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Increasing High School Students' Awareness of the Risks of Gang Violence

Kyla Castaneda

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Increasing High School Students' Awareness of the Risks of Gang Violence

Kyla Meza Castaneda

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Science

Increasing High School Students' Awareness of the Risks of Gang Violence

Introduction

Many high school students may not be aware of the impact of gangs and gang violence. When high school students are unaware of gangs, without knowing and understanding the consequences, students can be introduced to a negative and unsuccessful lifestyle that gangs hold. When high school students learn about gang awareness, they may be able to cope with others' gang involvement, how to be aware and resist the pressure of gangs, and may move them towards higher life aspirations away from gang affiliation. To address the lack of awareness towards gang violence, I have created a two-session curriculum about gang violence for freshmen in a seminar course that helps incoming students transition into the highschool atmosphere, at Alisal High School in Salinas, California.

Needs Statement

Many adolescents do not know about gangs and their criminal behavior and violence, even though there is an escalating trend of gang-related violent shootings and deaths (Bhatt, G., & Tweed, R. 2018). Despite little understanding about the dynamics that drive youth towards gangs and how to best combat gang consequences, youth would benefit from becoming aware of coping with others' gang involvement, resisting the pressure of gangs, and setting higher life aspirations to avoid gang involvement.

In communities with gang issues, youth receive many complex messages everyday in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods. These messages lead to the understanding that gangs should be avoided, but yet they seem to offer power, support, prestige, and economic incentives to their members. Unfortunately many youths that join gangs do so because their home environment does not give them the emotional support and growth that they need (Bhatt, G., &

Tweed, R. 2018). Especially to adolescents surrounded by the environment where independence and identity such as decision making and working out who they are and what they want to be is taking place (Mercer, N., Crocetti, E., Branje, S., van Lier, P., & Meeus, W. 2017). If youth are encountering gangs in school or community, they need opportunities to talk openly about these issues surrounding their environment (Bhatt, G., & Tweed, R. 2018.) By creating an environment of safe places, people, and settings even within the most dangerous communities this can provide a trusted source where clarity can take place for these individuals (Murray, L. K., Cohen, J. A., & Mannarino, A. P. 2013).

Peer pressure can influence a person to do something that is relatively harmless or something that has more serious consequences (Merrin, G. J., Hong, J. S., & Espelage, D. L. 2015). During the adolescent stage, teens find themselves overly dependent on their peers because they begin to develop an issue of self-confidence where friendships become valuable in terms of not wanting to feel left out or “let people down” on promises (Merrin, G. J., Hong, J. S., & Espelage, D. L. 2015). Gangs can enact peer pressure on teens to engage in activities to prove their loyalty or desire to join a gang. When unaware of the consequences of gang involvement, resisting pressure from gangs can be difficult for adolescents (Merrin, G. J., Hong, J. S., & Espelage, D. L. 2015). Teens are pressured to fit in, and, often, joining a gang allows them to become important within a group (Bhatt, G., & Tweed, R. 2018). While being pressured into joining, oftentimes members of gangs will recruit younger siblings and friends to join the gang by telling them how wonderful the gang life is (Bhatt, G., & Tweed, R. 2018). Delinquent peers and pressure from these peers increase the likelihood of antisocial behavior and gang membership (Alleyne & Wood, 2014). But, by creating the emotional strength to resist peer pressure, seeking for further resources like counselors, and support groups can be very beneficial

in order to help young people avoid gang related activities overall (Merrin, G. J., Hong, J. S., & Espelage, D. L. 2015).

Stable guidance from parents, teachers, and counselors can have a positive impact on adolescents' overall growth. Positive relationships throughout a child's early stages in life can lead children towards higher life aspirations (Wang, C., Williams, K. E., Shahaian, A., & Harrison, L. J. 2018). Throughout adolescence, teens tend to struggle with finding and establishing their own sense of self (Wang, C., Williams, K. E., Shahaian, A., & Harrison, L. J. 2018). But, by creating interventions for the youth like interpersonal skills training, recreation centers, or simple parental involvement and monitoring, this can often be the best way to make change in an individual's life, especially when surrounded by gang violence. Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments are essential to prevent early adversity, including child abuse and neglect, and to assure that all children reach their full potential (Wang, C., Williams, K. E., Shahaian, A., & Harrison, L. J. 2018). This action can cause change and healing for a better future for young adolescents.

