

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY YOUTH

A LITERATURE REVIEW


by

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ABSTRACT

Today's youth face numerous challenges. For this literature review, resiliency is defined as the ability to thrive in spite of risk or adversity. The school setting is one environment which may allow for maximum resilience growth to occur in young individuals. Factors that may also influence the degree of youth resilience acquired include child temperament, attachment, mentoring, gender and age, intelligence, self-awareness, parenting style, peers, and school and community involvement. Reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors also greatly impacts resilience development in youth. Implemented within a rural Kansas county, The Rural Underpinnings for Resiliency and Linkages (RURAL) project combines both the schools and community to assist in strengthening resilience development by way of service provision to at-risk youth and their families. School psychologists held key roles in several aspects of the program. Initial findings regarding provision of services, methods of service implementation, and program evaluation outcomes are presented and discussed.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Youth in contemporary society seem to possess a substantially higher level of potential for encountering adversity compared to their counterparts of generations past. Such adversity includes surviving within an era of technological advances, dramatic transitions in family life, in addition to mastering competency skills associated with developing productive relationships (Frydenburg, 2004). This being said, it then seems reasonable to deduce that, “The fostering of personal agency is an important component in inoculating young people against [adversity] and equipping them with life management skills” (Frydenberg, 2004, ¶ 2).

One such context for maximum growth to occur within the area of resiliency encompasses the educational setting. Resiliency is generally defined as the ability to thrive in spite of adversity (Bentro & Longhurst, 2005). Schools set the stage for both the framework and foundation of youth resiliency in that both teachers and other educational professionals become valuable adult influences within young individuals’ lives. According to Smith & Carlson (1997), teachers are “A frequent, nonparent adult resource” for children (p.239). They provide a solid source of support and also act as a determinant for student success (Frydenberg, 2004). According to Frydenberg, “The most significant amount of students’ time apart from family is spent with teachers, who are often the most important connection for a young person [as well as] the first contact for many issues and services” (2004, p.19). Segal (1988) contends the development of resilience in youth can partially be attributed to the presence of one charismatic adult, a person with whom they can identify and gather strength. Interestingly, this individual takes on the form of a teacher (as cited in Bracken, 2000). Furthermore, teachers and

other school faculty have been trained to recognize and understand the diverse types of social and emotional issues that arise from students within their progression through the educational system (Frydenberg, 2004). If not identified and remedied, these personal dilemmas experienced by youth can manifest into more serious circumstances which may then negatively impact the youth, school, and the surrounding community.

It appears when the notion of resilience in youth was first investigated by human development and educational scholars, it was initially conceptualized in models and theories as an entity possessed individually. Both external and internal environmental factors may have influenced the degree to which a young individual acquired resilience-based characteristics, as resilience is a aggregate of inners strengths and external supports (Lerner & Benson, 2003, as cited in Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005), but the theoretical frameworks predominately focused upon resilience as only possessed by the individual person. One popular theory emphasizing this assumption is comprised of Resiliency Theory (LeBuffe & Naglieri, 2003) and the importance of developmental assets and protective factors. This framework provided the contention that certain developmental assets paved the way for the formation of protective factors in youth. These factors buffered the negative impact of risk factors (LeBuffe & Naglieri, 2003). Children who possessed a substantial number of strong protective factors were more apt to be resilient and achieve typical developmental outcomes when confronted with risk and adversity. Children who demonstrated weak protective factors were more likely to encounter negative outcomes when faced with adversity or the opportunity to engage in risk-taking behaviors (LeBuffe & Naglieri, 2003). Benson (1997) ascertained youth can acquire specific internal and external assets which serve as positive agents in building resilience

(as cited in Simms-Shepard, 2004). Internal assets include commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. External assets often consist of support, empowerment, boundaries, expectations, and constructive use of time (Simms-Shepard, 2004).

With the progression of time also came the initial steps of an evolutionary shift in resilience. Rather than primarily associating this term with solely the individual, it was now also applied to the familial context. Resilience models and theories now focused upon understanding certain family strengths and capabilities which safeguarded the familial network from crises and disruptions associated with a variety of stressors (Lustig, 1999). One such model includes the Resiliency Model of Family Stress, Adjustment, and Adaptation. This framework served as a basis in answering the critical question of why certain families deteriorated when faced with change or crises while other families encountered troubling situations with relative ease by identifying new patterns and resorting and revising former patterns of functioning (McCubbin et al, 1996, as cited in Lustig, 1999).

The next transformation regarding youth resilience occurred by way of developing school-oriented resilience models and then implemented these into the academic institutions. Schools have achieved phenomenal success by integrating resilience-based programs. Many educational professionals have found, “When a protective environment is established, students will achieve academically and will be less inclined to participate in unsafe and dangerous behaviors (Bowers, 2004, ¶ 1). Furthermore, “By increasing protective factors in schools, students will have more opportunities to achieve academically and will be less vulnerable to becoming involved

with such things as alcohol, tobacco, drugs, gangs, violence and sexual activity” (Bowers, 2004, ¶ 1).

The last transition within the evolution of resilience-based theory occurred via the creation of models and frameworks emphasizing the importance of community involvement in youth resilience development. Understanding resilience in the context of the individual, family, and school is critical, but to also recognize youth resilience as a community responsibility creates increased opportunities for young individuals to acquire and display resilience and coping mechanisms in a long-term fashion, possibly spanning their entire lives (Doron, 2005). One model which has been associated with resilience includes Urie Brofenbrenner’s Ecological model. Though often utilized in disciplines such as the environmental sciences, this framework can also be applied to the fields of psychology, education, and human development. Brofenbrenner’s work consists of an approach emphasizing the notion that each individual is affected by experiences and interactions spanning over several overlapping ecosystems. At the center of the model lies the individual. The first ecosystem level to interact with the individual is deemed the Microsystem. This consists of the family, classroom, peers, neighborhood, and church. The next level is comprised of the Exosystem which includes the school, community, health agencies, and mass media. The last ecosystem level is referred to as the Macrosystem and constitutes political systems, economics, society, nationality, and the culture overall (Psychology Portal, Grand Theories in Psychology, n.d.).

Though it may not seem initially apparent how resilience is related to each system or to the Ecological framework, both the systems and Brofenbrenner’s theory overall play an integral role in understanding how resilience is acquired and maintained by youth.

