mountainside	Bob	3	Mary Beth Simon
2 nd & 3 rd	Mountainside	Bob	3	Richard Simon
2 nd & 3 rd	Mountainside	Bob	3	Susan DeMetro
2 nd & 3 rd	Mountainside	Bob	3	Ines Hillman
2 nd & 3 rd	Mountainside	Bob	3	Colleen Miller
4 th – 5 th	Mountainside	Angela	4	Rebecca Burke
4 th – 5 th	Mountainside	Angela	4	Sasha Fleming
4 th – 5 th	Mountainside	Angela	4	Lillian Davis*
4 th – 5 th	Mountainside	Angela	5	Cristina Diaz**
4 th – 5 th	Mountainside	Angela	5	Sally Simon

*Indicates a student who joined the group late, due to a change in family dynamics.

**Indicates a student who left the group, due to a familial reconciliation.

At the first group meeting, students in all groups completed assent forms (see Appendix E). Then, I introduced myself to the students and explained my role as a participant-observer. As a researcher, this role “permits the evaluator to access personal knowledge and direct experience as resources to aid in understanding and interpreting the program being evaluated”

(Patton, 1990, p 205). During my observations, I amassed field notes by watching the group, participating in activities, and interacting with the participants. I wrote down important events and conversations and after each session, transformed my jottings into detailed field notes, which included the time, description of context, participants, and participant quotes.

Pre- and post-surveys. I discussed my study with the program developer, Dr. JoAnne Pedro-Carroll, and she provided me with an open-ended survey, “Comments about the Group” (see Appendix F) that is copyrighted by the Mental Health Project and has been used in numerous qualitative studies that she has conducted to measure children’s perceptions related to the group (personal communication, April 20, 2015; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985). The 6-item measure consists of two open-ended questions and six questions, which utilize a four-point scale from 1 (*very true*) to 4 (*not true at all*). It was administered to participants after the third and final sessions to consider how children’s perceptions about the program had changed over time. The survey was read aloud to participants in the 1st grade group, as well as 2nd & 3rd grade groups to ascertain their understanding of the questions. Overall, this measure provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences being involved in CODIP, and to offer candid feedback regarding the program.

Parent correspondence. On December 15th, prior to the last session taking place, I sent out an email to all parents of program participants, asking about their perceptions regarding the program’s impact on their child (Appendix G). In the email, I offered parents the opportunity to discuss the program on the phone or in person, if they would like to do so, as well. Unfortunately, I only received one response; however, I attribute this to timing, as the email was sent out a week prior to holiday recess.

Focus groups. Focus groups make for a safe environment with one's peers (Mauthner, 1997) and are advantageous, especially when individuals – like children – interviewed one-on-one may be tentative in offering information (Creswell, 2007). A brief focus group took place with each group, after they had completed the post-survey, during the final session. The intent was to have each facilitator conduct the focus group, as they had already developed a level of trust with the students and had experienced the program with them, so I figured students would be most comfortable sharing their feedback related to the program, given these conditions. However, in four cases at Riverdale School, due to time constraints imposed by rigid teaching schedules, the guidance counselor carried out facilitators' focus groups (Joan, Shan, Bella, and Evette). The guidance counselor approached me in early December and shared the facilitators' concerns that the quality of the focus group would be compromised if they attempted to cram it in, subsequent to participants completing the post-survey and completing activities that were part of the final session. Due to the guidance counselor's flexible schedule and previously established rapport with all group participants, he offered to conduct the focus groups for them.

In early December, facilitators were provided with a focus group guide and a brief video that I created, explaining how to conduct a focus group. The focus group guide will consist of eleven questions and several potential probes, arranged into three main categories: general perceptions of program, resiliency skills, and suggestions for improvement of program (Appendix H). The day before each focus group took place, I checked in with facilitators to ensure that they had watched the video and understood the focus group guide and provided facilitators with a digital voice recorder to use during the focus group. All focus group meetings were audio recorded and the recordings were transcribed directly afterwards and uploaded to Dedoose.

Student work samples. After the final session had taken place, I collected student work from each facilitator that participants had produced during the weekly sessions. For example, the students in the K-1 group created booklets about what makes them special, while students in the 4th & 5th grade group completed a “Challenges Checklist” in which they indicated specific issues that they face with their parents’ divorce. Given that my observations of group sessions were subject to my interpretation as a researcher, collecting student work samples helped reduce potential disparities caused by research subjectivity and to gain insight into the six groups that I did not observe (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008).

The multiple sources of data collected and their relation to the research questions are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Use of Data for Research Questions

Research Questions					
	Observational Data	Pre- and Post-surveys	Parent Correspondence	Focus Group Transcripts	Student Work Samples
1. How do students describe their experiences in CODIP?	X	X	X	X	
a. In what ways have students benefited from their involvement in CODIP?	X	X	X	X	X
b. Which features (components) of CODIP contributed to students’ positive outcomes?	X	X		X	X
c. Which features	X	X	X	X	

(components) of the program did students like most?					
d. Which features (components) of the program did students like least?	X	X	X	X	
e. How did participants' perceptions of the program vary across developmental age groups?	X	X		X	

Analyzing the Data

Analysis began during the data collection phase of my study. First, subsequent to each observation, I developed comprehensive field notes, by transforming my jottings into detailed descriptions of what took place during each group session, as well as key quotes of participants. Similarly, after each focus group took place, I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim. Each set of field notes and transcriptions was reread multiple times for corrections and then, uploaded to Dedoose, a qualitative software program. Overall, 106 pages were uploaded for analysis.

Next, I organized the pre- and post-surveys by age group. I placed each participant's pre- and post-survey together. While organizing these surveys, I utilized initial steps in data analysis, suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). Thus, I developed informal document summaries, by highlighting salient information that was pertinent to my research questions, specifically honing in on participants' quotes, given my interest in their perceptions.

After organizing the data, I acknowledged preconceptions that I had about the experiences of children of divorce and the children and families involved in my study, by

engaging in *Epoché* (Patton, 1990). During this phase, I set aside my preconceived experiences “to best understand the experiences of participants in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 235). I wrote these down in my research journal, constantly revisiting them, as to ensure that they were not interfering with my interpretation of the data throughout the process of data analysis.

Next, in order to gain a preliminary understanding of my data and to reflect on its overall meaning, I thoroughly read through the data several times and wrote memos to myself, in order to generate broad coding categories (Creswell, 2007). The memos assisted me in engaging in an inductive and deductive process of developing codes. Using Dedoose, I identified and coded excerpts, which answered my research questions. Throughout the course of data analysis, I continued to refine my coding scheme, and in doing so, I began to interpret the data by looking for patterns and connections among the various codes. This process of making meaning of the data led me to identify several key themes.

Researcher Role and Trustworthiness

As researcher, my role is complex, as I have pre-established relationships with many of the students who were involved in the study, given my professional role as a teacher at one of the two research sites. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), there are both positive and negative aspects associated with conducting research within your place of work. While positive elements, include accessibility to the site location and participants for study, as well as ease in establishing a rapport with the participants, negative elements, include potential bias in interpreting research findings, as well as issues with role release. Furthermore, my interest in programs for children of divorce arose from my personal experiences with my parents' divorce in elementary school. There were no programs available to provide me with the necessary support and I felt isolated, hopeless, and burdened with worries about the future, as a result. This

positionality as a former child of divorce is a strength, as it offers me a unique perspective, which allows me to be sensitive to the needs of this population of children and empathize with their experiences. In addition, during the study I utilized my positionality as a teacher with whom many of the children were familiar and a former child of divorce to increase the comfort level among the participants.

I took several measures to avoid researcher bias. First, teachers and staff members in the Greenboro School District facilitated the CODIP groups. Similarly, subsequent to the final session, facilitators conducted focus groups. Therefore, the potential for bias was minimized, as I maintained one role as a researcher, as opposed to two roles, as a researcher and facilitator. I also addressed any preconceived notions I had about divorce, by keeping a research journal, in which I wrote down my feelings about the observations and focus groups, as well as questions that I had, immediately afterwards. Ortlipp (2008) explains the role that self-reflective research journals play in making the research process more transparent and minimizing researcher subjectivity in qualitative research. Finally, once all data were collected, I checked all field notes and transcriptions for accuracy. Collectively, these measures helped to ensure that my unique positionality as a teacher in the Greenboro School District and former child of divorce did not skew my findings.

Validity

To ensure validity I triangulated my findings; engaged in peer debriefing; used rich, thick description to present my findings; and created an audit trail. In order to triangulate my findings, I looked across the observational data, focus group transcriptions, student work samples, pre- and post-surveys, and parent correspondence, in order to establish a coherent justification for my themes (Creswell, 2009). Also, I engaged in peer debriefing by asking the guidance counselor to

review my preliminary findings and ask questions about my study to enhance the accuracy of my findings (Creswell, 2009). In addition, when I presented my findings, I used rich, thick description, by describing my findings in great detail, particularly focusing on the perspectives of my participants. Furthermore, I included quotes from students, facilitators, and parents, as well as excerpts from my observational notes to provide the reader with a deeper sense of the context, as well as the emotions and feelings of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Finally, throughout the data collection and data analysis processes I created an audit trail by documenting decisions I made, as well as the rationale for making them. Employing several validity strategies allowed me to assess the accuracy of my findings from the standpoint of the researcher, participants, and readers, as well as to convince readers of the trustworthiness of my findings (Creswell, 2009).

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The bell rings, signaling the beginning of recess and excitement floods the classroom. Many kids rush to the closets with a great sense of urgency to grab their Beyblades, Shopkins collections, and football trading cards. In just a matter of seconds, they are gone, having burst out of the classroom and sprinted down the hallways to the Library. While this tornado of excitement had descended upon my classroom, two of my students, Richard and Colleen had glanced at one another across the room and grinned. I witnessed how they had both so willingly turned down offers to trade Shopkins and battle Beyblades, aware of the prospect of what awaited them just around the corner in Mr. Williams' classroom.

Once the classroom had emptied, Richard and Colleen skip down the hallway to Mr. Williams' classroom. Laughter penetrates the walls of his classroom and drifts down the hallways. As we round the bend, we catch a glimpse of the colorful sign hanging on the door, which informs visitors to knock before entering. Knowing that it does not pertain to them, Richard and Colleen fling open the door, enter the classroom, and scurry to the carpet, which is adorned with board game pieces and play dolls. Mary Beth and Ines are sitting in a circle on the carpet and are doubled over in laughter, as they listen to what seems to be the end of a story that Mr. Williams is telling about when he was a kid. Colleen joins the circle with "Starburst," the group puppet, which is a tattered cow.

As the din that had filled the classroom naturally simmers down to silence, Mr. Williams offers the children a warm smile and says, "So, how is everyone's week going so far?" The kids glance around at one another, their body language almost taking on a voice of its own, as if saying, "We all belong here." Before I know it, the fleeting moment of silence is over and the kids jump in to share. While Mary Beth excitedly offers that her dad visited over the weekend,

the other kids give her the attention they would, as if they were entranced by their favorite movie. Whether sharing about visiting their dad in rehab or the moment they were enlightened to dad's infidelity, their eyes on fixated on one another like magnets and their ears are tuned to listen. The next forty-five minutes seemingly fly by, as the kids engage in a role-play of divorce-related problems that they have faced and offer one another solutions. As the final lunch bell rings, the kids glance around the circle at one another and cry out in unison with a disapproving, "Awww." This is a typical CODIP session.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe CODIP in action through the voices of the participants. I will begin by depicting the primary benefits of CODIP for the children in the Greenboro School District. Next, I will identify the program features that the participants linked to positive program outcomes, as well as components of the program that they liked the most. Then, I will offer participants' constructive feedback regarding CODIP, specifically indicating aspects of the program that they did not like, as well as their suggestions to change the program. Throughout the chapter, I will provide an analysis of how these perspectives differ across the three age groups.

Benefits of CODIP

According to the CODIP participants, in the Greenboro School District, there were three main benefits of being involved in the program. First, they learned to express their feelings and had numerous opportunities to practice to assure for skill transfer. Secondly, they acquired problem-solving techniques to deal with the many divorce-related challenges that they faced. Finally, participants almost unanimously identified knowing that they were not alone, as an advantage of their involvement in CODIP. The findings are grouped into three categories, which are expressing feelings, problem-solving techniques, and not feeling alone. In the sections that

follow, I describe each of these benefits in detail, applying the analytical lens of developmental age group, in doing so.