Given that adolescents are unaware of gang violence, it is likely that they are unable to critically think about others' gang involvement, resist the pressure of gangs, and may not move them towards higher life aspirations. In order to increase their awareness, I intend to provide a two-session curriculum about gang violence for a freshman in a seminar course that helps incoming students transition into the high school atmosphere, at Alisal High School in Salinas, California.

Theory

Developmentally, adolescents are in what Erikson's Theory called the Identity versus Role Confusion stage where youth are in search for a sense of self and personal identity. As part

of this stage, adolescents may engage in the search for a sense of self and personal identity through intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals. Since adolescents are still figuring out who they are, many adolescents reject the standards imposed on them by adults and resort to "clannish" behavior that involves being cruel to others perceived as different from their group (Brittian, A. S., & Lerner, R. M. 2013). Under this theory, it is reasonable to suggest that joining a gang can foster the development of an identity and a clear behavioral and ideological map. For example, adolescents who have adopted the identity of gang affiliations after exploring gang involvement interests at home, school, or community. In addition, according to Marcia's theory of development, identity results for individual investigation towards exploration and commitment across different life spans. In this stage, adolescents are able to make their own choices regarding which ideologies, occupations, relationships, hobbies, and genders a person has incorporated into their identity, where conflict and commitment are affected by (Waterman, A. S., & Waterman, C. K. 1972.) Therefore, I am creating a series of lessons to help students understand how their behaviors and ideologies may affect their search for a sense of self and personal identity.

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be conducted at Alisal High School freshman seminar course. The ethnic composition of the participants ought to reflect that of Alisal High School. According to the School accountability Report Card (SARC; 2018-19) Alisal High School is 0.1% African American, <0.1% American Indian, 0.1% Asian American, 0.8% Filipino, 97.9% Hispanic or Latino, 1.0% White, and 0.1% Two or more races. In addition, 88.20% are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. I would expect that the participants would especially reflect the socioeconomically disadvantaged because the freshman seminar courses are designed for all

incoming freshman, who are transitioning from middle school to highschool, to enhance students' skills for academic success, develop students' understanding of the culture of the school, provide individualized academic advising, and foster students' meaningful educational engagement through active participation in the school culture. As a result, it is possible that the participants may not have as much regular access to resources in their own homes. This project is geared towards high school students and is not likely to apply in the same ways to younger children or older adults.

Learning Outcomes

I intend to provide two, 1-hour lessons to freshman high school students enrolled in freshman seminar classes at Alisal High School.

By the end of the project, participants will:

1. Identify three negative effects of being engaged in gang involvement.
2. Describe two ways of coping with gang involvement.
3. Indicate three life aspirations.

Method

Day 1

First, I introduced myself and told the class why I was there. Then, I asked the class to define what gang involvement means to them. Once I had a working definition, I had students break into groups and come up with a list of negative effects of being engaged in gang involvement. After about ten minutes, I asked the group's report out and listed the effect on the board. Then, I showed the short film: https://youtu.be/U0gtcJaU_rg. Then, I presented on what is known about gang affiliations and consequences. See Appendix A. Afterwards , I led a 15

minute discussion on what they can do to prevent gang involvement. At the end, I handed out anti-gang stickers.

Day 2

Today, I first asked the class what kind of violent acts do gangs engage with and wrote the definition and the negative effects of gang involvement on the board as a refresher. Then, I gave them a true/false pre-test on what participants know about violence and gang involvement. See Appendix B. I distributed a sheet of paper and had them list three life aspirations they wish to achieve in their future. I gave them the example of mine:

1. I wish to work in a hospital
2. Graduate with a bachelor's degree
3. Buy a house by the age of 26.

Then, I had everyone go around and read their listed life aspirations they wish to achieve in their future. After reading the lists, I facilitated coming up with a ranked list of the positive approaches they can have when achieving their future life aspirations. Afterwards, I asked them if they could achieve their future life aspirations when being affiliated with gang-involvement.

I then presented the five core strategies in regards to gang violence prevention from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/programs/gang-violence-prevention>. Afterwards, I handed out the summary sheets that asked the participants to indicate one thing that they hope to do to change their approaches towards gang involvement and two coping skills of the dangers of gang involvement in which they had learned. See Appendix C.