When scholars first defined the concept of resilience, they only applied and generalized it to the individual. Gradually, it was found resilience also rested in families, schools, and communities. These institutions, which also make up two of Bronfenbrenner's systems (Microsystem and Exosystem), play crucial roles in assisting in the process of teaching individual youth how to cope and become resourceful individuals in spite of adversity and negative circumstances. They also impact one another in terms of the degree of success each youth achieved in gaining protective factors and resilience-based traits. Political systems, found within the Macrosystem level, are also influential, as they delegate money towards resiliency programming. Another system, the entire culture itself (Macrosystem), delineates the specific norms, rules, and values that define the importance of youth resilience development. This is the same culture that may become hostile towards youth, both presently and in the future as they grow into adults. It is important youth experience and acquire protective factors early on within their lives so they are able to cope and thrive when life becomes stressful and difficult. In sum, it appears all of Bronfenbrenner's systems within the Ecological model play upon and influence one another in shaping young individuals' abilities to survive when adverse circumstances are encountered.

It is clear that incorporating programming which stems from a school and/or community-based resiliency model can demonstrate positive and profitable consequences for young people. When protective factors and rules and expectations of appropriate and acceptable youth behavior are consistently integrated by larger community, youth are more inclined to acquire resilience and be protected from risk at the highest level (Resiliency Factors, Partners for Peace, n.d.) Utilizing a school or community-based

resilience model also assists in emphasizing important issues that may help all young individuals and their families deal with significant changes and adverse life experiences (Doron, 2005). Communities can be organized to construct strengths (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005). When both schools and communities bestow opportunities for positive development, youngsters thrive and achieve their potential (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005).

One solution for both reinforcing and cultivating resiliency characteristics within young people involves integrating school and community-based programs, which not only provide the opportunity to acquire these skills, but also enhance a youth's overall functioning and well-being. As a result, it is beneficial that school-based programming which strives toward the goal of increasing the quality of students' social and emotional affect be developed and implemented (Frydenberg, 2004). One such invaluable resource includes the Rural Underpinnings for Resiliency and Linkages (RURAL) project.

The Rural Underpinnings for Resiliency and Linkages (RURAL) is a needs-based program which provides services to children, youth, and families in a rural Kansas county. It was developed to focus on closing specific gaps in services provided to at-risk and high-risk youth and families, in addition to accentuating prevention of aspects that could increase at-risk behaviors (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Founded from the public-health model, RURAL is divided into five project functions which consist of prevention, intervention, treatment, community outreach, and evaluation components. The RURAL program first identifies the most conducive method of strategy selection for a school and community by way of determining risk factors, community needs, and available resources. The prevention component integrates school-

based activities which targets preschool through middle school students (due to the greater chance for prevention of risk behaviors to occur). The intervention component includes social work staff who are assigned to particular schools or programs. Individual and family services are then implemented by this staff within either the home or school setting, with an emphasis placed on family-driven and solution-focused strategies. The treatment component includes the provision of support and assistance from a mental health facility. Also established was a learning center which provides resources related to dropout prevention and recovery for at-risk individuals. Childcare services, evening hours, as well as Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language instruction are also incorporated. The community outreach component encompasses the creation, dispersion, and integration of numerous RURAL programs on both the local and national level which consist of various types of information, strategies, and resources related to resilience development. Lastly, the evaluation component is comprised of extensive supervision and analyses conducted assessing the level of comprehensive progress made towards of project goals and objectives (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

The public health model demonstrates an eclectic approach by fostering partnerships between various disciplines, professions, organizations, and community stakeholders in which health concerns and changes of personal practices hold eminent interest and become key goals (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Other goals comprise of increasing student perceptions of school safety and promoting the development of resilience competencies within all students.

Compared to the medical model which solely emphasizes the diagnosis and treatment of illness, the public health perspective offers more than this in that it holds a

more applied, goal-oriented, community and school-based method for health advancement and maintenance. This approach accomplishes these tasks by recognizing problems and creating solutions for certain population groups via data collection describing the nature, incidence, trends, and prevalence of the problem. Following the determination of risk and protective factors, universal and effective interventions are constructed and education endeavors are coordinated to establish public awareness on these specific issues (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Crucial to the key development, implementation, and management of this project includes school psychologists who educate and offer technical assistance to school staff to sustain and extend specific programs. School psychologists are intentionally placed at the forefront within the RURAL project due to their high skill level demonstrated in executing a proactive, leadership-based role within the educational and community contexts. Acting as facilitators within the consultation process, school psychologists are catalysts for managing school activities, and assistants in the development of strategic plan designs for crisis response and bullying prevention within the RURAL program (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Statement of the Purpose

For this thesis, a literature review will be conducted regarding the history of the RURAL project, a description of the five components, as well as a critical analysis of the research supporting the five components and the RURAL project. Literature will be reviewed and collected between January and May of 2006.

Research Objective

The main objective of this study is to investigate and document evidence supporting the Rural Underpinnings for Resiliency and Linkages (RURAL) project.

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this literature review, ten terms will be defined to establish further clarification within this investigation.

Attachment – A mutual, strong, long-lasting relationship between a child and significant adults such as parents, other family members, and teachers (LeBuffe & Naglieri, 2003).

Developmental Assets – The foundation of healthy development that can assist youth in growing up to be healthy, caring, and responsible (Benson, 1997, as cited in Simms-Shepard, 2004).

External Assets – Resources provided by outside individuals and/or institutions (Benson, 1997, as cited in Simms-Shepard, 2004).

Internal Assets – Resources possessed internally by youth (Benson, 1997, as cited in Simms-Shepard, 2004).

Protective Factors – Characteristics, attitudes, or environmental circumstances that assist an individual, a family, and/or a community in learning to cope, adapt, and adjust to everyday stressors (Cooper, Estes & Allen, 2004).

Parenting Style – A complex set of enduring attitudes and beliefs regarding parenting (Prevatt, 2003).

Risk Factors – Circumstances that increase the likelihood a youth will develop an emotional or behavioral disorder compared with children from the general population (Garmezy, as cited in Smith & Carlson, 1997).

Temperament – A child's disposition (Smith & Carlson, 1997).

Self-Awareness – The ability to recognize and acknowledge one's strengths and weaknesses, accept one's reality, and strive toward one's future potential (Hippe, 2004).

Youth - Individuals ages five through eighteen years of age.