Expressing Feelings

Age and developmental level are two prominent factors, which influence a child's response and feelings that they may have to their parents' divorce. Despite the fact that in each group, no two children had the same experience with divorce, there were many consistencies in how they responded to it, and in particular, the feelings that they had. According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), anger and feelings of stigma and isolation are more prevalent among third through fifth graders, while sadness, fears of abandonment, and guilt are characteristic of first and second graders. Therefore, at each level, the program was structured in such a way to help children to identify their feelings, get a sense of validation for having these feelings, and then learn to effectively express them. While students in the first grade group focused more on how to recognize feelings and appropriately identify them, third graders learned how to effectively channel positive and negative feelings and felt validated for having both kinds of feelings, and students in the 4/5 grade level groups reframed their perspectives to better understand their feelings.

According to the pre- and post-surveys, all participants in the first grade group identified that it was "very true" that "our group was a safe place to talk about feelings." Furthermore, more than half of the children (N=4) identified talking about their feelings as one of the "2 or 3 most important things that this group has meant" for them.

During the first four sessions, I observed participants in Ms. Hugh's group grapple with their feelings. While Gabe shared his confusion about why his mom was sleeping on the couch, instead of with his dad, Alicia and Nancy confessed to feelings of guilt that the divorce may have

been caused by something that they had done. Ms. Hugh helped them to identify these feelings, through the use of a feelings chart, as well as discussion about what feelings look and sound like, and how to ask someone how they are feeling. To that end, Ms. Hugh started off each session by asking the children, "How are you feeling today?" She helped them to match the description of what they were feeling to the appropriate feeling on the "Feelings Chart." Once they identified the feeling that they were experiencing – especially if it was a negative feeling - she often followed up by asking, "Is it OK to feel that way?" thereby validating their feelings. Over time, their response to this question transformed into an immediate and emphatic, "Yes!" as they came to the realization that they are entitled to all of the feelings that they have, whether positive or negative.

During the fourth session, Ms. Hugh read a book to the kids called *Dinosaurs Divorce*, which incited many feelings among the participants, allowing them an opportunity to practice identifying their feelings and expressing them effectively.

Alicia: I felt guilty when my parents divorced. I didn't know what happened sometimes. I thought it was something I did.

Ms. Hugh: Divorce is a grown-up problem and it's not your fault. However, I could understand how you could feel that way.

Nancy: I feel safe now.

Alicia: They aren't fighting anymore, so I feel relieved about that.

In the two third grade groups, participants benefitted by being able to share their feelings in a safe space and learn the best ways to communicate their feelings to their parent(s). Based on the pre- and post-survey, all third grade participants (N=9) indicated that the "group was a safe place to talk about feelings." Furthermore, during the focus group, kids shared that they would

tell future participants that “it is OK to have bad and good feelings,” “it is safe to share your feelings,” and “it helped me understand my feelings.”

At the third grade level, the first four sessions were dedicated to work related to feelings; however, the focus shifted from identifying feelings to acknowledging that many of the divorce-related feelings that we have may be uncomfortable. Furthermore, participants learned that it is not only essential to acknowledge their feelings, but to be able to express them, as well. For example, in Mr. Williams' group, Susan candidly shared how she felt frustrated when she found out that her “dad was going out with someone else” when her parents were married. As a result, her parents got divorced and “now it's hard” because they “had to move to a smaller house and mom takes toys and clothes to a consignment shop to get money.” The group members validated Susan's feelings, by sharing how they were frustrated, too, when being delivered the news about their parents' divorce. Given that Susan had shared having had several screaming matches with her mom, Mr. Williams helped to coach her, in effectively channeling these intense feelings of frustration and anger during swimming, and the group role-played to practice how Susan might more successfully convey these feelings to her mom.

In the groups consisting of fourth and fifth grade students, 14 out of 15 students felt it was “very true” that the group was a safe place to talk about their feelings. During the focus groups, many participants reflected on how they felt “free” and “relieved” after sharing their feelings. Lucia, a participant in Mrs. Gonzalez's group explained how she “let her feelings free.” Similarly, Anna, a fifth grader in Mrs. Campbell's group offered that she would tell future participants, “you gonna have like all this shame on you and when it's done, you gonna be like lifted – like, you're not gonna think it's your fault anymore.” Finally, Sasha, a fourth grader in

Ms. Baker's group said, "Like instead of keeping all your feelings inside of you, you can talk it out."

Given their increased level of awareness and more widespread range of experiences, students in this age group dealt with intense emotions, many of which provoked feelings of shame. Participants benefitted by acknowledging the universality of these feelings, as well as developing the means to effectively communicate divorce-related feelings to their parent(s). During the second session in Ms. Baker's group, one of the girls shared, "I am angry that my dad thinks I don't notice how he tries to earn us, but he does, by trying to buy us things." Two of the other girls piped in, "That's what my dad does," and "Me, too." Ms. Baker coached the girls in understanding *why* their fathers might be trying to do this to help them reframe their perspectives (Thomas, 2011). In addition, they practiced using I-statements, "I feel _____, when you _____" to support them in effectively communicating their feelings.

Overall, after weighing in, participants in all three age groups perceived a key benefit of the program to be identifying and expressing divorce-related feelings, which is a component of one of the two program goals, involving the reduction of stress associated with parental divorce through a supportive group environment (Pedro-Carroll, Alpert-Gillis, & Sterling, 2010). Sharing their feelings in the context of a peer support group served to normalize their feelings (Pedro-Carroll, 2005), minimize feelings of self-blame, and develop appropriate ways of dealing with their feelings (Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985), thereby reducing stress, as well as potential risk factors.

Problem-Solving Techniques

The second of the two overarching goals of CODIP, consistent across all three developmental age groups, is to "build competence by teaching specific skills that can help

children cope with the many challenges posed by parental divorce” (Pedro-Carroll, Alpert-Gillis, & Sterling, 2010). Specifically, participants identified acquiring problem-solving skills as one of the primary benefits of their involvement in CODIP. Participants in all groups expressed that by the end of the program, they felt more competent in discerning between problems they can and cannot solve, as well as better equipped to deal with the former set of problems.

In the first grade groups, the second phase of the program, addresses problem-solving skills and techniques. These sessions consist of frequent puppet play for behavioral rehearsal, in which facilitators assist participants with developing more adaptive responses (Fazio-Griffith & Ballard, 2014; Pedro-Carroll, 2005). For example, in Ms. Hugh's group, participants engaged in the “Red-Light, Green-Light Game,” to practice discerning between problems they can and cannot solve. Using Tender Heart, the group puppet, she presented them with several problems and they had to decide whether it was solvable and hold up a green circle, or unsolvable, and hold up a red circle.

Ms. Hugh: On Thanksgiving, Tender Heart said his parents were fighting and he went to his room and played with his little sister, but when he went downstairs, his parents told him they had something to tell them. They said they were going to get a divorce and they are going to live apart.

Alicia: (Holds up a red light.) You can't choose.

Ms. Hugh: Exactly. It's not Tender Heart's problem; it's his parents' problem.

Nancy: (Quickly changes her green light to a red light.) The parents need to do what they need to do.

Gabe: (Holds up his green light with a confident look in his eyes.) It could be solvable because they might just need some time alone and they might come back to the same

home together again.

Ms. Hugh: Yes, Gabe, but most of the time that doesn't happen. What could Tender Heart do in the meantime to feel better?

Gabe: He could come to the group!

Ms. Hugh: (She pretends to be Tender Heart.) That would make me really happy! I want to give you a hug, Gabe! (She squeezes Gabe's arm, using the puppet, signifying a hug.)

Third grade participants entered the CODIP group with a rather strong ability to distinguish between solvable and unsolvable problems. Therefore, their work together was much more practical in nature, concentrating on applying social problem solving concepts to divorce-related problems in their own lives. Students developed perseverance in their problem-solving abilities, generating alternative solutions to problems and also, evaluating the consequences to potential solutions in order to select the best one. Coupled with puppet play, third grade participants utilized a three-step process to solve problems, depicted as a cartoon.

During the fourth session, in Mr. Williams' group, participants took turns assuming the role of "director" and casting fellow participants to act out divorce-related problems. The "director," in this case Colleen, was responsible for utilizing the social-problem solving steps to guide the "actors" and "actresses" to arrive at a solution.

Colleen: Ines is going to be the mom, Mary Beth will be the friend, and Richard is the dad. I'm going to be the kid and use Starburst (holds up the group's puppet).

Mr. Williams: Okay, set the scene. What's happening?

Colleen: The mom gets really mad at Starburst because she is supposed to be with her dad, but the mom doesn't want to be with the dad because the mom doesn't really like the

dad or trust him. We are at the playground and Starburst is sitting on the slide. Mary Beth is supposed to ask me what's wrong.

Mary Beth: What's wrong, Starburst? You look like you're feeling sad.

Colleen: Well, I'm supposed to be with my dad, but my mom won't let me go. And, I'm really bummed because we were gonna go to the arcade.

Mary Beth: Well, you shouldn't be sad if you're going to the arcade.

Colleen: But, my mom won't let me go. How do I solve the problem?

Mary Beth: Did you have something planned with your mom?

Colleen: No. She just doesn't like me being with him because she doesn't trust him.

Mary Beth: I know! You could bring a friend. This way, there will be another person and maybe your mom will feel better.

Colleen: If my mom doesn't trust my dad with me, she is not going to trust him with another person, like a friend.

Mary Beth: Okay. Hm...well, maybe she could go with you guys! This way, you could still go to the arcade with your dad and have fun, but your mom would feel comfortable knowing that she was there with you.

Colleen wraps up the role-play and reflects on it, by sharing. "If you have a person you feel comfortable with and trust, you can ask them for possible solutions, if you have a problem you're facing." This is just one example of many underscoring how participants perceive the group as a supportive and encouraging environment, in which they not only have opportunities to share their problems, but to develop the skills to solve them, as well. In essence, through role-play, participants replace internalizing behaviors like suppressing their emotions with adaptive responses and coping skills (Knell, 1998).

The fourth and fifth graders were certainly the most vocal about the benefits associated with talking through divorce-related anxieties with their peers and facilitators, in order to arrive at practical solutions. Given the severity of some of the problems with which these kids were faced, they strived to accept the situation for what it was, but generate solutions that would make it tolerable for them at this moment in time. For example, one student in Mrs. Campbell's group shared how his mom's most recent boyfriend had left the family. Given that he was the sole provider for the family, which consisted of four children, the student was now plagued with worry as to when he would get his next meal and if his mom would have enough money to pay the rent. Mrs. Campbell was aware of the extent to which the student was internalizing these feelings, so they discussed solutions for how he could relieve some of his anxiety. Utilizing the problem-solving steps, with Mrs. Campbell's guidance, he realized he could count on having breakfast and lunch at school each day. Also, whenever he was concerned or worried, he would share his feelings with a trustworthy teacher or friend, instead of bottling them up inside. During the focus group, he said, "[The program] helped me a lot."

The fourth and fifth grade participants also shared how the problem-solving techniques prepared them to face future problems. As Sally put it, "It's easier to have solutions ready for when things go wrong." Discussions centered on solutions for common divorce-related problems, such as when parents argue, when children are inadvertently designated the role of the middleman, or going back and forth between parents' houses/apartments. These discussions often made students feel more confident in their ability to grapple with such issues and at peace with the current status, despite how chaotic, of their family. As Maria, a participant in Mrs. Campbell's group wrote, "Think of the bright side and not the negative...at least that you have a family."

Across developmental age groups, participants identified the acquisition of problem-solving skills as a crucial benefit of the program. Developing active coping skills increased participants' confidence in their abilities to deal with stressful family situations (Sandler, Tein, Mehta, Wolchik, & Ayers, 2000). Furthermore, through puppet and role-play, multiple opportunities for practice assured for more successful transfer of these skills to the participants' everyday lives.

I'm Not Alone

Like most programs for children of divorce, CODIP is premised on the tenet that a peer group offers children a support system, in which they establish shared experiences and in doing so, realize that they are not alone (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). The group experience offered children opportunities by which to engage in "constructive interpersonal connections" with their peers (Magid, 1977). While participants, in all three age groups, shared that attending the group alleviated feelings of isolation and anxiety, by identifying peers who were experiencing similar changes in their families, the importance of not feeling alone increased across developmental age groups.

According to Chloe, a first grader in Mr. Barnes' first grade group, she indicated on the post-survey that one of the two or three most important things that the group meant for her was "I met someone else whose parents are divorced." Along the same lines, on the post-survey, all but one of the first grade participants (N=8) marked that the following statement was "very true": "I made some new friends in [my] group." Also, the same number of participants expressed that it was "very true" that "I feel less alone than I did before our group."

One aspect of their parents' divorce that many of the first grade participants connected about was missing their noncustodial parent. According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), this is

characteristic of most 5- and 6-year old children of divorce. While observing Ms. Hugh's group, Alicia and Gabe engaged in a conversation, in which they opened up about how they often yearned for their noncustodial parent.

While drawing a picture of her family, Alicia draws her and her mom on one side of the paper and her father on the other. Then, she draws a bold line down the center of the paper. She looks up at Ms. Hugh with sad eyes; her face is devoid of the grin she almost permanently wears.

