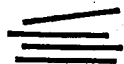


**RISK AND RESILIENCE
IN CHILDHOOD
AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Mark W. Fraser, Editor

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SCHOOL FAILURE: AN ECOLOGICAL- INTERACTIONAL-DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Jack M. Richman and Gary L. Bowen

Many students today experience difficulty adjusting to school and acquiring the social and academic skills necessary for pursuing advanced education and training. As a result their opportunity for functioning successfully as adults in work and family roles is being jeopardized. With limited means and opportunities to achieve self-sufficiency through employment, many of these young adults are unable either to participate meaningfully in society or to find personal satisfaction and purpose. Poverty and welfare dependency become a way of life for many, especially females (Bowen, Desimone, & McKay, 1995; Harris, 1991). For others, the future is even more bleak: school failure has been associated with higher mortality rates, higher incidence of suicide, and more frequent admissions to state mental hospitals (Brenner, 1976; Rumberger, 1987).

The impact of school failure has consequences for society as well for the individual, including a waste of human capital, loss of national income, loss of tax revenues, earlier involvement in sexual intercourse, higher risks of sexually transmitted disease, increased use of and demand for social services, more crime, reduced political participation, and higher health care costs (Carnahan, 1994; Levin & Bachman, 1972; O'Malley, 1977; Santelli & Beilenson, 1992). In addition to these concerns, business leaders have noted that many students either graduate or leave school before graduation without the basic competencies to perform even rudimentary tasks in industry, much less to hold positions requiring more technical ability or knowledge (Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1988). Such a loss of human capital places a heavy weight on the U.S. economy and greatly restricts this nation's competitiveness in the world economy. Helping to keep students in school and to promote academic success are critical steps toward promoting greater and more competent adult role performance. These aims have important implications for the individual, the family system, the economy, and the general well-being of society.

It is interesting to note that the heightened interest in school dropout and school success by researchers, politicians, educators, business and community leaders, and consumers comes at a time of declining nationwide dropout rates. In 1900, 4 percent of the population completed high school; by 1950 that figure had risen to 50 percent,

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and the graduation rate now stands at approximately 75 percent in the United States (Carnahan, 1994; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Given these positive trends for the past 100 years, why are school success and educational resilience such important issues in America today? Several possible explanations exist. Chief among them is the fact that school failure appears to have more severe consequences for individuals and society today than it did for prior generations (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Hepburn & White, 1990; Levin & Bachman, 1972; O'Malley, 1977; Rumberger, 1987; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Furthermore, school failure seems to affect poor people and individuals of color disproportionately more than economically stable and heterogeneous populations. The implications of not acquiring minimal high school competencies in the context of prevailing social and economic realities place young people in much greater jeopardy of failing to achieve the entry-level abilities necessary to function as competent adults in a complex society.

This chapter considers an individual's resilience as a central protective factor that promotes his or her successful adaptation to the challenges and demands faced in school and in the larger social environment. After discussing the concept of school failure and the profile of students most likely to experience difficulty in academic settings, this chapter advances an ecological-interactional-developmental perspective to explain variations in levels of resilience across individuals.

At the center of an ecological-interactional-developmental perspective is the person-environment fit, a dominant viewpoint in a variety of helping professions. Concepts from this perspective are used to discuss social structural experiences that may promote the development of resilience in children and how these experiences can become the foci of prevention, early intervention, and remedial efforts to reduce school failure. Last, we discuss the development and implementation of the School Success Profile, an assessment instrument informed by the ecological-interactional-developmental perspective.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

CONCEPT OF SCHOOL FAILURE

Comparisons of definitions of school failure by both practitioners and academicians reveal a great deal of conceptual confusion. Indicators and predictors of school failure often overlap; other times they are used interchangeably. For example, one study may emphasize poor grades as a predictive variable of school failure (Rumberger, 1983), whereas another uses grades as an indicator of school achievement (Steinberg, Elman, & Mounts, 1989; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Some authors avoid distinguishing between indicators and predictors altogether by talking more generally about correlations and associations.

Although the school dropout problem should not be overlooked or minimized, it is only one manifestation of school failure. Large numbers of students stay in school but do not or cannot participate in ways that enable them to acquire the requisite skills to function even at basic educational levels. Some researchers have postulated that the number of "academically marginal students" (Alpert & Dunham,

1986) or "interior dropouts" (Martz, 1992) is equal to the number of students who actually drop out of school (Martz, 1992). Alpert and Dunham (1986) define academically marginal students as those youths in school who display low attendance, low grade-point averages, and low scores on achievement tests. Therefore, the problem is not only preventing school dropout but also maximizing school success. As Wehlage and Rutter (1986) stated, "The problem is not simply to keep educationally at-risk youth from dropping out but, more importantly, to provide them with educationally worthwhile experiences" (p. 375). Redefining the focus from dropping out to maximizing school success greatly increases the area of concern, because a focus on school success includes the entire school-aged population, that is, school dropouts, academically marginal students (interior dropouts), and students who function at acceptable educational levels or higher.