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed the research reviewed and incorporated into this thesis is valid, unbiased, and reliable. It is also assumed that the benefits assessed within the RURAL program are measurable and accurate. One limitation includes the narrow method of literature collection in that most resources were derived from the university library. Another limitation includes both the intentional and unintentional biases exuded from the researcher on the subject of youth resilience. In addition, further biases may be implemented by the authors of the articles utilized within this literature review in that several of the articles used support the benefits of both youth resilience and the RURAL program. Additionally, the rural nature of this program may limit its effectiveness and generalizability to more urban populations.

Chapter II Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will begin with a diverse array of research regarding individual, familial, parental, school and community related components correlated the development of youth resilience. Just as the theories of resilience have upwardly progressed from the individual to more broad-based definitions and applications (family, school, community), the components will be discussed on a narrower, more individual level and then expanded to a broader, more global spectrum. These include child temperament, attachment, mentoring, gender and age, intelligence, self-awareness, parenting style, peers, and school and community involvement. A discussion on reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors will also be provided. A historical overview of the origins behind one community-based resilience project, the Rural Underpinnings for Resiliency and Linkages (RURAL) program, will be supplied. In addition, the five components of this project will be explained in greater detail along with further elaboration on the role schools play within the execution and implementation of this program. This chapter will then conclude with several evaluation methods utilized to gauge the efficacy of the RURAL program within youth resilience education.

Child Temperament

A child's temperament or disposition can greatly influence their level of personal resilience (Smith & Carlson, 1997). Research has found that children who are identified as difficult or slow-to-warm are less likely to be able to cope with stress compared to easier children (Smith & Carlson, 1997). Within older youth, personality traits such as sociability and humor have been found to express protective characteristics for older

children (Smith & Carlson, 1997). In sum, regardless of age, it appears youth who are resilient tend to, “Seek out and gain the support of adults” (Smith & Carlson, 1997, p.238). These efforts may then help to provide a cushion against the negative effects that stress, crises, and trauma can exert on youth.

Attachment

“Children are biologically programmed to find other humans as the most interesting and important objects in their world” (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005, ¶ 43). They do not develop attachment in a random fashion, but instead, form connections with individuals who meet their needs (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005). When this occurs, children are likely to model and learn from them (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005). Literature has shown, “Children are wonderfully resilient creatures capable of surviving harsh experiences and transforming them into personal strengths” (Brown, 2004, ¶ 1). However, this does not occur overnight nor does it develop solely within young people independently. One critical component associated with youth resilience consists of caregiver attachment. Children who are able to securely attach to at least one individual, usually a caregiver, are more apt to become resilient in the face of stress and trauma (Perry, 2002). Youth who bond poorly with a caregiver tend to experience more attachment problems and are less apt to be resilient. This phenomenon may be related to the significance that lies in connecting with other people when stress, crises, or traumas are experienced (Perry, 2002). In addition, youth who display meager social and emotional connections are highly susceptible to distress. These young individuals are then more vulnerable to develop maladaptive styles of coping and exhibit symptoms such as impulsivity, aggression, inattention, and depression (Perry, 2002).

Mentoring

As children grow and expand their circle of attachment, they gain support from family members, teachers, peers, and mentors (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005). According to Perry (2002), children who possess extended and invested family members, neighbors, caring teachers, and community members experience far fewer issues with severe stress and trauma. Youth who are able to be influenced by positive role models and mentors experience heightened opportunities to become resilient (Brown, 2004). It is believed that praiseworthy mentors provide inspiration and motivation to their clients through consistency through both their words and their actions (Brown, 2004). Mentors contribute to the end product (the child) in his/her own unique way. As stated by Brown (2004, ¶ 21), “They accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative”.

Gender and Age

One interesting aspect related to the acquisition of resiliency in youth involves gender. Frydenburg (2004) contends that compared to boys, girls are more disposed to, “Turn to others, think hopefully, and resort to tension-releasing strategies” (¶ 13). In addition, they are more inclined to engage in these behaviors as they get older (Frydenburg, 2004). However, studies conducted by Frydenburg and Lewis (2000) also found by the time girls reach the age of 16, they are more apt to declare personal helplessness and an inability to cope compared to boys (as cited in Frydenburg, 2004). In addition, Frydenburg and Lewis (2000) identified that a critical period exists regarding the acquisition and solidification of resilience in youth. These periods occur between the ages of 13 and 15 for both girls and boys (as cited in Frydenburg, 2004). “Involvement in social action, turning to spiritual support, and the use of physical recreation decreases in

use between the ages of 12 and 14. Reference to professionals is significantly less at 15 than it is at the ages of 13 and 17” (Frydenburg, 2004, ¶ 14). Given these findings, it appears imperative that youth are provided with coping strategies and other resilience-based mechanisms by the age of 16 (Frydenburg, 2004).

Intelligence

Intelligence level also appears to contribute to resilience development in youth (Kitano & Lewis, 2005). While it is important to note that high cognitive ability is not a prerequisite for resilient outcomes, it seems to be a supporting factor, especially as it relates to coping (Kitano & Lewis, 2005). Reviewers of literature also agree that above to above average intellect supports youth resilience (Condy, in press; Doll & Lyon, 1998, as cited in Kitano & Lewis, 2005). Osofsky & Thompson (2000) contend that cognitive ability may be the most important personal quality which serves as a protective factor (as cited in Kitano & Lewis, 2005). It seems that a child who learns quickly and can also learn from minimal experiences tends to undergo an easier time calling upon his/her own experience and his/her capacity to imagine a future that is happy and safe (Perry, 2002). Frydenburg (1997) ascertains that these youth are more apt to utilize problem-solving skills, work hard, and achieve more compared to their peers who possess lower intellect (as cited in Kitano & Lewis, 2005). In addition, Frydenburg (1997) also found children who demonstrate average to above average cognitive ability are less likely to engage in wishful thinking, more likely to invest in a close circle of friends, and use positive means to reduce stress and tension (as cited in Kitano & Lewis, 2005).

Self-Awareness

A youth's level of self-awareness is another precursor to successful development of resilience. Self-awareness allows a child to identify strengths and weakness in a frank and realistic manner (Hippe, 2004). Related personal resources such as self-esteem, confidence, acceptance, and optimism have also been recognized as resilience protective factors (Smith & Carlson, 1997). Hippe (2004) contends that providing environments which encourage self-awareness and allow youth to work through personal issues and areas of challenge are also key. Such environments can be supplied through parents and caregivers. Hippe (2004) identifies two primary elements for instilling resilience in youth. The first element includes reducing the occurrence of harmful influences of television, computer games, and music that portray violence, sexism, misogyny, or projections of unrealistic body images for boys and girls to imitate. The second element consists of developing resilience in youth by way of modeling empathic caregiving. According to Hippe, "A caregiver who is empathic will be more able to identify with the child, more effectively demonstrate true interest, and help the child identify their strengths and areas of challenge" (2004, ¶ 11).