Ms. Hugh: What's wrong?

Alicia: I'm confused. I live with my mom mostly and sometimes I go see my dad.

Ms. Hugh: Does that happen to anyone else? When you're with your mom, you miss your dad, and when you're with your dad, you miss your mom?

Gabe: Everyday!

Alicia's face breaks into a grin, as she glances over to Gabe, seemingly exchanging a look of understanding.

In the 2/3 grade level groups, participants developed shared understandings, by delving into much more sensitive and personal divorce-related topics, such as co-sleeping and parents' dating lives subsequent to the divorce. Susan, a participant in Mr. Williams' group stated, "I like it because I'm not the only one going through these things." During the third session, as Mr. Williams read aloud from the book *Dinosaurs Divorce*, a page entitled, "Living with One Parent" prompted a discussion about co-sleeping. Mary Beth offered that she and her brother and older sister take turns sleeping with her mother, ever since her parents divorced. Looking around the circle at her peers' faces, hesitant to how they may react, she quickly added, "I only like it because I don't have to make my bed, then." Relief seemingly swept over Mary Beth's

entire body, when Ines revealed that she sleeps with her dad whenever she visits him at his apartment, as there is only one bed. In witnessing this exchange take place, I could almost see the layers of loneliness and isolation melt off of Mary Beth and Ines, as they developed this shared understanding.

According to Kelly and Wallerstein (1976), increased feelings of shame and isolation are commensurate with the age of a child of divorce. Therefore, fourth and fifth grade participants entered the program experiencing the strongest feelings of loneliness. Rachel, a fifth grader in Mrs. Gonzalez's group, explained how the group alleviated these feelings, in stating, "[in the group] you don't feel lonely, like you're the only one who had this feeling, also." In addition, on the post-survey, Sally, a fifth grader in Ms. Baker's group expressed that one of the most important things that the group meant for her was, "I could meet others who feel the same way that I do."

During the second session in Ms. Baker's group, an intense discussion about parents trying to buy their child's loyalty was stirred up by watching the movie, *Tender Places*. Ms. Baker had them reflect on the movie, by writing their thoughts on an index card, so they could be shared anonymously. She shared the first one, which read: "I hate how they just can't be OK with us trying to live together again. My dad thinks I don't notice how he tries to earn us, but he does, by trying to buy us things." This clearly hit a nerve in Rebecca, as the typically shy and reserved girl, dove headfirst into the conversation by almost shouting, "That's *exactly* what my dad does!" Sally joined the conversation, by offering her agreement. After encouraging the girls to reframe their perspectives, by considering that their dads are perhaps coming from a place of fear and apprehension, she wrapped up the conversation by confirming, "you're not alone...there are a lot of people feeling the way you're feeling."

Although most participants expressed having feelings of isolation and loneliness upon entering the program, the intensity of these feelings increased across the developmental age groups. Therefore, while students in the first grade groups appreciated meeting other children their age who came from divorced families, participants in the 2/3 and 4/5 grade level groups relied more heavily on establishing the supportive group environment to have opportunities to share about common divorce-related issues and also, resolve misconceptions about family transitions. As Pedro-Carroll (2005) puts it, these children “find much comfort and relief from the words of a peer with similar feelings – sometimes even more so than from the intellectual assurances of an adult” (p. 56).

Program Components Contributing to Positive Outcomes

The following section addresses the gap in the literature describing the participants' perceptions of the components of the program that are responsible for its positive outcomes. My analysis extends the findings that are available, which are primarily based on general measures, to glean insight into *how* CODIP positively influences children's understanding of their parents' divorce and provides them with adaptive coping mechanisms to respond to it (Ebling, Pruett, & Pruett, 2009). Participants attributed the benefits they experienced by being involved in CODIP to the following three program features: positive group dynamics, a trusting relationship with their facilitator, and the experiential nature of the program. Each of these components will be discussed in great detail below.

Positive Group Dynamics

Participants valued the group, as they felt it was a safe place, in which they could share information about their families without the fear of others finding out. Having a safe place and being surrounded by people they can trust are crucial for a child of divorce. For many of them,

they did not regard their homes as emotionally safe places, for they were places where conflict abounded. For example, during nearly each group session, 8-year old Susan mentioned an argument she had with her mom or conflict between her parents, thereby expressing feelings of stress and unease. During the second to last session, Susan felt the need to explain to the group why her lunch consisted of merely a vanilla yogurt and a Granny Smith apple.

Susan: It was supposed to be my night with my mom, but we got in a big fight. It was so bad that I called my dad to come and get me.

Mr. Williams: I'm sorry to hear that, Susan.

Susan: Yeah, I threw an apple and a yogurt in a bag and my dad picked me up to go stay the night at his girlfriend's house. That's why I like barely have a lunch.

According to Pruett and Pruett (1999), Susan is not alone in her preoccupations with safety, as many children of divorce feel that the web of safety and security in their lives is shattered, when their parents get divorced. Furthermore, children can be hesitant to share about their parents' divorce with friends, given the shame they feel, as well as their worries that peers will not understand what they are going through (Tartari, 2007). In Mr. Williams' group, during the fourth session, the participants had a discussion about their fears related to their peers finding out that their parents were divorced.

Mary Beth: (Uses Starburst, the group puppet, to act out the scene.) Starburst, I told you my parents are getting divorced and now the whole school is finding out. You were the only one I told, so obviously, that's how the whole school found out.

Mr. Williams: Are you scared of other people finding out?

Mary Beth: Well, Susan knows because she is in the group, and another girl I'm friends with knows because my mom told her mom because they are friends. But, now more people know about it, and I don't know how.

Ines: Yeah, I had the same thing. In kindergarten, I told one of my friends about my parents not getting along, and then, somehow the whole class found out.

This conversation provides a glimpse into the shame that children of divorce often carry with them. In a longitudinal study, taking place over the course of 25 years, Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee (2000) discovered that children often consider the divorce a secret, which is never to be divulged. This thereby restricts them from entering into the "social world of their peers" and limits their opportunities to "learn about other families" (p. 103). Thus, many children adopt avoidant coping mechanisms with the intent of protecting themselves and their families (Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998).

Due to decreased feelings of safety and security, as well as being burdened by the secret of their parents' divorce, children of divorce are in dire need of people in whom they can confide, who are not directly involved in the divorce, as well as an environment, in which they feel safe. Thus, program participants perceived the CODIP groups as offering them just that – individuals in whom to confide, in a space that was both safe and confidential.

Feelings of being safe in CODIP groups were consistent across all developmental age groups. In fact, 97% of the participants indicated that the statement, "Our group was a safe place to talk about feelings" was "very true" on their post-survey. Furthermore, while fifth grader, Rachel, mentioned during the focus group that, "I think it's a really safe place...no one will hear what you're saying," a first grader, Nancy, mentioned, "This program is maybe safe for you and

you, you will not get hurt.” There were several aspects of the group that created feelings of safety, including: participant agreement forms, door signs, and trust among group members.

Based on past practice, in addition to the consent and assent forms that children were asked to complete, they were also required to sign a “CODIP Participant Agreement” form (see Appendix I). The guidance counselor, Tim Barnes, shared that students had a similar agreement during *Rainbows* groups in previous years, and as he put it, having those guidelines in place “made them feel safe in the group and reinforced that no one should share other people’s business outside of the group” (personal communication, October 14, 2015). Also, we discussed how children come to the group at all different stages in the process of coping with their parents’ divorce and therefore, some may not be ready to talk about it, yet, but get a great deal just by listening. Thus, while they were expected to be good listeners, they would never be pressured to share.

There were many parallels in my observations of the first session of each of the three age groups. With her first grade group, Ms. Hugh broke down the definition of confidentiality to be “not sharing anything outside of the group, unless it is with your parents” and reminded them that the group “was a safe place to share their secret with others.” Likewise, in Mr. Williams’ group, he told the third grade participants that the agreement was like a “special code” and “it’s OK to tell your parents about what happens in the group, but no one else.” Finally, in Ms. Baker’s group, she told the girls that, “what others share here is private and is to stay here.” In essence, each facilitator, regardless of the age level of the group, verbally reinforced the meaning of confidentiality to assure the safe nature of the group. Susan’s comment in Mr. Williams’ group affirmed this feeling of security, when she stated during the second session, “You come

here because you know it's a safe place and if I shared something here and then found out someone told it, I would feel like that safe feeling was ruined."

In addition, Tim Barnes created door signs for each facilitator to hang on their classroom doors, while the group was in session. The signs read: "Group in session – Please do not disturb." The participants, especially in the younger group, valued the privacy they felt that these signs seemingly guaranteed. On several occasions, Gabe and Nancy, in Ms. Hugh's group, noticed that the sign was not posted or the door was open and would ask Ms. Hugh if they could post the sign and/or close the door. For the first grade groups, they yearned for safety that was created in more of a concrete sense, which is reflective of their developmental abilities and reliance on concrete experiences to process more abstract concepts, like divorce (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll, & Cowen, 1989).

On the other hand, the 2/3 and 4/5 grade level group participants conceived safety to be the outcome of trusting peer relationships. These relationships reduced children's inhibitions about discussing their emotions related to their parents' divorce, enabling them to speak candidly about their experiences (Gilman, 2005). Robbie, a fourth grader, said that one of the most important things that the program meant for him was "sharing and not worrying I will get made fun of." Similarly, Mary Beth, a third grader in Mr. Williams' group wrote, "They can't tell anyone what I said...they listen to me." Many of the participants in the 2/3 and 4/5 grade level groups used the word "secret," and described how the group was a supportive environment, in which they could entrust others with their secret.

CODIP participants across all three age groups indicated that having a safe and supportive group environment was one of the key program features that contributed to its positive outcomes. Children valued the physical and emotional safety the group offered them, as

well as the opportunity to entrust others with private information about their families. According to Demo and Acock (1988), children of divorce have a greater chance of developing more adaptive coping mechanisms if provided with opportunities to discuss their experiences with peers, who have had similar experiences. Ultimately, the peers serve as “active intervention elements, by offering one another “social support and shared perspectives and experiences” (Stolberg & Mahler, 1994, p. 147).

Relationship with Facilitator

Another aspect of the program that participants associated with its positive outcomes was the supportive relationship that they established with their facilitators. After experiencing their parents' divorce, children have difficulty forming trusting relationships with others, as they often arrive at the horrifying conclusion that “Personal relationships are unreliable, and even the closest family relationships cannot be expected to hold firm” (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004, p. 359). In particular, the parent-child relationship often suffers; divorce leads to diminished parenting, given that parents are often preoccupied with their own personal problems and psychological distress (Strohschein, 2007). Subsequent to the marital separation, children need their parents the most to make sense of what is happening and to adjust to the unstable and constantly changing environment, in which they must learn to live between two homes and grapple with divided loyalties. However, it is during this time that adults emotionally detach from their role as parents (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004) and in some cases, “blur the boundaries of the parent-child relationship,” by turning to their children for emotional support and comfort (Strohschein, 2007, p. 359). In a longitudinal study conducted by Wallerstein and Lewis (2004), involving 131 children, when interviewed as adults twenty-five years subsequent to their parents' divorce, nearly all recounted feelings of loneliness and anger. They described the feelings of

distress they experienced over their parents' lack of availability and one individual recalled, "I remember feeling so alone. I would go for days with no one to talk to" (p. 360).

Taken together, the aforementioned risk factors underlie increased mental health problems (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Furthermore, divorce can lead to decreased social competence, as it impacts a child's ability to consolidate "parental attachments, capacities for intimacy, and trust" (Pruett & Pruett, 1999, p. 1544). However, there are numerous protective factors (see Appendix J) that can offset these risk factors, one of which is supportive relationships with positive adult role models (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). In this study, participants identified the relationship they developed with their facilitator as a protective factor, or a feature of the program that contributed to its positive outcomes.

On the post-survey, children of all age groups identified supportive facilitators as one of the two or three most important things, which the group meant for them. While participants in the first grade groups expressed it as "being able to eat lunch with Mrs. Martin," those in the 2/3 grade level groups were able to articulate it as "Mr. Williams helps me with my problems." In one of the 4/5 grade level groups, Mrs. Campbell shared how students sought out support throughout the week from her, even on days when the group was not scheduled to meet. Clearly, participants perceived the facilitators as individuals to whom they could entrust their family issues and depend on for guidance, as well.

Participants appreciated the facilitators' willingness to share, especially those who have had a direct experience with divorce, either as children or adults. For example, in one of the first grade groups, Gabe got up from his seat and hugged Ms. Hugh, after she shared, "I love that the group is here because when I got divorced, even as a grown-up, I went to a program like this and it really helped me." In sharing this, Ms. Hugh normalized the experience of divorce for the

children and offered them a sense of hope that if she was able to emerge from it as such a strong and positive person, whom they all revere, then they could, too.