Results

Learning outcome 1 was that participants would identify three negative effects of being engaged in gang involvement. I believe this learning outcome was fully met. From our discussion about the risks of gang involvement, the participants focused a lot on how relatability plays a factor amongst one another of having known someone who is or has been in a gang. In total, as a group, they named 18 different ways towards the effects of being engaged in gang involvement, which seemed to fully represent the experience of 23 participants in the classroom. Their answers reflected the content I had discussed? See Table 2 for what they said.

Learning outcome 2 was that participants would describe two ways of coping with gang involvement. After watching the short-film: https://youtu.be/U0gtcJaU_rg, and going over my slide presentation as I presented the five core strategies on gang violence prevention from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/programs/gang-violence-prevention>, the participants were able to establish 24 different ways of coping with gang involvement based on the data from the worksheet I had provided them to fill out. See Table 1. From the results of the class overall, the participants had a similar thought process of coping with gang violence and involvement when the class was evenly divided into two big groups, as they each created a group poster in regards to coping skills with this kind of violence. This leads me to believe that the participants took into account the negative effects gang violence and involvement has on an individual's physical, mental, and emotional status. See Figure 1.

Learning outcome 3 was that participants would indicate three life aspirations. First, on the summary sheet, the participants were asked to list the top three risks of gang violence that stood-out to them. While reading through responses, each participant listed dying as one of the top risks that stood out to them in terms of gang violence. See Table 2. Then, they were asked to

elaborate on coping skills to reduce gang involvement. As the class divided into two evenly groups that consisted of about 10-11 participants in each group, both groups shared a similar thought process and relatability towards gang involvement by each participant having known someone who is, or has been in a gang as they shared their group posters of coping skills of gang violence and involvement. See Figure 1. Lastly, I handed out a worksheet and had the participants list three life aspirations. As a result, each participant was easily able to set high goals for themselves with no hesitation, even with gang violence surrounding their communities. See Figure 2. I believe that this learning outcome was generally met because all participants could list three life aspirations they wished to achieve in the future.

Discussion

I believe this project was successful. The participants were engaged in the topic and learned a lot from the experience. Because the participants were in the Erikson's stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion, I think that the project helped participants clarify who they are and what they wish to change, achieve, and believe in. I think the discussion about the awareness of the risks of gang violence made the largest impact, given that the adolescents have the relatability of knowing someone of whom is or has been in a gang. At the same time, because they are still developing their identities, they are beginning to make their own choices in which they become incorporated into building their individual identities. When we discussed the risk of gang involvement, many participants could elaborate on the negative effects of being engaged in gang involvement. Also, when we talked about the negative effects of gang involvement, I think the participants could see how the risks of gang involvement could lead to real life consequences.

In terms of diversity, I think my project included everyone. With this topic being a sensitive target to youth in this community, this helped aim to reduce the number of youth who

join gangs. This also brings awareness to gang violence in the community where 98% of the community given in the neighboring location of Alisal High School is Hispanic or Latino origin.

If I had to do this over again, I wish I would have given the pre-test at the beginning of the two-day presentation, to see if the participants learned anything more from what they already knew. I think that, in our discussion on the violence and gang involvement, a pretest would have told me that the participants had a clear understanding and knew more than I expected. I think if I had asked about the topics at the beginning and then at the end, I could have charted how much they had learned. Also, if I would do this differently, I would have presented this topic to freshmen and seniors in order to compare their knowledge of the risks of gang violence. I wonder if both would have the same definition of gang consequences or have the same ways of coping and resisting gang affiliation. Nonetheless, I feel like the participants learned about the topic and are walking away much more aware of the coping skills to help aid the risks of gang violence and affiliations.