Lavoie (2003) also provides additional insight into ways an individual, usually a parent or caregiver, can foster self-awareness into a child. These aspects are comprised of praising, encouraging, and maintaining interest in the child (as cited in Hippe, 2004). Lavoie (2003) maintains when praise and encouragement are combined together, they can be powerful motivators for a child, as they help to instill self-esteem, pride, foster cooperation, build positive relationships, highlight unique skills and abilities, and assist youth during difficult times. When interest in a child is consistently demonstrated by a

caregiver or other significant adult, it tends to convey the notion that he/she is accepted unconditionally. It may also send a message to the child that he/she is able to accurately identify significant areas of strength (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001, as cited in Hippe, 2004).

Parenting Style

Baumrind's (1996, 1991) classification of parenting styles have provided a basis for a magnitude of research to be developed regarding the interaction and overall relationship between parenting and child outcomes (as cited in Prevatt, 2003). This appears to convey an important message that parent(s) can demonstrate resilient-based characteristics through personal interactions with their children. Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer (2003) have found parents who display warmth, encouragement, assistance, high expectations, a belief in the child, and a non-blaming stance are more likely to produce resilient children who are able to cope well with adversity (as cited in Cooper, Estes, & Allen, 2004). Parents who also provide support and guidance when personally experiencing stress and disadvantage are more apt to instill resilience in their children (Smith & Carlson, 1997).

Parenting styles that enhance the possibility for a child to lack resilience include parental negative reactions to chronic stress and neglect and abuse which may result in out-of-home placement. It appears removal from the home may provide increased incidence of unstable and inconsistent caregiving along with a chaotic home environment, which may then decrease the level of protective factors for these children.

Peers

The nature of the peer group and how a young individual interacts with this group is also a critical component when discussing how youth acquire resilience. According to Smith & Carlson (1997), “Evidence is accumulating that children at-risk tend to withdraw from peers or interact with them in an aggressive way” (p.240). Smith & Carlson (1997) also contend these behaviors tend to be followed by friendships or peer associations with equally less adapted youth who then reinforce this deviant conduct. This may pave the way for future juvenile delinquency or substance abuse (Smith & Carlson, 1997). However, positive peer relationships can also provide worthwhile and valuable experiences for children, which may then increase the likelihood of resilience acquisition and adaptive coping mechanisms. “Connections with peers and activities that are socially rewarding and that also foster social values and connectedness have been found to have protective value “(Smith & Carlson, 1997, p.240).

School and Community Involvement

The environment beyond the family can also provide ample opportunities for children to become resilient (Smith & Carlson, 1997). Supportive school professionals and community members have been highly correlated with protection. Other protective factors related to the school and community involve providing services and specific resources to combat personal or family-based adverse circumstances. Another protective factor may include chances to connect with “conventional opportunities and institutions” (Smith & Carlson, 1997, p.239).

Reducing Risk Factors

One predominate theme exhibited within this literature review encompasses the detrimental nature of risk factors and the level to which they can inhibit resilience to become instilled in youth. Specific risk factors will be briefly discussed in this section of the literature review. Although these factors are not all encompassing, they provide a solid idea of the types of behaviors and circumstances related to lowering the incidence of resilient youth. These risk factors include parental joblessness, physical or emotional abuse, neglect/maltreatment, economic disadvantage, substance abuse, personal or family-based isolation, dangerous and disorganized neighborhoods and communities, marital dissatisfaction, divorce, familial conflict, mental illness within the child, parent, or other family member, and unsupported teenage mothers (Smith & Carlson, 1997).

It appears unrealistic to believe children will never encounter any of these factors or situations within their lifetimes. Given this seemingly inevitable circumstance, Rutter (n.d.) has provided two methods to buffer the effects of risk factors upon children. These consist of modifying exposure to risk and modifying perceptions of risk (as cited in Smith & Carlson, 1997). Many times this is done by integrating professionals such as social workers, physicians, mental health counselors, guidance counselors, school psychologists, social agencies, other service providers to assist in eliminating or decreasing the incidence of specific risk factors within an individual or family.

Enhancing Protective Factors

In reducing risk factors, it seems also essential and necessary to replace these negative features with protective factors. Smith & Carlson (1997) contend that enhancing self-esteem and improving academic achievement are two viable options. According to

Simms-Shepard (2004), educational professionals can build resiliency in contemporary youth by providing chances for meaningful engagement and participation through the implementation of interesting, relevant learning activities. Simms-Shepard (2004) also argues that successful academic achievement can be sought through supporting various learning styles, strengths and preferences. In doing so, students are able to express their intellect and abilities which may then allow them to take part in learning on several levels (Simms-Shepard, 2004). Modeled after Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences framework, this educational philosophy appears to hold great promise for fostering resiliency within the classroom.

History of the Rural Underpinnings for Resiliency and Linkages (RURAL) Project

The need for a program such as the RURAL program can be traced back to the rough and arduous heritage possessed by the state of Kansas. Its past is one marked by "famous lawmen and gunfighters of the American West...home to some of the most unsavory saloons" (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003, ¶ 1). In addition, gunfights and murders were quite prevalent in its history. These tumultuous historical roots paved the way for residents within later years to cope with a steeply declining farm economy, harsh climate, and even worse recession (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). This brief chronicle of state history can be deemed as relevant to this literature review in that these events and attitudes expressed by former residents seemed to precipitate and then become manifested by future generations through an expression of ambiguity that is now conveyed toward alcohol and drug use, as well as an enduring advocacy for the right to bear firearms (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). "[County] rates of underage alcohol use are higher than state averages and marijuana and methamphetamines are [becoming

evolving] concerns” (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003, ¶ 2). Entities such as alcohol, drugs, and firearms are also easily accessible to students (Connect Kansas, 2001, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Almost 14% of youth residing within Ellis County live in poverty and 27% are strained economically (Census, 2000; Kansas State Department of Education, 2002, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Graduation rates within the school district have decreased from 97% in 1997 to 90.7% in 2001 (Kansas State Department of Education, 2002, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Also, various other risk factors within this community encompass a heightened number of births to single adolescents, increased foster placements, and a growing incidence of child abuse (Kids Count, 2001, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). The number of juveniles processed within the judicial system has also increased dramatically, with approximately 29% of 2001 arrests for DUI belonging to Ellis County youth aged 14-21 (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). In addition, past surveys developed by local community partnerships which assessed students within grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 revealed that significant increases in drug use has arisen within Ellis County youth since 1995 (Connect Kansas, 2001, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