Furthermore, children in this age group are often most distressed by the transience of relationships in their lives, as well as the need to continually adapt to a turbulent and unstable environment (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). For example, Nancy, a first grader in Ms. Hugh's group mentioned how "I am worried about who is going to take care of me and pick me up from school." Therefore, the predictable nature of the group, coupled with the awareness that the facilitator was someone who was readily accessible and willing to offer them support, served to assuage these fears.

According to Wallerstein (1986), many children between 8.5 and 12 years of age, are humiliated by their own powerlessness, especially when it comes to the relationships in their lives. More often than not, they exhibit a greater desire for nurturing, as they have lost a close connection with one parent and are fearful that they will lose contact with their other parent, as well (Ackerman, 2001). Many participants in the 2/3 grade level groups expounded upon the feelings of powerlessness that they felt, when their parents began to date or get remarried. Mr. Williams validated these feelings among the participants in his group, when he shared his confusion and anger, when his parents got remarried. While reading *Dinosaurs Divorce*, he shared a time when he felt ashamed.

Mr. Williams: I remember one time when my step-mom came to pick me up at school for the first time. I was thinking about how the other kids were probably looking at her and wondering to themselves, "What is going on?"

(Later in the conversation, Susan shared a similar experience.)

Susan: Yeah, my mom is always lying about messages that pop up on her phone from match.com. She goes out with lots of people. Like now, she is dating someone from Connecticut and told me and my sister that we might move there.

In sharing this, Susan was describing the powerlessness she feels in the relationships her mom is forging to cope with the divorce and her frustration related to the impact that these transitory relationships have on her own life. In the long run, while most likely improbable, Susan was burdened by the fear that if her mother did date someone who lived in a different state, it could alter her living arrangements, forcing her to make new friends and to get acclimated to a new school. However, Mr. Williams shed light on the positive side of his parents' remarriages, when he said, "I'm happy that my parents got remarried because they found people who they could be happy with."

During the following week, Susan made a comment that echoed what Mr. Williams had shared, when she made the comment below.

Susan: I really wouldn't wish for my mom and dad to get back together again because they weren't happy together....I think I'd feel happy if they married someone new, as long as the person was funny and nice.

Mr. Williams' ability to identify with the participants as a child of divorce, himself, and to openly share his experiences, allowed the participants to accept aspects of their lives that they could not control and view post-divorce family changes in a positive light. Mr. Williams consistently encouraged them that if he was able to cope and positively adjust to his parents' divorce, then they could, too. Furthermore, they internalized the belief that he shared with the group, "The most important thing is knowing that we have each other."

While participants from three of the groups were fortunate to have the unique experience of having a facilitator, who was either a child of divorce or a divorcée, children in all groups reaped the benefits of forming supportive relationships with their facilitators. Participants had few adults in their lives who were not implicated in the divorce, whom they trusted enough to turn to for unbiased advice. Therefore, having a trustworthy teacher or staff member, who exhibited a genuine concern for helping them cope with their parents divorce, who was at their disposal five days a week, seemed like a dream come true to most participants.

Therefore, it is no surprise that when the sessions came to an end in December, participants expressed feelings of disappointment and sadness, out of fear that another close relationship they had developed would be severed. In Ms. Baker's 4/5 grade level group, during the last session, she asked the girls, "Is there anything else you would like to talk about?" With a quiet hesitance in her voice, Sasha asked, "Can we keep meeting with you?" Similarly, more than half of the groups arranged a weekly or monthly "reunion meeting," as Ms. Nelson deemed it, in which facilitators would open their classroom to participants and they were welcome to come to just enjoy lunch or discuss any issues that they were facing in their lives. Several facilitators mentioned that after the holiday break, despite all of the exciting things that may have happened in the participants' lives, one of the first things they did was seek out their group facilitator to see when the first "reunion meeting" was going to take place.

CODIP participants identified a strong link between the benefits they experienced from the program and the supportive relationship that they forged with their group facilitator. For many participants, this relationship was the only relationship on which they could depend. Given the weakened state of many of their relationships with their parents, participants looked to the facilitators not only for someone in whom they could trust, but also, an adult who could help

them make sense of all of the transitions and turbulence in their lives, as well. As Susan put it, “This program has made me feel supported...Mr. Williams helps me solve the problems with my parents’ divorce.” The participants’ actions and words made it clear that all they wanted was to feel secure in a relationship with an adult, whom they could trust.

Experiential Nature of the Program

The final component of CODIP that participants perceived as contributing to its positive outcomes was the experiential nature of the program. Participants in all age groups valued hands-on activities, which provided them with concrete opportunities to develop coping skills and recognize ways to apply these skills to real-life experiences (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Through role-play, puppet play, and games, children had the chance to acquire skills, such as how to disengage from loyalty conflicts, or ways to positively channel their anger, and then test out different approaches in their real lives. Having multiple opportunities by which to rehearse these coping skills in a supportive group context, prior to using them in their own lives, assures for greater skill transfer and enhances their long-term adjustment (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). During the focus group, participants in Jillian Campbell’s group reflected on how the experiential components allowed them to “test out” specific coping skills, before applying them at home.

Jillian: Why has [CODIP] helped you with your parents’ divorce?

Marco: Sometimes what we do here, sometimes it does come true.

Jillian: Yes, and I know we have all tried different things at home to see if it worked and each of you have come in at separate times and some of you have had stories where problem-solving strategies have worked.

Marco: I’m just glad because when I first saw this group, I thought we would mess up a lot, but when we got through it, people helped each other.

Children of all age groups echoed similar feelings of success, in acquiring coping skills through hands-on activities, and then effectively applying them to solve divorce-related problems in their own lives. In the sections that follow, I will describe the two experiential components: games and role-play, which participants highlighted as helping them to build competence in coping with divorce-related challenges.

Games. In all three age groups, developmentally appropriate games served to increase the level of engagement among the participants (Stolberg & Mahler, 1994). Also, given that divorce often imposes a great deal of stress on children, the games helped to alleviate some of this stress, by incorporating an element of fun into the program. Furthermore, the games were an effective vehicle for normalizing the divorce experience, helping children to express their feelings, giving and receiving help from peers, and instilling hope about the future (Yalom, 1970).

Several students in the first grade groups indicated on the post-survey that “playing games” and “having fun” were two or three of the most important things that the group meant for them. During the focus group, Tim Barnes asked his group what they would tell a student who is joining the group next year, about the program. Becky was quick to answer, “I would tell them that it helps them with your divorce and you can play games and you can bring lunch and it’s really fun.”

The first grade participants in Ms. Hugh’s group had enjoyed playing the “Red-Light, Green-Light” game, during the sixth session, to hone their abilities to differentiate between problems that are solvable and those that are unsolvable. During the next session, Ms. Hugh had the following conversation with Gabe.

Ms. Hugh: There are only two more sessions left of the program.

Gabe: Nooooooooooooo!

Ms. Hugh: You have become a really good problem-solving group and have come up with some good strategies.

Gabe: Can we play another game?

Ms. Hugh: Yes, today we're going to play a game called "Daring Dinosaurs." You are going to be daring dinosaurs because you are daring to make good choices, using what you have learned in the program.

During the next thirty minutes or so, Gabe, Alicia, and Nancy displayed the same level of enthusiasm that they would exhibit if they were charging across the playground to the swings, or involved in an intense Beyblade battle with their friends. Instead, they were reviewing feeling words, social problem-solving skills, and coping skills for dealing with anger, as well as distinguishing between solvable and unsolvable problems, and discussing their thoughts and beliefs about divorce-related misconceptions. When the lunch bell rang, signaling that the CODIP session was over, all three participants groaned and asked if they could continue playing the game during the next session. Presenting coping skill enhancement in a game-like format, clearly captured and maintained the participants' interest in the first grade groups, as it seemed unbeknownst to them that they were "working" in the process, by enhancing adaptive coping mechanisms they had acquired during previous sessions (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

While the 2/3 grade level groups also enjoyed the "Daring Dinosaurs" game, the "You're a Special Person" game, which is a component of the 2/3 and 4-6 grade level curricula, had a significant impact on the participants. During the seventh session, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on their strengths individually, by creating an "I Am Special" book. Thus,

during the eighth session, the “You’re a Special Person” game encouraged participants to consider one another’s unique strengths, as group members.

As Mr. Williams explained the rules for the game, the silliness that had filled the room seemed to dissipate and was replaced by a pervasive earnestness. The children followed his directions with complete and utter diligence, writing their names atop the blank construction paper that he passed out. Mr. Williams instructed them to take the next few minutes to pass the papers around the circle. When they got a piece of paper with a group member’s name on it, they were to reflect on positive qualities and strengths characteristic of that person and then write them down on the paper.

For the next eight minutes, the typically rambunctious third graders operated like a well-oiled machine, passing the papers around to one another, in complete silence. They glanced around the room furtively at one another, as if they were undercover cops, working on an intense case. As Susan wrote a positive comment about how funny Richard was, she giggled to herself, perhaps recalling one of his comical moments that had taken place over the last few weeks. Similarly, Colleen’s marker moved feverishly across the paper with Mary Beth’s name on it. While Colleen’s reserved nature contrasted Mary Beth’s boisterous spirit, Colleen had plenty to say about her fellow group member, and now, friend.

As the papers eventually made their way full-circle, finding their way home to their original owners, silence continued to fill the room. Smiles appeared on all participants’ faces, as they read what their peers had written about them. The positive comments from their peers bore much greater significance than a note from a teacher or praise from an adult. Therefore, when Richard made his way back to his classroom, the paper did not get lost in the abyss of his desk, but was carefully tucked away, in a spot where he knew it would not get lost.

Given that there were fewer games at the 4/5 grade level – only three – there was a ubiquitous yearning for more, thereby indicating how much the participants enjoyed the games. For example, during the focus group, Rachel, a fifth grade participant in Mrs. Campbell's group explained that her favorite part of the program was picking cards with problems written on them and then, determining whether the problem was solvable or unsolvable. The game presented the skill of distinguishing between problems that a child of divorce can or cannot solve in a fun and engaging way. However, at this level, games were replaced with other hands-on activities, such as the expert panel, in order to "build children's competencies while appealing to age-related interests" (Pedro-Carroll, 2005, p. 58). Furthermore, the few games that were included were far less active than those that were part of the curricula for younger children. Therefore, two of the five facilitators at this level modified the games to make the more active, or included other divorce-related games, such as "Divorce Jenga," to engage and maintain the students' interest. Clearly, the participants' persistent requests for more games indicate that they perceived the games to be an integral component of the program, which contributed to its positive outcomes.

Participants in all three age groups expressed that the games were one of their favorite components of the program. While the first grade and 2/3 grade level participants enjoyed active games, like "Daring Dinosaurs," they also valued quiet games, like "You're a Special Person." However, the children in the 4/5 grade level group exhibited an overt sentiment that they enjoyed playing the games so much that they would like to have had the opportunity to play more. Overall, the games served as seemingly disguised therapeutic techniques, in which children acquired and enhanced skills, such as expressing their feelings, building their self-esteem, grappling with loyalty conflicts, and discerning between solvable and unsolvable problems – all in the midst of having fun (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

Role-play. Another experiential component of the program that participants enjoyed was role-play. This technique serves to facilitate the expression of feelings and also allow children to “try out” solutions to divorce-related problems and obtain feedback from their peers, based on their handling of the situation (Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985). While participants in the 4/5 grade level groups engaged in role-play with one another, participants in the first grade and 2/3 grade level groups primarily used puppets to do so. However, regardless of the type of role-play in which the engaged, all participants perceived it as an aspect of the program that contributed to its positive outcomes.

Nearly half of the participants in the first grade and 2/3 grade level groups indicated on their post-survey that the puppet was one of the most important things that the group meant for them. Facilitators in these age groups introduced the puppet as a member of the group, who also had parents who were divorced, during the first session. The puppet was then used to model skills and facilitate participants' practice of these skills, thereafter.

As an integral component of cognitive behavioral play therapy, upon which CODIP is premised, puppet play is used to “exteriorize conflict through symbolic action” (Bromfield, 1995, p. 435). In essence, puppets allow children to express any negative or uncomfortable feelings that they may have towards an individual, and displace these feelings by expressing them towards a puppet, instead. Therefore, participants experienced greater self-expression, as they were not anxious about the outcome, given that the puppet could not get upset with them or retaliate in any way (Bromfield, 1995). For example, Mary Beth, a participant in Mr. Williams' group engaged in puppet play with their group puppet, Starburst to consider solutions to a problem she was experiencing with a close friend. She had shared with the friend, in confidence that her parents were getting divorced and then, several other people in her class somehow knew

about it. By engaging in puppet play, Mary Beth was able to express her shame regarding her parents' divorce, as well as the violation of trust she experienced, as a result of her friend telling others. Furthermore, by utilizing social problem-solving steps, she arrived at a solution to the problem, with which she felt comfortable.