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Table 1

List of responses to what participants would do to increase coping skills of gang-violence and involvement

Strengthening families	Provide a center for youth recreation and referrals for services
Reducing youth conflicts	Provide tutoring for students who are performing poorly in school
Teaching students that gangs can be dangerous	Adult supervisor of students after school
Enforcing “zero tolerance” policies in school	Provide training for parents of disruptive and delinquent youth.
Providing interpersonal skills training for students to help resolve conflicts.	Be an example to my brothers and sisters
Work on making yourself healthy and strong	Create positive friend relationships
Ask for help	Share your feelings
Practice mindfulness	Take a break
Cry it out	Use positive affirmations
Write a list of choices	Roleplay some scenarios
Shut out negative vibes (people, comments, etc.)	Ask for support
Establish healthy boundaries	Weigh the PROS and CONS

Table 2

List of the participants' responses to three negative effects of being engaged in gang involvement

Negative Effects	Number of times mentioned
Bad grades	17
School drop-out	20
Being controlled by others	11
Bad relationships	19
Dying	22
Unstable employment	7
Early parenthood	12
Incarceration	19
Commit crimes	20
Substance use	15
Aggressiveness	8
Threats and Violence	18
Lack of positive support	16
Poor decision making	16
Bad example for younger youth	19
Low healthy habits (depression/anxiety)	9
Always in trouble when wanting to leave a gang	11
Pressured	17

Table 3

Percentage correct for each True/False Violence and Gang Involvement Question

	Percent Correct
Question 1	68%
Question 2	50%
Question 3	89%
Question 4	32%
Question 5	43%
Question 6	72%
Question 7	40%
Question 8	93%
Question 9	57%
Question 10	63%

Figure 1

Results of the discussion on negative effects of gang involvement

(Picture of white board; two groups)

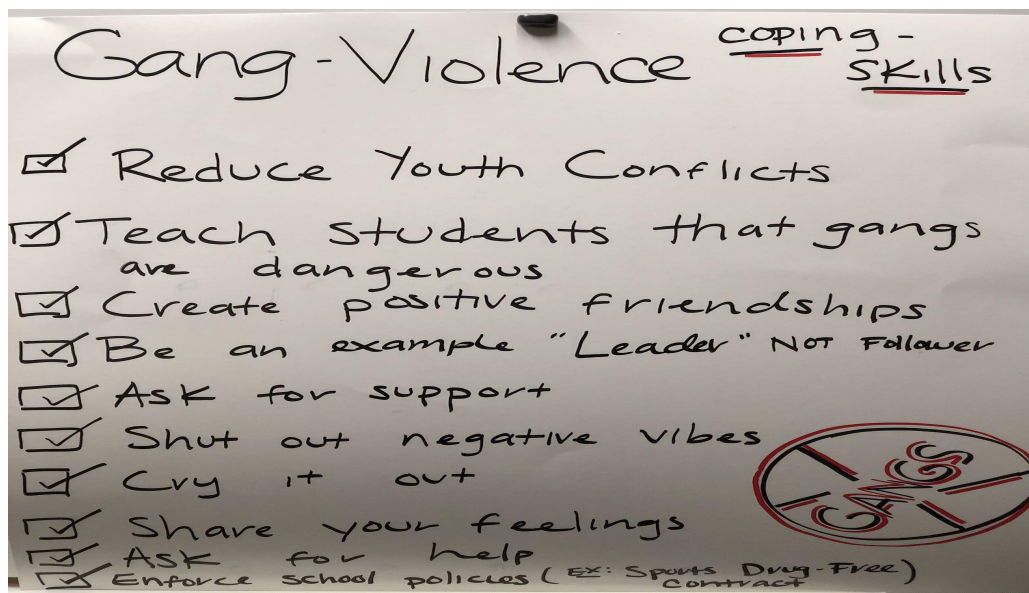
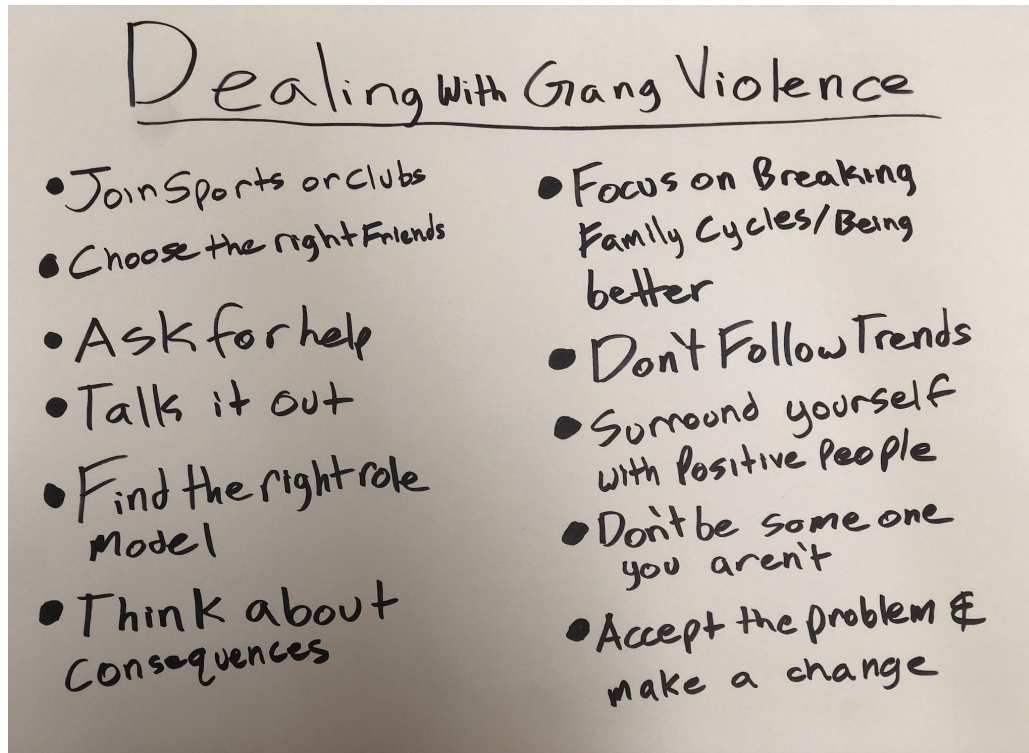