To add to this increased occurrence of youth at-risk activity, gang affiliation and membership has also been an emerging epidemic. Other adverse circumstances impacting Ellis County youth comprise of the ease of developing lenient attitudes toward alcohol and illicit drugs, diminishing levels of parental involvement, and escalating rates of crime-related activity (Connect Kansas, 2001, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Furthermore, along with being located on a widely recognized “interstate route for drug

trafficking” (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003), Kansas presently stands as the second highest state in illegal methamphetamine labs and ranks as the fifth state nationwide in drug trafficking seizures (Legislative Division of the Post Audit, 2001, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). According to Paige, Kitzis, and Wolfe, local law enforcement, “Seized eleven illegal [methamphetamine] labs in 2001 [alone]” (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003, ¶ 2).

This being said, local awareness and need for a youth-based resilience program to become implemented sparked the formation and materialization of the RURAL project. Modeled as an example of the Safe Schools/Healthy Student (SS/HS) project, this program was designed to serve both youth and families in rural Ellis County. Currently, it serves 5,500 students in Ellis County (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). The foundation of the program lies within strengthening and embodying existing alliances among three school districts, the community mental health care center, law enforcement, the local prevention center, and Fort Hays State University. A vast number of evidence – based approaches were applied within the schools and community, with the intention of increasing school safety and encouraging healthy behaviors (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). The approaches consisted of universal prevention strategies for the student body, early intervention for at-risk youth and families, along with an intensive provision of services to those young people with the greatest needs.

RURAL Framework – The Development of the RURAL Partnerships and Coalitions

Although the population of Ellis County has experienced a high level of at-risk and dangerous illegal activity committed by its youth, those working within the helping professions within this geographical area have been fortunate to develop and maintain a

long and productive history of agency collaboration. For example, the district's school psychologists, mental health center staff, social and rehabilitation services, along with other agencies have combined financial and staff resources to maintain multiple local social programs. In addition, the community also possesses numerous multidisciplinary teams and alliances that address issues such as child abuse, substance abuse, child protection, and early childhood (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Given that several programs had been previously founded to focus on juvenile crime and substance abuse, the Rural Underpinnings for Resiliency and Linkages (RURAL) project seemed the most beneficial and viable step on the pathway to developing effective youth resilience programming.

Upon the creation of the RURAL project, several goals and objectives have stemmed from its design. Considered an asset to this program, the acquisition of additional staff and funding has allowed for the development of numerous committees. It is these committees that are responsible for establishing increased support, resources, and monetary means to then be distributed across the county to assist in identifying the most beneficial services for at-risk populations. In addition, addressing concerns, needs, and gaps within the community are also of great interest. Task groups were also generated as smaller sub-committees to construct and implement strategic plans to assist in the resolution of community dilemmas; several of these plans have achieved high success since their implementation (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

The RURAL project has widened its coalition memberships, promoted the emphasis of limited resources, and created adequate support with the end result

encompassing the successful accomplishment of instilling resilience within the young people of Ellis County (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Another valuable asset which can be deemed as crucial to the success of the RURAL project entails frequent communication, both on a formal and informal level. The members of the coalition engage in quarterly steering committee meetings which involve discussion and individual input in regards to planning, resource sharing, goal setting, decision making, and evaluation of the RURAL project.

Project Components

Strategy Selection Component

Strategy selection within the RURAL framework was based upon specific risk factors and needs of Ellis County, but also upon available resources. Those individuals working within the RURAL project determined which services and agencies were most utilized and effective within the community. These resources were then enhanced via the provision of additional staff training and social work services (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

In addition, adopting research-based programs was another essential aspect so that the results could be deemed as being measured in a more predictable, cost effective and appropriate method for the community (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Prevention programs were chosen on the “quality of their research base, appropriateness for the population, and recognition by [other community] agencies” (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003, ¶ 15). Supplementary strategies were selected based upon what past literature illustrated as prerequisites to enhancing resilience and protective factors. These methods encompassed school-based mentoring programs, “Crisis response planning, after-school

planning support, tutoring services, and youth advisory group development” (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003, ¶ 15).

Social work support was chosen due to the disparity in school to home linkages as well as the need for early intervention for families who encountered problems with parenting, accessing resources, as well as other issues (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). These services were aimed towards young children, their families, in addition to school-age students and entailed individual, family, and group intervention strategies (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

In assistance with the community mental health center administration, functional family therapy was designated as another appropriate treatment resource due to the increasing population of juvenile offenders and the growing need for an effective approach for servicing dysfunctional families. Other treatment approaches consist of programs which addressed dropout prevention, recovery services, underemployment, substance abuse, crime, and other counterproductive behaviors (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Prevention Component

Prevention activities selected were school-based and intended for preschool through middle school youth due to the greater possibility for preventing at-risk behaviors (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Rather than implement RURAL in a mandated, top-down fashion, it was decided that individual schools would determine their desired level of collaboration and participation, with the anticipation that the positive attributes of the programs would be apparent once teachers and support staff recognized their effectiveness. Following this occurrence, schools would then “own”

their chosen programs, possibly resulting in improved and enhanced implementation (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

The role of the prevention team, which included school psychologists and a social worker, entailed training and providing technical assistance to school staff in order to cultivate and broaden prevention programs. The prevention team applied a strategic change approach which stressed awareness, support, and sustainability. Instructors could request differing levels of support, which comprise of modeling, handouts, corrective feedback, and/or consultation (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). In addition, schools or teachers could also request other resources such as posters, videos, customized handouts, to support new, additional strategies. The prevention team held primary responsibility for offering support and allocating requested resources (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Each school involved with the RURAL project assembled school safety personnel groups which consisted of a school psychologist, principal, school counselor, and one or more teachers. Individuals belonging to this team were responsible for, “(a) accessing the safety needs of their school through safety audits... (b) hold [investigations] of crisis drills, and (c) assess concerns such as communication gaps between [various school employees and departments]” (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003, ¶ 21). Student climate data was provided in addition to the utilization of plans which addressed such issues as bullying, social isolation, and equity in enforcing school rules and policies. Each team was provided with possible methods and strategies selected by RURAL which could potentially determine appropriate strategies to adopt (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Incidentally, each school personnel team’s request for additional support and/or resources needed to be connected to each school’s safety school personnel plan. These

plans were deliberately and carefully created for each building, with some concentrating on the needs on the entire school population, while others focused on a particular, individual strategy. Also, some schools modified their plan annually, revising specific aspects based upon changing needs and perceptions on what was desired or needed (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Intervention Component