In the first grade groups, the puppet served as a means of normalizing the divorce experience, thereby leading to the positive outcome of making children feel as though they were not alone. During the fifth session in Ms. Hugh's group, she shared that the group puppet, Tender Heart, experienced a problem, over Thanksgiving break. Tender Heart told the group that he and his little sister heard his parents fighting and when they went downstairs, his parents told them that they were going to get a divorce and therefore, would live apart from one another. All having gone through a similar experience, the participants responded empathetically, and tried to help him solve his problem. This form of puppet play not only normalized the divorce experience, but validated the children's feelings of nervousness, anger, and sadness that they felt, when their own parents broke the news to them about getting a divorce.

Just as participants in the first grade and 2/3 grade level groups enjoyed engaging in puppet play, children in the 4/5 grade level groups valued taking part in role-plays for similar reasons. Role-play was integrated into the final four skill-acquisition meetings, in which group members participated in role-plays to practice applying skills to divorce-related problems (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Role-play opportunities allowed children to hone their self-expression skills, and "test out" solutions to divorce-related issues. It also provided children with opportunities to explore other "roles" involved in divorce, such as the parents, and consider their thoughts and feelings, regarding these issues. For example, during the fifth session, Rebecca

engaged in a role-play with Ms. Baker, in which Rebecca played the role of the mom and Ms. Baker was the child.

Rebecca: Listen, Suzy, we are going to have to move in a few weeks.

Ms. Baker: Why, mom?

Rebecca: (Paused for a minute) I am getting a divorce from your father.

After this brief exchange, the girls burst into a fit of laughter. When Ms. Baker asked them why they were laughing, they explained that a parent would never inform their child about a divorce in such a nonchalant manner, providing very little detail. To that end, Rebecca explained that she paused for a minute because she was not sure how to tell Ms. Baker, or Suzy, that she was getting a divorce. By role-playing this scenario, Rebecca was able to better understand what her mom went through when she broke the news to Rebecca.

In addition, during several group discussions, Sasha had mentioned many changes that were taking place in her family, due to her parents' relationships with significant others. She had shared how her mom had just moved in with her boyfriend, so, because her mom was the custodial parent, this meant that along with her brother and sister, she had to move into her mom's boyfriend's house, as well. In addition, she was worried about her dad, as he and his girlfriend had just broken up. Many changes were taking place in Sasha's family, as a result.

During the sixth session, Ms. Baker posed the following scenario for the girls to act out: "Sam's mom has been hiring a babysitter, so she can go out on dates." She asked Sasha and Lillian to engage in the role-play. Sasha asked if she could be the mom and by default, Lillian agreed to play the role of Sam.

Lillian: Mom, I feel really worried that you have been going out on lots of dates.

Sasha: Well, since your dad and I got divorced, I have been going out on dates to meet

someone.

Ms. Baker interrupted the role-play and called attention to the way that Lillian spoke to her mom. The girls engaged in a discussion about how Lillian could have expressed her discomfort and nervousness about her mom beginning to date, by screaming at her mom or avoiding her; however, instead, she approached her mom in a calm manner and used an I-message to describe how she was feeling. Sasha then considered how she could use similar techniques to approach her mom's boyfriend, when she felt uncomfortable, when he tried to act like her dad and discipline her. In this instance, the role-play, which involved a fictitious scenario that was parallel to a situation Sasha was facing in her life, facilitated her revelation of feelings and provided her with a feasible solution – an I-message – to use with her mom's boyfriend.

Furthermore, this sociodramatic form of play allowed the participants to displace their feelings from the individuals with whom they were connected to fictitious characters, played by their peers. Therefore, the element of fear that the children may have had in facing some of their divorce-related concerns was removed. For example, in the aforementioned situation, Sasha was able to put aside the nervousness that she had been experiencing about approaching her mom's boyfriend and focus solely on honing her problem-solving abilities and self-expression skills (Bergen, 2002).

Participants in all three developmental age groups valued role-play as a component of CODIP that contributed to the benefits that they experienced. In the first grade and 2/3 grade level groups, puppet play served to normalize the divorce experience and validate participants' feelings. Similarly, children in the 4/5 grade level groups engaged in role-play with their peers to hone their problem-solving skills and enhance their understanding of the thoughts and feelings

of others, such as their parents, who were implicated in the divorce-related issues that they faced. All in all, just as with the games, role-play was a therapeutic technique that incorporated an element of fun, while allowing participants multiple opportunities for skill enhancement (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

Participants' Constructive Feedback and Suggestions for Change

The process of soliciting constructive feedback from participants, with regards to their evaluation of the program served "to empower them to let their voices be heard and encouraged them to value their opinions" (Oliphant et al., 2002, p. 161). The students had multiple opportunities (i.e. pre-survey, post-survey, focus group) to share their feedback and to express aspects of the program that they did not like, as well as suggestions for possible changes. In addition, several facilitators took a moment at the end of each session to ask the participants to reflect on anything that they did not like, or that they found to be ineffective.

Based on the results of the post-survey, 25% of the participants stated that they would not change anything, and that they liked the program the way it was. During the focus group, participants explained that "I don't really think it could be better because I feel very supported in this group," and "I think that it talks about everything that we need to know." The remaining 75% of the participants suggested for minor changes to be made in the following two categories: environmental conditions and more hands-on activities. The participants' feedback is described in detail, below.

Environmental Conditions

The majority of feedback that participants offered was related to the context, in which the program was delivered, as opposed to the program, itself. Given that CODIP has been carried out in numerous service delivery contexts, including schools and churches, internationally, I

presume that each of these contexts would present similar issues for the participants involved. Therefore, while the feedback below cannot be generalized to all service delivery contexts, it serves as a reminder of some of the environmental factors to consider, prior to implementing the program.

Several participants offered feedback about the window of time, during which CODIP sessions were carried out. Based on the school and/or age of participants, the sessions took place during recess, lunch, or both recess and lunch. Four male participants and two female participants – all of whom were 2/3 or 4/5 grade level participants - suggested to change the time of implementation. Overall, they did not like that the program took place during recess and recommended that it take place only during lunch or after school. Chris, a third grader at Riverdale, offered, “I think you should make it after school, instead of during recess.” Similarly, Cameron, a fourth grader at Riverdale stated, “Change the time [to] lunchtime, so we could still – we would have already played and we’d be eating our food, so we could still talk.” Clearly, the participants valued their recess time, as an opportunity to play and socialize with their friends.

However, as children, they did not realize the logistics involved in having the program after school. As Tim Barnes explained, in previous years, when they tried to carry out the *Rainbows* program after school, attendance was inconsistent and there was a much smaller turnout. This was due to the fact that many of the parents of participants were single parents and were attempting to balance work with shuttling their other children around to their after-school activities. Therefore, having the program during lunch/recess allowed for the greatest consistency in attendance and turnout among participants. Thus, the mere 14% of the participants, who expressed discontent with the window of time, during which the program was

carried out paled in comparison to the prospect of changing the window of time, and being able to serve fewer children, as a result.

In addition, participants across all three age groups expressed a desire to have more than just nine CODIP sessions. As first grader Kyle put it, "I wish it would last longer." In Shan Nelson's 2/3 grade level group, on the post-survey, the participants unanimously indicated that the one thing they would change about the program would be to have "more time." Likewise, fifth graders Juan and Marco, in Jillian Campbell's group, wrote that they would like to "make it a little longer" and to have "more time and more lessons," respectively. The fact that the participants wanted to extend the program was more of an affirmation of how much they enjoyed the program and the benefits they reaped from being involved, as opposed to constructive feedback. Participants may have perceived the termination of the program as yet another loss in their lives, given that they were no longer going to have weekly contact with individuals to whom they had grown so close.

Another aspect of the program that participants suggested changing was the composition of the groups. While some children felt it would be beneficial to have more participants in each group, others offered that mixing up the groups across grade levels would provide for richer discussion. During the focus group in Shan Nelson's 2/3 grade level group, Natalie and Larissa discussed the benefits of cross-grade level groups.

Natalie: You should like have more kids in the group. Like put more, like mix the grades up, so you can hear like what other first graders or third graders or fifth graders need to talk about.

Larissa: I agree with Natalie because it's kind of better to hear other people and how they feel.

While the children's suggestions make sense, they run counter to the existing research, which has been carried out by the CODIP developers. They have found that groups exceeding five children do not accomplish program goals as effectively as groups with five or fewer children (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Furthermore, through extensive evaluations, the program model has been adapted over the years for children of different ages, based on the fact that children respond differently to divorce, based on their age. Likewise, each of the four versions of the program reflects techniques and objectives, appropriate for children of that age group (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Therefore, increasing the size of the groups and/or creating cross-grade level groups would pose great difficulty and potentially reduce the program's positive outcomes.

The final environmental issue that participants mentioned, during focus groups and on their post-surveys, was the room environment. Primarily, the participants from Ms. Baker's 4/5 grade level group commented that the room, where they met for weekly CODIP meetings, was "a cramped space." As a basic skills teacher, Ms. Baker had to share a room with other teachers and therefore, utilized the speech teacher's room for her group's meeting space, given that the speech teacher was not there on Tuesdays. However, there were three weeks when the group had to relocate to alternate spaces, as Ms. Baker had to shift their meeting time to a different day, due to meetings and/or days off from school. As a participant-observer during these sessions, I noticed that changing the meeting space certainly impacted the group dynamics. The level of comfort and safety that had been established during previous weeks seemingly had to be restored. Therefore, it is no surprise that all of the girls in Ms. Baker's group proposed that next year the group meet in a bigger space on a consistent basis. Once again, while this feedback is specific to Mountainside Elementary School and not necessarily CODIP, it serves as a reminder of yet another environmental factor to consider, before implementing the program.

Without question, participants in the 2/3 and 4/5 grade level groups were the most vocal about environmental issues that they suggested could be addressed to improve the program's positive outcomes and/or increase children's willingness to attend. Many participants stated that they felt the program needed to be extended to include more lessons. Other participants requested to consistently meet in bigger spaces, as well as to modify the composition of groups to reflect more children in each group and children from all grade levels. Finally, a fraction of participants (N=6) proposed changing the meeting time from lunch/recess to either just lunchtime or after school. While these issues are specific to Mountainside and Riverdale Elementary Schools, the participants' perceptions shed light on a handful of environmental factors that should be taken into consideration in any service delivery context.

More Hands-on Activities

Over 40% of the participants (N=15) suggested that the program could be improved if they had more opportunities to play games or engage in hands-on activities. This is no surprise, given that participants in all three age groups expressed that the games were one of their favorite components of the program, which led to its positive outcomes. In all three first grade groups, when prompted on the post-survey to "tell us anything about the program that you would change," all nine participants wrote something to the effect of "more games." Only one participant in the 2/3 grade level groups suggested to "play more games." Lastly, among the 4/5 grade level groups, five participants felt that more games should be incorporated into the program to enhance it.

While the participants enjoyed the activities that were less hands-on in nature, such as reading books and watching movies, they suggested that these components of the program be shortened to allow more time for games. Based on the summary sheets that the facilitators

completed, as well as my informal conversations with them, many facilitators responded to this feedback and followed the participants' lead. Therefore, with the guidance counselor's or my permission, they omitted books and shortened movie clips, to make for increased time to play games. Also, in two cases, at the 4/5 grade level, facilitators included divorce-related games of their own that were suggested by the guidance counselor, including "Divorce Jenga." This was largely due to the fact that only three games were included for participants of this age group and based on their feedback, they were clearly yearning for more. Participants in all three age groups enjoyed hands-on activities and suggested that the program could be improved if more hands-on activities were incorporated.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

“Sometimes I feel invisible, like no one even notices me,” (Pedro-Carroll, 2010, p. 23) and “It doesn’t matter...because I have no say so anyway” (Dlugokinski & Allen, 1997, p. 96) are common feelings among children of divorce. With this study, my goal was to remove these cloaks of invisibility and to make children of divorce feel as though someone *does* care about what they have to say. Through a process evaluation study, I focused on the perceptions of CODIP participants to transcend the existing research substantiating the efficacy of CODIP, in an attempt to uncover specific aspects of the program that contribute to its positive outcomes (Oliphant et al., 2002). Furthermore, drawing upon their experiences as CODIP participants, children offered their feedback about components of the program that they enjoyed and those which they did not.

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings in light of the previous research conducted, which was used to inform this study. First, I will revisit the conceptual framework to provide a sense of context, within which to situate the study. Next, I will discuss the findings, as they relate to each of my research questions. Finally, I will summarize my conclusions and engage in a brief discussion of the implications for program developers, school counselors, and for further research, as well as the limitations of my study.