Figure 2

Results of Life Aspiration

(Picture of Summary Sheet)

What are three life aspirations you wish to achieve in the future?

1. I would like to earn a 3.5 GPA
2. I would like to buy my mom a house.
3. I would like to be the first college graduate in my family.

What are three life aspirations you wish to achieve in the future?

1. In the future I wish to see myself graduate college at San Jose State University.
2. I want to get my license at 18 and buy my first car.
3. I wish to be the best role model for my siblings and make my parents proud.

*Appendix A**PowerPoint on gang involvement prevention*

Gang Affiliations and Consequences

...

Kyla Meza Castaneda

What is a gang?

A gang is a group or society of associates, friends or members of a family with a defined leadership and internal organization that identifies with or claims control over territory in a community and engages, either individually or collectively, in illegal, and possibly violent, behavior.

Being in a gang?

Several warning signs identified in possible gang affiliation include:

- Family conflict (curfew violations)
- Talking back, lack of communication
- Changes in behavior and attitude
- Dress style
- Increase in material possessions and cash
- Trouble in school
- Peers in a gang
- Low commitment to school.

What about those who are in a gang...

Some children and adolescents are motivated to join a gang for a sense of connection or to define a new sense of who they are. Others are motivated by peer pressure, a need to protect themselves and their family, or because a family member also is in a gang.

What about those who are in a gang...

Consequences of gang membership may include:

- Exposure to drugs and alcohol
- Age-inappropriate sexual behavior
- Difficulty finding a job because of lack of education and work skills
- Removal from one's family
- Imprisonment and even death.

Consequences of gang affiliation

Former Alisal football player earns redemption through Silver Star program



Cristian Ponce
The Californian

Published 4:37 p.m. PT May 25, 2018 | Updated 6:05 p.m. PT May 25, 2018



38 Photos

VIEW FULL GALLERY

PHOTOS Silver Star Award Ceremony

Salinas native Tenoch Ortiz Jr. had a lot going for him as a student-athlete at Alisal High School.

But bad decisions caught up with him.

"One mistake just changed my life forever," said Ortiz.

Not worth your life!



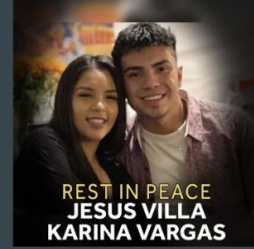
Police said officers were flagged down after the shooting in the area of East Alisal Street and Kings Street by a 20-year-old driver. The driver said his passenger, 19-year-old Fabian Moreno, had been shot.

Moreno was taken to the hospital where he later died. A neighbor who doesn't want to be identified says they heard people arguing outside before the shot was fired.



CASTROVILLE – Three men were killed and another was injured by gunfire early Monday in Castroville during a party that spilled out onto the streets.