The intervention team consisted of social work staff designated to certain schools or programs. Due to state funding specifications, school social workers in the state of Kansas were only utilized with children who received special education services. With the acquisition of the RURAL program, *any* child or family was eligible. In 2001, 164 families obtained services (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). In addition, these services are voluntary, linked to schools, convenient for families, and possibly most importantly, are free (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

This intervention included individual and/or family services, specific school-based services, parent education, and advisory and staff development for early childhood programs. Also, needs-based appraisals were conducted at each individual school in order to establish which school-based services were appropriate (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Individual or family assistance were implemented within the home or school environment, during daytime or evening hours, which also were provided through a family-driven, solution focused approach (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Issues characteristically addressed basic parenting strategies, supervision, boundaries, academic attendance, discipline, and resource allocation. Family-based concerns also typically included depression, loss, financial stress, divorce, and/or mental illness. Case

management and referrals to additional agencies and services were also available. The referral process encompassed parents or teachers denoting particular children as requiring assistance provided via a school psychologist or school counselor before referring them to RURAL. This strategy can be perceived as beneficial in that it guaranteed that there was an evident and well-defined need for services and that the referral itself was not an attempt to circumvent a more appropriate referral to the community health center or a special education team (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). If additional, more extensive referrals were required, allowing a school employee to contact the family would primarily serve to diminish barriers to the acceptance to services for their children (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

In addition, psychoeducational and specifically aimed school-based groups were habitually co-led with the school's psychologist or counselor. Subjects discussed entailed dating, healthy relationships, and depression. Targeted students engaged in anger management or social skills acquisition groups. Short intervention groups were also developed for high school students who had infringed upon school substance abuse policies (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Thirty-one students took part within the 2001-2002 academic year (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Parenting support and education exhibited high interest as demonstrated by full, regularly-attended classes, waitlists, and additional extra sessions. Fifty-two adults participated overall (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Treatment Component

In alliance with the community health center, the RURAL project contributed support for functional family therapy training for staff and clinicians. In addition, school

psychologists and counselors were asked to take part in Functional Family Therapy (FFT) introductory training. The treatment component of RURAL consists of dropout prevention and recovery services. Curriculum is customized and self-paced in nature in which materials such as computer-assisted instruction, videos, CD-ROMS, books, magazines, and newspapers are utilized (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Child care and evening hours are typically used by those who are parents or who work during daytime hours. Individuals who have dropped out of the primary educational system enroll in the recovery program. Within a two year period, 25 individuals have received high school diplomas due to the implementation of this program (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). This piece of information holds extreme significance in that a majority of students enroll with few high school credits and may be able to only attend and participate in a few hours of class time weekly (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). To date, dropout prevention and recovery services have assisted 200 individuals (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Overall, 450 individuals have enrolled at the community learning center from June 2000 to June 2002 (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Individuals who utilize these services can earn high school credits for failed classes following school or during the summer. Also, the learning center adopted by RURAL also serves as an alternative educational placement (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Not only can these resources be applied to at-risk or high risk students, adult English courses are also available and were used by seven adults in 2000-2001; 80 in 2001-2002 (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). In addition, parents participate in evening classes located in a local neighborhood school in which free child care is provided to promote attendance.

Community Outreach Component

RURAL has demonstrated a high level of engagement and participation within Ellis County (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). This occurrence has been evidenced by RURAL project staff establishing media contacts by way of television, radio, and newspaper. In addition, local public service announcements have been implemented and broadcasted numerous times daily (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

A RURAL resource library is also open to all residents within the community and provides over 500 resources. District school psychologists, counselors, and teachers utilized several of the materials offered within the library. Parents and local agencies also utilize resources when needed. These materials encompass reference books, government publications, games, videos, program guides, parenting programs, and counseling resources (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Subject material found within the resources comprises of crisis response, parenting, child development, divorce, death, alcohol and drugs, psychological disabilities such as attention deficit disorder, home visits, cultural competency, tolerance, school safety, violence prevention, conflict management, peer mediation, and bullying (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Lastly, local, state, and nationwide programs and conferences are the primary mode of external communication for the RURAL project. Such conferences and programs held nationwide include If Children are the Future, Parent Hold the Key Initiative which brings particular issues to the surface such as substance abuse and domestic violence through means of positive parenting skills and community resources (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Presentations at the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (Paige, Francis, & Schiada, 2002; Paige, Hodgdon, Douglas, &

O'Day, 2001, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003) , the National Conference on Advancing School-Based Mental Health Programs (Paige, 2002b, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003), along with the Safe Schools/Healthy Students National Conference (Cohen & Paige, 2002; Paige 2000b, 2002a, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003) have also been methods for conveying RURAL's message on a national level RURAL was featured prominently at the Surgeon General's Community Forum on Youth Violence (Paige, 2001b, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003) and the Centers for Disease Control SafeUSA Leadership Conference (Paige, 2001c, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Articles pertaining to the RURAL project have also been included in national newsletters such as the *Communiqué* (Paige, 2000a, 2001a, as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003) and the *Challenge* ("Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative", 2001; Paige, as cited in Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Additional collaborative enterprises include Safe Instead of Sorry Conference which addresses school violence and substance abuse prevention and developmental assets.