Conceptual Framework: Revisited

CODIP’s theory of action is premised on the belief that evidence-based preventive interventions can promote children’s adjustment to their parents’ divorce, by reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors (Pedro-Carroll & Jones, 2005; Leon, 2003). Therefore, CODIP developers utilized theories of risk and resilience, as well as research related to group

and cognitive-behavioral play therapy in designing the program. Over the years, they have carried out numerous evaluations to modify the program to meet the needs of children ages 5-14, of various socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, since the program's inception in 1982, at least six studies have documented the durability and generalizability of the positive outcomes that participants have experienced, based on their involvement in the program (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

For all four programs (K/1, 2/3, 4-6, and 7/8 grade levels), the developers theorize that three program features are responsible for the program's positive outcomes: structure of peer group, cognitive-behavioral play therapy components, and the long-term nature of the program. First, the group format of CODIP offers children a supportive group atmosphere (Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985), in which they are surrounded by other children of divorce and therefore, do not feel alone (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Secondly, CODIP is largely grounded in cognitive-behavioral play therapy, in which the participants are offered multiple opportunities to make meaning of their experiences through play. Also, modeling with puppets, characters in books, and role-play, is used to help children strengthen, weaken, or acquire specific skills (Bandura, 1977) and frequent role-play and puppet play in allows for behavioral rehearsal, as well as the development of more adaptive responses (Fazio-Griffith & Ballard, 2014; Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Finally, the developers of CODIP have discovered that children's positive adjustment to their parents' divorce can be promoted through the implementation of a preventive program on a weekly basis for 45 minutes to an hour over the course of 8 to 16 weeks (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Therefore, while numerous studies have documented CODIP's efficacy, the developers only have a theory as to *why* it works.

Findings: Revisited

My research questions were written in such a way to explore the missing link between the developers' theory and positive program outcomes, by shedding light on the perceptions of those directly involved, the participants. Below I will summarize my findings, as they relate to each research question and in doing so, address the developers' theory, as well.

Perceived program benefits. CODIP participants, in the Greenboro School District, identified three main benefits of being involved in the program: having multiple opportunities to express their feelings, acquiring problem-solving skills to tackle divorce-related challenges, and being comforted by knowing that they were not alone.

Based on the results of the post-survey, over 70% of the participants (N=27) expressed that the group was a safe place to share their feelings. The group, itself, provided children with a designated space, in which they could share their feelings. And, at each level, the program was purposefully structured in such a way to help children to identify their feelings, feel validated for having these feelings, and then to acquire the tools by which to effectively express them through a series of games and activities. This perceived benefit aligns with one of CODIP's five program objectives, which is to "help children identify and appropriately express feelings" (Pedro-Carroll, 2005, p. 56). The developers designed the curriculum, taking into consideration the "universality, diversity, and acceptability of all feelings" prior to concentrating on divorce-related issues (Pedro-Carroll, 2005, p. 57).

The second benefit that participants perceived - acquiring problem-solving skills - relates to another one of CODIP's program objectives, which is to enhance children's active coping skills. Research shows that children of divorce are at a greater predisposition to develop internalizing behaviors, like anxiety and depression, as well as avoidant coping mechanisms to

grapple with their parents' divorce (Gilman, 2005; Lengua et al., 1999). Given the numerous family transitions that may take place following the divorce, including moving to a new home, assuming more responsibility, and getting acclimated to a different standard of living, children of divorce encounter many problems and situations, in which they feel helpless (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Therefore, developers incorporated activities such as the "Red-Light, Green-Light" game and resources like the social problem-solving cartoon into the program to enhance children's coping skills and offer them a realistic sense of control over situations in their life that may otherwise feel overwhelming (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Participants in all groups expressed the effectiveness of these components in helping them to feel more competent in discerning between problems they can and cannot solve, as well as better equipped to deal with the former set of problems.

The final benefit the program participants identified was that the highly supportive group environment offered them multiple opportunities to establish shared experiences and thereby, diminished their feelings of loneliness, isolation, and anxiety. Over the course of nine weeks, participants met other children, whose parents were divorced and who were facing similar challenges, which fostered a sense of belonging. Promoting a supportive group environment is yet another one of CODIP's program objectives, as the developers believe that children seek greater comfort in the words of a peer who has similar feelings, as opposed to an adult's intellectual and rational affirmations (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). As fifth-grade participant Rachel put it, after joining CODIP "you don't feel lonely [anymore]."

Features contributing to positive outcomes. As Grych and Finchman (1992) established in their study and Pedro-Carroll (2005) reiterated, the majority of studies have focused on moderator variables, as opposed to mediator variables. Therefore, the link between

implementing CODIP and children's positive adjustment has been clearly documented; however, the program components that account for positive outcomes have not (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). My study addressed this gap in the research and findings revealed that participants highlighted three program features: positive group dynamics, the experiential nature of the program, and a trusting relationship with their facilitator, which accounted for the benefits that they experienced.

Two of the program features that children perceived as contributing to the program's benefits, positive group dynamics and the experiential nature of the program, are consistent with the developers' theory. Just as the developers conjectured, one of the reasons that CODIP groups are successful is due to the highly supportive group format, in which they unfold. Participants in my study valued the physical and emotional safety of the group, as well as the opportunity to confide in peers about their family's "secret." Members of the group functioned as active intervention elements, in offering one another social support, by sharing their parallel perspectives and experiences. Likewise, the program developers theorized that the cognitive-behavioral play therapy components of CODIP allow children multiple opportunities by which to make sense of their experiences and to acquire adaptive coping mechanisms (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). The participants in my study corroborated this theory, in positing that the experiential aspects of the program, primarily games and role-play, offered them numerous concrete opportunities by which to develop coping skills, rehearse these skills, and then determine ways to apply them given real-life experiences (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). In addition, games and role-play were effective vehicles for normalizing the divorce experience and alleviating some of the divorce-related stress imposed upon the participants, by integrating an element of fun into the program. Therefore, according to both the children of divorce involved in my study and the

developers of CODIP, two mediator variables accounting for the program's positive outcomes are the supportive group environment and the experiential components.

However, the developers and study participants had incongruous beliefs about the third mediator variable; while the developers theorized that it was the long-term nature of the program, the participants perceived it to be the close-knit bond they formed with their facilitators. During the months and years following their parents' divorce, children are in dire need of a trusting and supportive adult relationship (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). More often than not, though, their parents are unavailable as they are preoccupied with their own psychological distress and issues that they emotionally detach from their role as parents (Strohschein, 2007; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). This explains why many CODIP participants forged close relationships with their facilitators and depended upon them for advice and consolation. While the group members valued the long-term nature of the program, they perceived the supportive relationships that they forged with the facilitators to be such a crucial component of the program's success.

The participants in my study helped to distinguish the missing link to explain *why* CODIP works. In comparing their perceptions to the theories of program developers, a qualitative analysis of the data revealed that both groups perceived the supportive group atmosphere and the experiential components of the program, as factors contributing to the program's positive outcomes. However, program developers identified the third program feature to be its long-term nature, while the participants found it to be the strong and supportive relationships that they formed with their facilitators.

Participants' suggestions for improvement. While 25% of the participants were satisfied with the program and felt that it could not be improved, the majority of participants

offered suggestions for minor adjustments to be made. Their recommendations fell into two categories: environmental issues and an increased number of hands-on activities.

In terms of the former category, several participants in the 4/5 and 2/3 grade level groups proposed for the program to take place during lunch only, or after-school, as they valued their recess time and did not like missing it. Also, participants across all three age groups expressed a desire to extend the program; they felt that nine sessions was not enough. Finally, participants in one of the 4/5 grade level groups disliked the “cramped” room, where their meetings took place and suggested gathering in a bigger space in the future. Clearly, all of this feedback is specific to Riverdale and Mountainside Elementary Schools; however, serves as a reminder of several environmental factors to consider, prior to implementing the program.

Another component of the program that participants suggested adjusting was the composition of the groups. While some participants requested larger groups, consisting of six or more kids, others justified the benefits of having cross-grade level groups. However, both of these requests oppose existing research, which validates the effectiveness of groups of no more than five children, who fall within the same age range (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

Finally, over 40% of the participants (N=15) felt that the program could be more effective if non-experiential components (e.g., reading books, watching movies) were shortened to allow for more opportunities to engage in hands-on activities. Children in all three age groups valued hands-on activities, like games and role-play. These activities served to infuse fun into the program, as well as to normalize the divorce experience (Yalom, 1970). While the children enjoyed the hands-on activities because they were fun, they were extremely effective, as they allowed them multiple opportunities to acquire and enhance skills, such as expressing their

feelings, building their self-esteem, navigating loyalty conflicts, and distinguishing between problems they can and cannot solve.

Differences among developmental age groups. Participants' perceptions of CODIP were rather consistent across developmental age groups. They distinguished similar program benefits and attributed these benefits to the same set of program components. However, *how* they experienced the program and thereby, arrived at these perceptions was quite different. While the perceptions of children in the first grade groups were largely grounded in concrete experiences, children in the 2/3 and 4/5 grade level groups expressed insights that were more theoretical in nature. For example, all three groups of children valued the security of the CODIP groups. However, while the younger children associated the safety they felt to the presence of privacy signs hanging outside rooms and closed doors, older children related it to the abstract notion that the group was like a vault – everything said in the group would stay in the group. In addition, students in the first grade group perceived one of the benefits, problem-solving techniques, as helping them solve problems that they had experienced in the past or were currently experiencing. On the other hand, children in the 2/3 and 4/5 grade level groups were able to anticipate problems they may encounter in the future and extrapolate how they could apply specific problem-solving techniques to solve them. Finally, students in the 4/5 grade level groups were certainly the most vocal, when it came to offering constructive feedback about the program. While many participants in the first and 2/3 grade level groups just accepted the program as it was, participants in the 4/5 grade level groups were the most insightful about ways the program could be even more effective.

Implications for Practice

Program Developers

One important implication of this study is for CODIP developers to expand the introduction section of program manuals to include more comprehensive guidelines about the following: group formation, facilitator recruitment and assignment, as well as suggestions for handling possible scenarios that may arise.

One of the program components that participants in my study attributed to the benefits of CODIP was the positive group dynamics. Even though in some cases groups were formed solely based on the participants' age, in other cases, factors like maturity and level of insight were considered. For example, at Mountainside Elementary School, there were 15 students who signed up for CODIP at the 4/5 grade level. Therefore, the guidance counselor and I determined that three groups had to be made. We spent a great deal of time contemplating possible groups, based on what we knew about the students and the depth of their understanding of their situations as children of divorce and relative abilities to articulate these understandings. I acknowledge that not all CODIP group coordinators will be privy to this information. However, I suggest that the program developers create a form for parents to complete, prior to their children being involved in the program. Another option would be for the parents to meet with the group coordinator for a brief interview. The objective of the form or interview would be to obtain information about the participant to most effectively place them in a group with participants with similar needs and experiences. This would be especially crucial if CODIP is implemented in a service delivery context, other than a school, as group coordinators may have very little, if any knowledge about participants.

In addition, program participants valued the close-knit relationships that they established with their facilitators. Therefore, selecting group facilitators capable of forging such relationships and supporting children of divorce is integral to the program's success. To that end, the introduction section of the group manual should be augmented to include a section about recruiting and selecting facilitators. While Pedro-Carroll (2005) briefly mentions that group facilitators should be skilled mental health professionals or if they are not, they should be closely supervised throughout the course of program implementation, she does not expound upon the latter point. I would suggest that a section be added to each program manual detailing guidelines for selecting facilitators that are not mental health professionals. In my study, Tim Barnes and I discussed the traits that would make someone an effective group facilitator, including the ability to respond empathically to participants, having strong active listening skills, as well as being able to manage dual roles (i.e. teacher and group facilitator) (Reed & Koliba, 1995). We utilized an informal checklist to select individuals, who we felt would be effective group facilitators. The program developers should consider incorporating a similar checklist or section describing the guidelines for selecting group facilitators in the introduction section of the CODIP manual. This is crucial to the success of the program, given that the participants in my study perceived the supportive relationship that they forged with their group facilitator, as one of the three program components that contributed to the program's positive outcomes.

Finally, throughout the course of the program, facilitators encountered many scenarios that they did not feel prepared to handle. This included participants joining the group several weeks into the program and/or requesting to leave the group, due to resolved family circumstances. While the facilitators felt comfortable approaching the Tim Barnes for advice in handling these situations, after they had occurred, not all facilitators will be as fortunate to have

such an easily accessible and amenable group coordinator. Therefore, I recommend that the program developers consider revising the introduction of the CODIP manual to include a section, which describes several scenarios that may arise, as well as advice for how to most effectively handle them.