On Tuesday the victims were identified as Julian Gallegos, 30, Jeff Robles, 21, and Juliani Robles, 21 – all of Salinas – according to the Monterey County Sheriff/Coroner's Office.



According to Salinas police, Jesus Villa and Karina Vargas were in their car when they were shot and killed. Police said they think two people approached the car on foot before shooting Villa and Vargas multiple times. Villa and Vargas were dating.

"Jesus and Karina were not the intended targets of this senseless act of violence," said Salinas police detective James Arensdorf. "It was in fact a case of mistaken identity."

Good for future outcomes?

Five Core Strategies



*Appendix B**Pre-test on violence and gang involvement*

What do you know about violence and gang involvement?

Please indicate if the following are true or false:

(T or F)

1. ____ The term “gangs” has one universal meaning. F
2. ____ Different gangs use the same name. T
3. ____ Gangs are stable. F
4. ____ Gang leadership does not change with activities. F
5. ____ All youth gangs are highly organized. F
6. ____ A “wanna-be” is a “gonna-be” F
7. ____ Local youth gangs are often connected to other big city gangs. F
8. ____ There are intervention programs that help gang members. T
9. ____ 10-24 age bracket contains about 70% of all gang members. T
10. ____ The majority of gang members are adults. T

*Appendix C**Summary sheet to achieve Learning Outcome*

Summary Sheet

What is one thing you hope to do to reduce gang involvement and what coping skills can you use to overcome gang interactions and experience?

What are three risks of gang involvement that stand out to you?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What are three life aspirations you wish to achieve in the future?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

*Appendix D**Presentation from Capstone Festival*

Increasing High School Students' Awareness of the Risks of Gang Violence

...

Kyla Meza Castaneda

Need Statement:

Many adolescents do not know about gangs and their criminal behavior and violence.

- Become aware of coping with others' gang involvement
 - Resisting the pressure of gangs
 - Learn to set high life aspirations to avoid gang involvement
-

Erikson's Theory of Identity vs. Role Confusion



Adolescents may engage in search for a sense of self and personal identity through intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals.

Marcia's Theory of Development



Adolescents are able to make their own choices regarding which ideologies, occupations, relationships, hobbies, and genders a person has incorporated into their identity

Erikson's and Marcia's Theory

This is affected

- Conflict
- Commitment

It is reasonable to suggest that joining a gang can foster the development of an identity and clear behavioral and ideological map

By the end of the project, participants will:

1. Identify three negative effects of being engaged in gang involvement.
2. Describe two ways of coping with gang involvement.
3. Indicate three life aspirations

What did you do?

Day 1:

- Presentation to class about the definition of gangs, gang violence, and the effects of being engaged in gang involvement.
- Summary sheet of the participants own knowledge in regards thoughts, needs, and hopes with gang involvement.
- Discussion on the relative topics of gang violence in Salinas.

With whom and where?

- Alisal High School in Salinas, CA.
- Freshman seminar course
- Adolescent ages 13-15 years old
- 23 participants