On the state level, the RURAL project was a primary feature at several school psychology association conferences (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

The Role of School Psychologists

The function of the school psychologist plays an essential role within the development, implementation, and evaluation of the RURAL project. RURAL was constructed and written by two school psychologists who became the future Project Director and Prevention Team Coordinator (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). The prevention team was also comprised of school psychologists due to the need for these individuals' skills and experience with systems modification and consultation as well as

their reputation as proactive members within the academic setting. Furthermore, school psychologists are key, active players at the building level in that they often tend to drive school team activities and help design strategic plans for crisis response, bullying prevention, and other project objectives (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

RURAL Local Evaluation

Evaluation Planning and Process Evaluation Development

All school sites involved within the Safe Schools/Healthy Students programming as well as the RURAL project are mandated to evaluate and monitor the progression towards program goals and objectives. The evaluating agency of interest utilized the Docking Institute of Public Affairs, a research branch of Fort Hays University. Being involved with the RURAL project since its creation, this establishment ensured that appropriate measures were taken to secure familiarity with the components of RURAL as well as their evaluation processes (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). The steps taken to construct an evaluation plan are as follows: 1. *Defining goals and objectives*. This was conducted by converting project goals and objectives into “straightforward and tangible items” (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003, ¶ 39). Those involved within the evaluation process delineated goals and objectives into seven components: a) the provision of selected school services, b) the provision of selected social services, c) the provision of selected mental health services, d) lowering the rates of substance abuse, violence and crime, e) enhancing school safety, f) implement school safety codes and policies, and g) evaluating the activities of the RURAL project (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

2. *Identifying major RURAL components and categories*. Some components were particular programs that operated on an independent level, while others functioned in a

more continuous fashion. Those who evaluated RURAL created a plan that measured and monitored specific information for broader RURAL components. RURAL project components were arranged into five categories of prevention: a) programs, b) intervention/treatment services, c) staff development, d) school policies, and e) community awareness (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). 3. *Selecting Tracking Procedures.* Following the identification of the components, tracking methods were created. These methods were initially developed for semiannual collection, but as the federal tracking initiation took place, it became evident that there would be duplication and overlap with some of the measures when evaluating a few of the RURAL programs set in place by both the project staff and the national evaluator. As a result, the local evaluation process comprised of concentrating on a specific unduplicated set of monitoring procedures which largely encompassed satisfaction surveys and service application tracking procedures (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). 4. *Evaluating questions developed by component categories.* Though each component category possessed diverse assessment needs to a certain extent, as much comparability as possible was achieved across all categories. Overall, each new program or service was evaluated from the perspective of those accepting or providing services. Also, the views of parents and the community itself were acquired. If needed, certain items featured case studies (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). 5. *Developing Surveys to address evaluation questions.* The types of surveys utilized included process evaluation-related surveys which measured satisfaction in addition to surveys which measured project outcomes or attitudes of students, parents, teachers, other school personnel, community members, and RURAL staff. All surveys possessed an open-ended and multiple-choice question format. In order to compare

different service components and respondent types, terminology was kept as similar as possible within all the surveys (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). 6. *Planning of confidential process interviews*. The final step in the evaluation process entailed confidential interviews with RURAL staff, service providers, and/or the prevention team. This was designed to service two purposes: 1) to identify particular case studies to supplement the more encompassing outcome measures, and 2) to improve information from the process evaluation surveys (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

School and Community Climate Surveys

Several of the goals and objectives of RURAL were associated with developing positive changes within both the schools and the community on issues related to violence, drugs, safety, and the utilization of mental health and social services (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Consequently, assessment efforts were focused on tracking *attitudinal* and *behavioral* changes. Two surveys were constructed with this sole prospect in mind. A school climate survey which consisted of questions pertaining to school affiliation, rule adherence, bullying, violence, alcohol awareness, drugs or weapons brought onto school grounds, isolation and emotional support, academic support, parent and community involvement, teacher/principal/school staff relations, and school building environment was developed (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). In addition, a community climate survey was introduced in which the questions concentrated on awareness and willingness to accept new RURAL services, school safety topics, substance abuse, and the incidence of violence within the community (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Following the implementation of the two climate surveys, it was found the questions differed greatly across both surveys and were administered differently within

each school building. Given these findings, it was determined that developing a school climate survey which included all the desired survey characteristics was a productive strategy. This survey was created by researching other survey instruments. The end result encompassed age-appropriate terminology and choosing questions to be addressed within the RURAL school climate survey (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Incidentally, the RURAL project evaluation process utilized both data extracted from both process and outcome evaluation measures. Following the distribution and completion of the above mentioned surveys, data was provided to RURAL staff and utilized to serve individual school-needs assessments (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Individualized reports were supplied to every building so that problem areas could be identified and remediated. As an outcome measure, climate data was also applied to determine whether bullying, substance abuse, school violence, school alienation, as well as other indicators had transformed over time (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Climate Administration

Due to the potential intrusiveness involved and difficulty in gauging small climate changes when applying pre-test/post-test methodology within this evaluation process, a continual random sampling agenda was utilized. At the onset of the academic year, each school district provided evaluators with classroom lists from each building. The prevalence of surveying a specific school was dependent upon the number of classrooms. Schools with smaller numbers of student enrollment, usually consisting of elementary schools, were surveyed once each semester or year whereas larger school such as the middle and high schools were sampled on a pre-created sampling schedule. Within the first survey year, baseline sampling was implemented into all buildings during the fall,

with continual sampling during spring semester. Survey year 2 encompassed continual sampling throughout the entire year. In addition, to decrease student impact and time to complete the surveys, students were recommended to complete either the school or community survey, rather than complete both at one time. This was achieved by surveying in-classroom pairs (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Teachers and staff were also assessed using a continuous random sampling format identical with the student sampling. In addition, parents from all schools were sampled during activities such as parent/teacher conferences or school events (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Impact Outcome Evaluation

The goals and objectives of the RURAL project along with the requirements of the federal component provided the foundation for the selection outcome measures (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Education measures consisted of attendance and dropout rates, suspension and expulsion rates, informal disciplinary reports, and academic tests scores. Social measures entailed child abuse/neglect reports, and births to single teens. Criminal justice measures encompassed juvenile court decisions, criminal court filings, and reported alcohol/drug rates (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Case Study Interviews

Case studies were deemed as a highly crucial component to the evaluation process, but also equally essential was the maintenance of anonymity of clients within a small community. In order to gain this type of unidentified status, RURAL staff was interviewed rather than their clientele (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). An instrument was created and provided in advance to all interviewees. Approximately half of the interviews

focused on process evaluation topics mentioned previously, while the remaining portion was concerned with asking staff and service providers to discuss and describe what was personally considered to be relevant experiences of success and failure found within their clients (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Findings indicated clients exuded seemingly positive and noteworthy endings. It appeared that the RURAL project has provided necessary, adequate, and appropriate support to those families in need (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Success of Research-Based Programs