A second implication for CODIP developers is based on the participants' suggestions for improving the program. Across all three developmental age groups, participants exhibited an overt sentiment for more hands-on activities. Just as each CODIP begins with a model and culminates with a review of the session, perhaps the developers can review lessons to ensure that a hands-on activity is incorporated into each session, subsequent to the model. For example, the developers can modify sessions that solely involve reading a book and discussing it to incorporate a hands-on activity by having participants "stop and sketch" or use play-dough to sculpt their emotional responses to a book. Such subtle modifications would serve to increase children's level of engagement (Stolberg & Mahler, 1994) in actively listening to a book and taking part in a related discussion. In addition, techniques like role-play could be incorporated into a greater number of sessions to respond to the participants' requests for more hands-on activities. Thus, by making subtle changes to the program and integrating a hands-on component into the structure of each lesson would allow children to know what to expect, by creating lessons that reflect a similar format, and increase their level of engagement.

School Counselors

There are several implications for school counselors to consider, prior to implementing CODIP in the context of a school. First, the timing of implementation is crucial to the program's success. School counselors should take a look at the school calendar and consider a timeframe during which there will be the fewest possible interruptions, due to holiday recesses and other

school activities (e.g., clubs, teacher meetings, etc.). In addition, they must reflect on whether it is possible to carry out the program during recess and lunch and if not, if there is a space available, in which to have the program after school. Based on the results of my study, it appeared as though the children in the 4/5 grade level groups valued their recess time and preferred that the group meet at an alternate time. Therefore, I would suggest that guidance counselors determine all possible times for implementing the group and then, offer the children in each group a choice of when they would prefer that it be implemented. For example, if there is a space and a facilitator available to conduct a 4/5 grade level group during lunch, recess, or after school, perhaps offer the children in this group all three options. Given that the success of the program will be directly correlated to the participants' willingness to be there, it is crucial that guidance counselors select a preferable time of day, during which to implement the program.

Finally, the counselors should consider meeting with the participants before the program takes place to inform them of what to expect and to assuage any of their fears. This would also offer participants an opportunity to meet as a large group with other children of divorce in different grade levels, taking into account their request for cross-grade-level groups. Additionally, meeting with the children after the program ends is key to address the feelings of loss that they may face, due to termination of the program, as well as to ensure that they receive any ongoing support that they may need.

While the aforementioned list is by no means comprehensive, it enlightens guidance counselors to several aspects of program implementation that they should consider, before carrying out CODIP in their school district.

Limitations

There are several limitations of the current study, including: small sample, modifications made to CODIP, prior relationships with facilitators, and changing group dynamics. First of all, given that my sample was relatively small, consisting of only 38 students, the generalizability of the results of the study to a broader population is limited. Furthermore, the use of students in grades 1-5 only provided a snapshot of the experiences of children in grades K-8, for whom the CODIP program is intended. Another limitation of the study is that modifications were made to the CODIP curricula at all age groups, in order to ensure that all groups began and ended during the same weeks. While we made the modifications under the guidance of the Director of Programs and Services from the Children's Institute, the fact that certain program components were condensed and/or eliminated from implementation of the program impacts the findings of the study. In addition, given that the program was delivered in the context of a school, many of the participants already had established relationships with their facilitator. Therefore, while the students in my study identified the supportive relationship they forged with their facilitator as a mediator variable contributing to the program's positive outcomes, this finding may not be generalizable to all service delivery contexts. A final limitation is that the dynamics of two groups changed throughout the course of the nine weeks, as students either joined or left the group. While I excluded these students when analyzing the data, their late entrance into the group and/or leaving the group in the middle of implementation had an effect on the other group participants. I have acknowledged the impact that the aforementioned limitations have on my findings and took them into consideration when interpreting my findings.

Conclusion

As this was a qualitative study of the perceptions of children of divorce of CODIP at my school, the findings of my study are limited to this context. However, by describing what unfolded over the course of the nine weeks of CODIP and specifically, in analyzing the participants' perceptions, this study enabled me to consider *why* the program is so effective. Given that the study took place on a small scale, it scratched the surface of active mediating elements of CODIP that account for its success, which can be explored in greater depth and on larger scales in future studies. Moreover, this study documented the consistency of participants' perspectives and experiences across three developmental age groups. Finally, based on participants' perceptions, this study provides the program developers with suggestions for ways to improve CODIP's effectiveness, by revising the program manual and incorporating more hands-on activities into the program. The findings of this study contribute to the limited literature available on why the intervention is successful, by addressing the developers' theory in light of the perceptions of program participants.

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Appendix A

Children of Divorce Intervention Program for Children of Separation and/or Divorce

Registration is now open for the new *Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP)* support group for students who are dealing with family changes involving separation and/or divorce. This peer support group will offer students a safe, comfortable setting to share their feelings with other students who may be able to relate to the way they may be feeling. It will also offer the students the emotional support they need to be able to have their best school experience possible. A combination of games, activities and literature will be used to encourage dialogue to guide the students through their specific changes. All groups will be facilitated by either a teacher, who has received CODIP training or me. Any students in grades 1 - 5 who may benefit from the program are welcome to join us!

The groups will meet in appropriate grade levels once a week for 9 weeks during recess/lunch periods beginning in mid-October. In contrast to the former Rainbows group, this program will be offered during recess at both Mountainside and Riverdale Schools so that transportation will no longer be an issue and conflict with all after school programs will be avoided. However, since it will run during recess time it may not be appropriate for all students. Therefore, it is important that no child be forced to come to this group so that it remains a positive experience for all members.

In addition, please know that all sharing remains confidential with the exception of when there is concern regarding the safety of a participant, as per the "duty to report" state mandate. If you are interested in having your child participate in *CODIP*, please complete the form below and return it in an envelope addressed to my attention. If you have questions about the program, feel free to call me or contact me to set up a conference. Please see the attached flier for more information about *CODIP*.

Tim Barnes, School Counselor

Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP)

Student(s) _____

Grade _____ Teacher _____

Parent name _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Parent signature _____

Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP)



CODIP is an evidence-based prevention program designed to address the specific needs of children of divorce, by helping them to develop effective coping skills. Since the program's inception in 1982, CODIP has supported thousands of children worldwide in countries such as the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

Program Goals:

- Increase children's ability to identify and appropriately express their divorce-related feelings
- Increase children's acceptance and understanding of divorce-related concepts
- Reduce children's anxiety and worry about their family circumstances
- Build confidence by teaching skills to help children cope with a variety of challenges

Benefits:

- Reduced desire of children to blame themselves or someone else for the divorce/separation
- Increased coping skills and ability to solve personal problems and let go of problems that are beyond their control
- Enhanced positive perceptions of themselves and their families
- The positive, supportive group environment of peers in the school setting allows children to share their experiences and learn from one another

For more information about *CODIP*, please visit:
<https://www.childrensinstitute.net/programs/codip>.

Appendix B

October 8, 2015

Dear Parents,

We are looking forward to having your child(ren) be a part of the *Children of Divorce Intervention Program* (CODIP) this year. Their participation will help me with my dissertation, as I am exploring kids' perceptions of the program. Signing the attached two forms will just allow me to include them in my research. Please note that no names or any identifying information will be included. Furthermore, the "Audio/Visual Addendum to Consent Form" just allows me to audiotape them during a final session, in which they will answer some questions regarding their thoughts of the program.

If you have any questions, I am happy to answer them. I appreciate your cooperation. Please return all forms by next Wednesday, October 15th.

Sincerely,

Lauren Senko
Third Grade Teacher
Mountainside School

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

*(This consent form is for **Confidential Data Collection**. This form is provided to the investigator as a guide. Instructions and sample language are noted in boldfaced italics within the brackets []. Sample language should be removed).*

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Miss Lauren Senko who is a student in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to determine participants' perceptions of the *Children of Divorce Intervention Program* and explore how (if at all) they vary across developmental age groups.

Approximately 30 subjects will participate in the study, and each individual's participation will last approximately one hour a week for a period of eight weeks.

The study procedures include: attending group meetings; when they feel comfortable, sharing their experiences about divorce with their peers; playing games; writing; drawing; and participating in two focus groups. Focus groups will be audiotaped and will take place after the third session and after the eighth session.

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you/your child and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your/your child's identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you/your child includes their feelings related to divorce. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. All data will be kept in a locked drawer in my classroom or on a password-protected folder on my personal computer to which no one else has access. Any data uploaded online will be to a heavily secure online data analysis system, known as Dedoose.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years and destroyed thereafter.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study other than potential emotional discomfort. This risk will be minimized by maintaining an environment where discussions regarding the children's struggles in coping with their parents' divorce are validated and supported through empathy and compassion. Should a child encounter any emotional discomfort, facilitators and/or the guidance counselor will offer emotional support and if necessary, contact the child's parent/guardian regarding the issue.

You have been told that the benefits of taking part in this study may be: connecting students with other students going through divorce, provide students with a safe environment in which to discuss their parents' divorce, offering them coping mechanisms through program activities to effectively deal with their parents' divorce, etc. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself at:

Lauren Senko
3 Jeffrie Trail
Whippany, NJ 07981
Phone: 201-317-7470
Email: lauren.senko@gse.rutgers.edu

You may also contact my dissertation chair at:

Dr. Sandra Tomlinson-Clarke
Rutgers University
10 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-9806
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Audio/Visual Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: Dealing with Divorce: Exploring Children's Perceptions of the *Children of Divorce Intervention Program* conducted by Miss Lauren Senko. We are asking for your permission to allow us audiotape as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The audio recordings will be used to ensure that I fully understand what the students say during the focus groups in addition to ensuring accuracy.

The audio recordings will include information shared during focus groups. They will include students' pseudonyms, as identifiers.

The recordings will be stored in a password-protected folder on my personal computer to which no one else has access and linked with a code to subjects' identity. They will be stored for three years and then destroyed thereafter.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Grade Level 1
Greenboro Public Schools

	CODIP Session(s)	Procedure	Materials
Session 1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Introductions – distribute name tags, ice breaker (“Getting to Know You” game) -Introduce puppet -Describe group purpose & structure -Make “You-nique” mini-posters -Review questions about group purpose, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Name tags -Puppet -“You-nique” posters -Crayons, markers
Session 2	2 & 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Introduce topic of feelings and share feelings poster -Discuss three ways to identify feelings -Read & discuss <i>The Way I Feel</i> -Create a “Feeling Telegram” -Review questions about feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Feelings poster -Mini feelings posters -Puppet -<i>The Way I Feel</i> -“My Feeling Telegram” -Crayons, markers, etc.
Session 3	4 & 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review feelings concepts -Introduce concept of families -Children draw a picture of their families -Introduce concept of divorce -Read & discuss <i>Let's Talk About It: Divorce</i> -Review questions about family and divorce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Feelings poster -Mini feelings posters -Puppet -Blank white paper -Crayons, markers, pencils -<i>Let's Talk About It: Divorce</i>
Session 4	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review how divorce is a grown-up problem -Read & discuss <i>Dinosaurs Divorce</i> -Introduce the coping skill of “asking” -Play “Ask a Dinosaur” game -Review questions about how to use “asking” as a coping skill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<i>Dinosaurs Divorce</i> -Scenarios for “asking” -Puppet -Dinosaurs on popsicle sticks
Session 5	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review the coping skill of “asking” -Introduce the concepts of “problem” and “solution” -Explain the three steps of the Problem-Solving cartoon & model how to use it -Play the “What Can I Do” game -Review questions about divorce-related problems and possible solutions and send home parent letter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Problem-Solving cartoons -Posters of children with problems (divorce-related and non-divorce-related) -Puppet -Parent letter
Session 6	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review the Problem-Solving Cartoon -Play the “What Can I Do If...” game (use children’s personal problems, if applicable) -Review questions about divorce-related problems and possible solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Problem-Solving cartoons -Grab bag with cards of possible scenarios -Puppet
Session 7	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review Problem-Solving Cartoon and examples of how children have applied it to their own lives -Distinguish between problems that can and cannot be solved -Facilitator performs a puppet play modeling an unsolvable problem -Play “Red-Light Green-Light” game -Review questions about solvable/unsolvable problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Problem-Solving cartoons -Puppet -Red and green circles -Scenarios written on sentence strips of solvable/unsolvable problems
Session 8	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Problem-Solving Show and Tell -Discuss how group will end -Play “Daring Dinosaurs” game -Closing remarks – remind students about how many sessions are left, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Calendar -“Daring Dinosaurs” game board and pouch with pieces & cards

Session 9	11 & 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Discuss how group will end-Create an "I Am Special" book-Explore feelings about group ending-Complete post-survey (feedback about group)-Conduct focus group-Distribute certificate of participation-Optional: Have a party.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Puppet-"I Am Special" books-Markers, crayons, etc.-Post-survey-Certificates
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Grade Levels 2 & 3