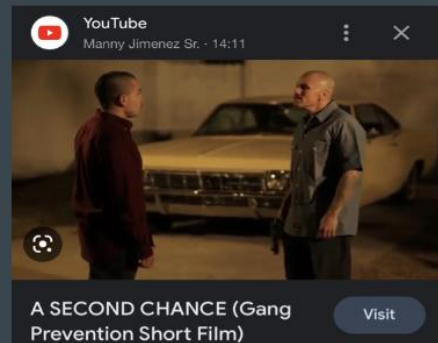
Results Learning Outcome 1

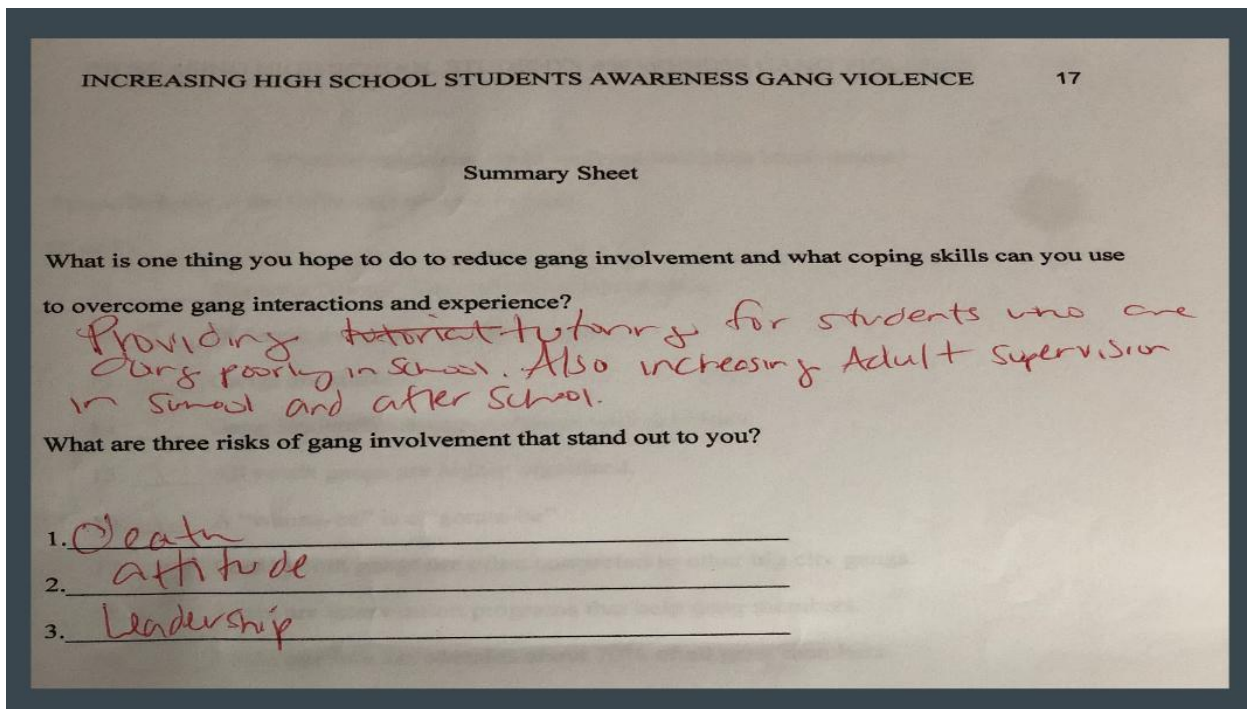
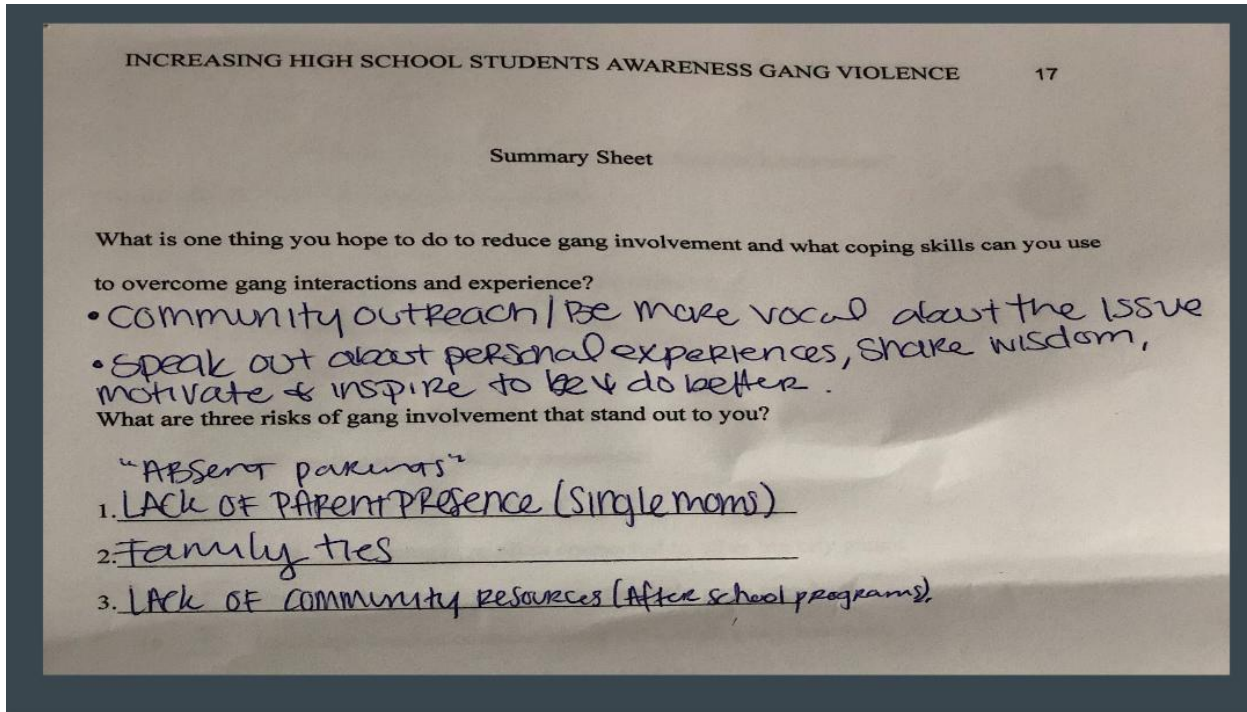
1. Identify three negative effects of being engaged in gang involvement.