The last aspect of the RURAL project evaluation process encompassed gathering information and data regarding the implementation and impact of its evidence-based prevention programs (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). It seemed that evaluating changes in outcome measures by utilizing a pretest/posttest program was the more accurate method for evaluation, having program participants operate as their own controls or as conditioned controls (Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1996 as cited in Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

As stated before, the staff and service providers of the RURAL project made a decision before the onset of the project that programs would be implemented and administered from a “grass roots” approach. This was established with the perspective that utilizing a top-down method would result in maladaptive and counterproductive activities to occur within the school districts (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Rather, applying a bottom-up method in which buildings could take part in programs on an individually-desired level may potentially result in teachers and school staff witnessing successful outcomes and then further implement additional programs over time. This has

seemed to occur within Ellis County. It is estimated that participation will increase on a steady rate over the course of time and will soon achieve 100% within most schools (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations

This chapter will begin with a brief summary on the information provided describing the Rural Underpinnings for Resiliency and Linkages (RURAL) program as stated within the previous chapters of this study. In addition, the chapter will also encompass a critical analysis of the benefits and limitations of the RURAL project as well as recommendations for the RURAL staff to potentially utilize in order to acquire improvement.

Youth living in contemporary society experience numerous difficult situations within their lives compared to counterparts of generations past. Therefore, it is imperative that those young individuals become equipped with a strong and resourceful foundation with which to combat those adverse and potentially harmful occurrences. One such opportunity for laying the groundwork and then solidifying the bedrock of youth resiliency can be found within the school and community in which these youth and their families reside (Frydenberg, 2004). The Rural Underpinnings for Resiliency and Linkages (RURAL) project is one such framework which provides a multitude of resources and services to children and families living in rural Kansas. By utilizing a public health model, which emphasizes increased school safety and community, the RURAL program was able to establish and incorporate strategy selection, prevention, intervention, treatment, and community outreach-related services and resources via research and evidence-based measures. Outcomes and goals of the RURAL program were then evaluated and examined by way of implementing supplementary research-oriented analysis. In sum, it seems the RURAL program is one whose strategies can be

deemed both valuable and useful for enhancing and sustaining youth resilience within the school and community (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Limitations of the Current Investigation

Due to limited resources, this examination and analysis of youth resiliency should not be taken as a conclusive and exhaustive account of what is provided within the area of resilience. Rather, this literature review should be perceived as only one facet and perspective within the multidimensional arena of youth resilience programming. In addition, though much research has been performed within the development and assessment components of the RURAL project which entailed significant, positive outcomes, this framework can still be conceived as a fairly modern approach towards youth resilience education and thus, should extract more extensive and detailed analysis highlighting the efficacy of this program from other parties other than those who solely work as staff or administrators within the RURAL program.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

It can be concluded the RURAL program could be potentially replicated within other communities for several reasons. It provides a method with which to utilize the public health perspective in tandem with school safety and healthy behaviors in a diverse and comprehensive manner (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003). Also, the focus upon both the prevention and staff development aspects of this program have allowed for school and community collaboration. Overall, this model has been quite effective and beneficial within a rural setting (Paige, Kitzis, & Wolfe, 2003).

Together, the concepts of collaboration and resiliency create a powerful vehicle for fostering coping skills and inner psychological strength within youth (Linquanti,

1992). According to Linquanti, “By applying the conceptual framework of resiliency to our collaborative efforts, families and communities become vital participants in improving their own lives, and their strengths, capacities, and assets become valuable resources” (Linquanti, 1992, ¶ 3). In addition, Chaskin and Richman contend that, “If we see planning, promoting, and provision of the full range of children’s services and opportunities as the responsibility of the community, that responsibility can become a [powerful agent] for enriching or even creating community” (Chaskin & Richman, 1992 as cited in Linquanti, 1992, p. 6).

Furthermore, schools can take a particularly active role in which the community acts as buffer and provides further support within the development and manifestation of resilience within youth and their families. There is a growing body of literature which advocates for the fostering of academic engagement (Morrison, Brown, D’Incau, Larson-O’Farrell, & Furlong, 2006). For instance, as children first enter the school environment, individual early academic progress and achievement essentially paves the way for the successful development of self-efficacy, positive coping strategies, and resilience, overall (Smith & Carlson, 1997). Research has also indicated a social environment rich in supportive peers, positive teacher influences, and academic and personal success supplemented with academic resources or assistance can increase the opportunity for resilience to develop within youth (Cooper, Estes, & Allen, 2004). Kitano and Lewis (2005) have also identified similar findings. It appears schools whose academic staff communicate high expectations, offer caring and support, encourage student participation, and provide a student-centered curriculum rich in complex, real-life

problems contributes to higher levels of educational resilience to be acquired by students (Kitano and Lewis, 2005).

Though heavily emphasized and incorporated within the program, these above mentioned aspects may be, in future time, examined more heavily in order to assess and further refine the resources and services provided by RURAL. One such method may be to determine which factors can be effectively and realistically addressed within correctional educational programs (Pasternack & Martinez, 1996). More specifically, if particular factors are addressed in the manner as stated previously, those RURAL programs which target young individuals who take part in underage substance use and/or school rule violations may benefit the most in that they may then tend to experience the highest levels of modification and lowest levels of recidivism. In addition, Sagor (1996) found that data assessment and evaluation is a critical aggregate in determining which students “slip through the cracks” and virtually miss the best and most beneficial programs provided by the school and community (p. 40). Thus, it may be reasonable to contend that future effort be dedicated toward research and analysis into a district-wide screening instrument which can be given to any and all students within a given community. This may be a more effective approach in that it potentially further recognizes and identifies all of those students who are classified as “at risk” but failed to be recognized by screeners and other identification measures previously utilized. These young individuals may then also be entitled to those resources and services provided by the RURAL project.

Conclusion

In sum, if increased research and evaluation-based measures can be contributed to improve the already positive, encouraging, and invaluable services provided by RURAL, a widespread trend of Resilience Education may emerge throughout the nation in which families and schools work together to facilitate and support the integration of youth Resilience Education within their community. As Bruner rightly noted, “Collaboration is only a means to an end, a process where people work together toward shared goals they cannot achieve by acting alone” (Bruner, 1991, as cited in Linqanti, 1992, ¶ 8). As such, a vast array of literature has suggested and implicated that, “The people we most need to be actively involved as key players in the process are the very children, families, and communities we hope to help” (Linqanti, 1992, ¶ 8).

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