Greenboro Public Schools

	CODIP Session(s)	Procedure	Materials
Session 1	1 & 2	-Introductions – distribute name tags, ice breaker (Name Game) -Feelings – introduce topic of feelings -Play “Feelings Grab Bag” game	-Name tags -Feelings poster -Mini feelings posters -Grab bag with feelings cards
Session 2	3 & 4	-Briefly review feelings/feeling concepts -Set up families using dolls -Introduce concept of divorce -Read <i>Dinosaurs Divorce</i>	-Feelings poster -Play dolls - <i>Dinosaurs Divorce</i>
Session 3	5 & 6	-Distinguish between problems/solutions -Introduce Social Problem Solving cartoon -Discuss alternative solutions, given a problem -Play Tic-Tac-Toe	-Copies of Social Problem Solving cartoon -Puppets -Cards with X's and O's -Tic-Tac-Toe board
Session 4	7 & 8	-Discuss solutions for divorce-related problems, using Social Problem Solving cartoon -Play “Red-Light Green-Light” game	-Puppets -Copies of Social Problem Solving cartoon -Grab bag with divorce-related problem situations -Red & green circles
Session 5	9	-Share solutions for divorce-related problems -Play “Daring Dinosaurs” game	-“Daring Dinosaurs” game board and pouch with pieces & cards
Session 6	10 & 11	-Read and discuss <i>Two Homes to Live In</i> -Facilitator performs play, using puppets about a parent-child issue (see examples)	- <i>Two Homes to Live In</i> -Puppets
Session 7	11 & 12	-Review play performed by facilitator -Children work in groups to perform their own plays -Discuss how many meetings are left -Play “Daring Dinosaurs” game, emphasizing parent-related issues	-Puppets -Calendar -“Daring Dinosaurs” game board and pouch with pieces & cards
Session 8	13	-Children complete “I Am Special” books -Discuss potential group termination issues	-Blank “I Am Special” books -Crayons, markers, and scissors
Session 9	14 & 15	-Play “You’re a Special Person” game -Complete post-survey (feedback about group) -Conduct focus group -Hand out certificate of participation -Optional: Have a party.	-White paper -Markers -Post-survey -Certificates

Grade Levels 4 & 5
Greenboro Public Schools

	CODIP Session(s)	Procedure	Materials
Session 1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Introductions – “Get-acquainted” exercise -Discuss feelings about group -Reinforce purpose of group and discuss confidentiality -Discuss feelings & play “Feelings Grab Bag” game -Complete Challenges Checklist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Name tags -Feelings poster -Mini feelings posters -Cards for “Feelings Grab Bag” game -Copies of “Challenges Checklist”
Session 2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review purpose of group, feelings, and any other pertinent discussions from Session 1 -Show <i>Tender Places</i> -Discuss how divorce is a difficult time for everyone -Share common experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Feelings poster -<i>Tender Places</i> DVD -Equipment to show DVD
Session 3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review discussion from session 2 and viewing of <i>Tender Places</i> -Partner up kids and give each partnership a “perspective” to use, as they’re listening to a book read aloud -Read aloud <i>What In the World Do You Do When Your Parents Divorce? A Survival Guide for Kids</i> -Discuss what they gleaned from book, using the perspective they were assigned -Introduce group newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Index cards with possible perspectives - <i>What In the World Do You Do When Your Parents Divorce? A Survival Guide for Kids</i> -Example of newsletter created by kids from CODIP group
Session 4	4 & 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Follow up on newsletter to probe student interest -Introduce Social Problem-Solving steps -Model how to use SPS steps with divorce-related problem -Children write descriptions of divorce-related problems they have faced -Identify solutions, using SPS steps and then role-play -Describe homework: Use SPS steps to solve a problem over the next week and be prepared to share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Copies of Social Problem-Solving steps cartoon -Divorce-related problems written on cards -Blank index cards -Markers
Session 5	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Share results of efforts to solve personal problems, using SPS steps -As a group, discuss the difference between problems that can/cannot be solved -Children practice distinguishing between solvable/unsolvable problems -Facilitator introduces coping skill of disengaging from unsolvable problems and models with an example -Role-play, using examples of solvable/unsolvable problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Copies of Social Problem-Solving steps cartoon -Cards with solvable/unsolvable problems
Session 6	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review how to distinguish between solvable and unsolvable problems -Panel of experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Chairs for panel -Props for panel (e.g., microphone, name cards, etc.) -Possible questions for panel, written on index cards
Session 7	8 & 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discuss the feeling of anger -Optional: Read aloud excerpts from <i>How to Take the Grrr Out of Anger</i> -Introduce anger-provoking scenarios and how to deal with them, using “I” statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<i>How to Take the Grrr Out of Anger</i> -Anger-provoking scenarios, written on index cards

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Kids are given several anger-provoking scenarios and using role-play, they practice using "I" statements -Discussion about the feeling of "being caught in the middle" -Discuss how group will end 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Erasable sentence strips for "I" statements -EXPO markers -Calendar
Session 8	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discuss how families are different -Read aloud & discuss <i>What Am I Doing in a Step Family?</i> -Panel of experts related to families -Ask students if there are any other special issues or divorce-related concerns that they would like to discuss that they have not thus far -Remind them that one session remains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<i>What Am I Doing in a Step Family?</i> -Questions for panel written on index cards -Paper to record any special issues or divorce-related concerns
Session 9	11 & 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review coping skills for solving problems and managing their anger -Discuss how some changes are good and having a positive perspective on family changes -Play "You're a Special Person" game -Explore feelings about group ending -Complete post-survey (feedback about group) -Conduct focus group -Distribute certificate of participation -Optional: Have a party. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Chart paper -Markers -Post-survey -Certificates

Appendix D

Summary Sheet

Session # _____

Facilitator Name: _____

Grade Level(s): _____

I made changes to the schedule when conducting this session. (Please circle one.)

Yes

No

If Yes, I made the following changes:

- _____
 - _____
 - _____
-

What worked:

What did not work:

Additional comments/feedback:

Appendix E**ASSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

Investigator: Ms. Lauren Senko
Rutgers University
Study Title: Dealing with Divorce

This assent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the researcher or your parent or teacher to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand before signing this document.

1. **Ms. Senko is inviting you to take part in her research study. Why is this study being done?**

I want to understand what kids think about the *Children of Divorce Intervention Program*. In particular, I want to know the parts of the program that you feel are helpful and work well and the parts that you feel could be changed in some way. About 30 kids in Mountainside and Riverdale Elementary Schools will be involved in this study.

2. **What will happen:**

You will come to weekly group meetings where we will play games, read books, and engage in activities that will help you talk about your parents' divorce. You are welcome to talk about your experiences being a part of a divorced family at any time, knowing that what you say will only remain in the group; however, you will never be forced to share and you are always welcome to just be a good listener, too. In addition, you will complete a survey (answer some questions) at the beginning of the program and the end of the program, asking you your thoughts about *CODIP*. Furthermore, you may participate in focus groups, in which a group of students will be asked about their thoughts regarding the program. With your permission indicated below (included in parent consent form sent home with child), I will make an audiotape of each session.

3. **What does it cost and how much does it pay?**

You don't pay to take part in this study and you do not get paid for participating.

4. **There are very few risks in taking part in this research, but the following things could happen:**

Probably: Nothing bad will happen.

Maybe: Your responses could be seen by somebody not involved in this study. I will do my absolute best to keep all your responses private. Your responses will be kept locked up. Your name will not appear on anything; I will use a pseudonym (fake name) instead. I will make sure that the information you share with me or the group leaders is well-protected. The only way that information will be shared is if I learn that you or someone else is in serious danger – I would then have to tell an appropriate family member, such as your mother, father, or caretaker or the appropriate officials to protect you and other people.

Very unusual: You could be upset or embarrassed by a few of the questions. If this should occur, remember that you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to and either you or a member of the research team may choose to stop the project.

5. **Are there any benefits that you or others will get out of being in this study?**

All research must have some potential benefit either directly to those that take part in it or potentially to others through the knowledge gained. Some of the direct benefits include being able to connect with other children of divorce and share your experiences. Through the program, you may be able to develop some coping mechanisms (ways to deal with the divorce) that may help you in the future.

It's completely up to you! Both you and your parents have to agree to allow you to take part in this study. If you choose to not take part in this study, we will honor that choice.

No one will get angry or upset with you if you don't want to do this. If you agree to take part in it and then you change your mind later, that's OK too. It's always your choice!

6. **CONFIDENTIALITY: We will do everything I can to protect the confidentiality of your records.** If we write professional articles about this research, they will never say your name or anything that could give away who you are. We will do a good job at keeping all our records secret by following the rules made for researchers.

7. **Do you have any questions?** If you have any questions or worries regarding this study, or if any problems come up, you may call the principal investigator Ms. Lauren Senko at:

Phone: 201-317-7470
3 Jeffrie Trail
Whippany, NJ 07981
e-mail: lauren.senko@gse.rutgers.edu

You may also ask questions or talk about any worries to the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect those who participate). Please contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Your parent or guardian will also be asked if they wish for you to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Please sign below if you assent (that means you agree) to participate in this study.

Signature	Date
-----------	------

Name (Please print): _____

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F

Comments About Group

Name _____ Date _____

We'd like to know how you have felt about being part of this group. Your comments will help us plan future groups for children whose parents are divorced or separated. We really appreciate your help.

What would you say are the 2 or 3 most important things that this group has meant for you?

1)

2)

3)

Please tell us anything about the group that you would change.

1)

2)

3)

We have a few other questions we want to ask. For each one, just circle the answer that best tells your feelings about the group.

	very true	sort of true	not very true	not true at all
1) I made some new friends in your group.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
2) I learned some new ways to solve problems.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
3) Being in our group helped me to understand my feelings better.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
4) I feel less alone then I did before our group.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
5) People in my group care about me and my feelings.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
6) Our group was a safe place talk about feelings.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

Appendix G

Parent Correspondence

The following will be sent via email to all parents of participants after the final CODIP session has taken place:

Dear Parent:

I am very interested in your impressions of what the program has meant to your child. Given that your thoughts and feelings about the program can be very helpful in shaping future services for children, I would appreciate any comments that you have on the following question:

In what ways have your child's feelings and behavior changed, if at all, since the program started?

If you would like to discuss this in greater detail, I am happy to set up a phone call or in-person meeting, as well.

Thank you in advance for your feedback.

Sincerely,
Lauren Senko

Appendix H

Focus Group Guide

General Perceptions of Program – *Questions will be of the following nature. Please note: Pictures may be included to provide students with concrete visuals to more effectively describe their thoughts and understandings.*

- Imagine that I asked you to meet with students who are going to be involved in the program next year. What would you tell them about it?
 - What would they expect the program to be like?
 - How might they expect it will change their ability to deal with their parents' divorce?
- On a scale from 1-5 (1 being the least and 5 being the most), how helpful have our meetings been in making it easier for you to deal with your parents' divorce?
 - Why do you feel this way?
- What are ways that the program has helped you?
 - Expressing your feelings? Telling the difference between problems you can solve and those that you cannot?
- What was the most difficult thing for you to deal with regarding your parents' divorce when you started the program?
 - Did the program help you deal with it better? If so, how?
- How do you feel the program change you, if at all?

Resiliency Skills – *Questions will be of the following nature. Please note: Pictures may be included to provide students with concrete visuals to more effectively describe their thoughts and understandings.*

- What types of coping skills did the program help you to develop, which makes it easier to deal with your parents' divorce?
- Being resilient means you are able to bounce back from something. So, if your parents make you feel like you're in the middle of their argument, resiliency allows you to deal the feelings that you have and then, move on from the situation. On a scale from 1 to 6 (with 1 being the least resilient and 5 being the most resilient), how resilient would you describe yourself as being?
- When you think about your family as it is now, please tell me the words or thoughts that come to mind.
 - Is hopeful one of those words? Why or why not?

Improving the Program – *Questions will be of the following nature. Please note: Pictures may be included to provide students with concrete visuals to more effectively describe their thoughts and understandings.*

- Do you feel that the program could be better? If so, how?
- What would you take out of the program?
 - Why would you take it out?
- What would you add to the program?
 - What do you feel is missing?

Appendix I

CODIP Participant Agreement

***As a member of the _____ group, I
promise to ...***

- ★ Be a good listener***
- ★ Not share anything outside of the group***

Participant signature: _____

Appendix J

Individual Factors	Family Factors	Extrafamilial Factors
Active coping style	Being protected from interparental conflict	Caring relationships with positive adult role models
Accurate attributions	Psychological well-being of parents	Strong support network: school, family, and community
Having hope for the future	Solid, supportive relationships between parent and child	Preventive interventions that provide children with support and coping skills
Realistic appraisal of what can/cannot be controlled	Economic stability	
Effective coping skills	Parental discipline; maintenance of household structure and routines	

(Pedro-Carroll, 2005)