As a result the class was able to identify the **many negative effects of being engaged in gang involvement due to relatability** by each individual knowing someone of whom is, or has been in a gang.

Presentation

- Definition of gangs
- Gang violence, what is it?
- The effects of being engaged in gang involvement.
- Short film





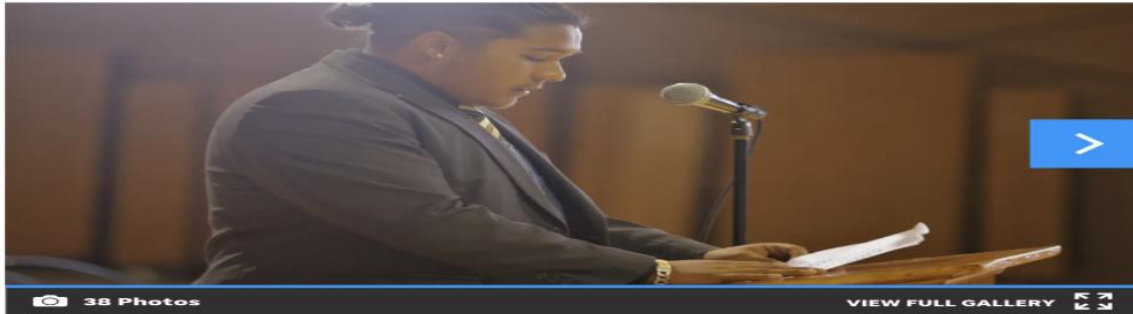
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According to Salinas police, **Jesus Villa** and **Karina Vargas** were in their car when they were shot and killed. Police said they think two people approached the car on foot before shooting Villa and Vargas multiple times.

What did you do?

Day 2:

- Refresh the definition.
- Students come up with ways of coping with gang involvement.
- Students list three life aspirations they wish to achieve in the future.

Results Learning Outcome 2

2. Describe two ways of coping with gang involvement.

From the results of the divided class, the **students had a similar thought process** in terms of coping with gang involvement and personal aims towards higher life aspirations.

Gang-Violence coping-skills

- Reduce Youth Conflicts
- Teach students that gangs are dangerous
- Create positive friendships
- Be an example "Leader" NOT Follower
- Ask for support
- Shut out negative vibes
- Cry it out
- Share your feelings
- ASK for help
- Enforce school policies (EX: Sports Drug-Free Contract)



Dealing With Gang Violence

- Join Sports or clubs
- Choose the right Friends
- Ask for help
- Talk it out
- Find the right role model
- Think about consequences
- Focus on Breaking Family Cycles/Being better
- Don't Follow Trends
- Surround yourself with positive people
- Don't be someone you aren't
- Accept the problem & make a change

Results Learning Outcome 3

3. Indicate three life aspirations

As a result **students set high goals for themselves**, even with gang violence surrounding their communities.

What are three life aspirations you wish to achieve in the future?

1. I would like to earn a 3.5 GPA
2. I would like to buy my mom a house.
3. I would like to be the first college graduate in my family.

Discussion

Did it work?

With this topic being a sensitive target to youth in this community, this help aim to:

- Reduce the number of youth who join gangs
- Brings awareness to gang violence in the community

What would you do differently?

I wonder if both freshman and seniors...?

- Have the same definition of gang consequences
- Have the same ways of coping and resisting gang affiliation

Increasing High School Students' Awareness of the Risks of Gang Violence

Any Questions?

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Thank You!

Kyla Meza Castaneda