Our perspective of school failure encompasses both school dropout (physical absence) and poor attendance, low achievement, and grade retention (psychological absence). It is possible to construct a simple typology of school failure by treating physical presence and psychological involvement in school as dichotomous variables (see Boss, 1988, from which this typology is adapted). Physical dropout from school is a dichotomous variable that assesses whether a student is physically enrolled (present) or withdrawn (absent). Poor attendance, low achievement, and grade retention are defined as indicators of psychological investment in school.

This typology reveals four categories of students. The first group includes those students who have both physically and psychologically withdrawn from school. For these students, dropping out of school merely formalized their psychological withdrawal as manifested in poor attendance, low achievement, and grade retention. For example, data from the National Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 suggest that a high percentage of students who leave school drop out, in part, because they are failing school and could not keep up with their schoolwork (U.S. Department of Education, 1990, 1992). These students probably will not return to a traditional school setting.

The second group involves students who physically drop out of school but remain psychologically invested in their education; these students, while attending school, evidenced at least satisfactory academic progress. These students may have dropped out of school because of situational circumstances or structural constraints, such as pregnancy. For example, many girls who participated in NELS and who dropped out of school reported a family-related reason for dropping out of school: became pregnant, became a parent, got married, or had to support the family or care for a family member (U.S. Department of Education, 1990, 1992). In the context of tangible support and encouragement, students in this group probably will either return to school to complete their education or pursue alternative educational opportunities.

Martz's (1992) label of "interior dropouts" perhaps best captures the next group of students, those who are physically enrolled in school but who are psychologically withdrawn. It is this group of students who often require the most help from school officials and who, without intervention, are very likely to join the first group of students.

This logical typology is completed by the fourth group of students, who represent what may be used to describe school success—students who are both physically and psychologically involved in school. This cell in the typology shifts the perspective from a pathological model of school failure to a model of school success that is oriented to the study of health, well-being, and successful coping (Antonovsky, 1991). An important goal of school-based interventions is to help students move from the first

three groups into the fourth group or to move them into alternative educational or career opportunities that will increase their economic prospects.

PROFILE OF SCHOOL FAILURE

Although no student is immune to school problems, students more vulnerable to academic problems and poor psychosocial adjustment in school are those from racial and ethnic minority groups and lower socioeconomic levels (Rumberger, 1987). These composite group effects (or contextual variables) are highly confounded with one another, and they are related to other predictors of school failure, such as family structure (Mulkey, Crain, & Harrington, 1992). Contextual variables serve as proxies for the more specific situational and behavioral variables associated with the structural variable in question. Each informs the social reality of individuals through its influence on the system of opportunities and constraints that individuals experience in society, as well as through its association with the normative system of values and beliefs that informs behavioral choices (Bowen & Pittman, 1995).

In the following analysis of data from the Bureau of the Census, dropout rates are an important criterion for school failure across racial or ethnic groups and socioeconomic status (Livingston & Miranda, 1995). Gender is not a major correlate of school failure and therefore is not included in the body of this discussion. (There has been a steady upward trend in the past 20 years for both male and female students in grades 10–12 to stay in school, although female students remain in school at a slightly high rate than male students.)

Racial or Ethnic Group

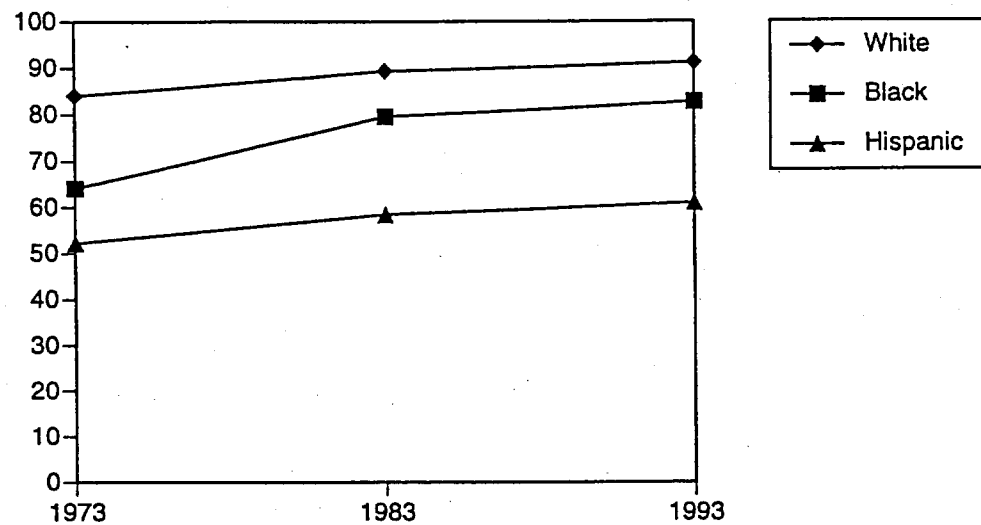
When the percentages of people 25 to 29 years old who completed high school are compared by racial or ethnic group identity in 1973, 1983, and 1993, it is evident that there has been a steady increase in the high school graduation rates of white, black, and Hispanic students (Figure 6-1). Although the proportion of white students who graduate from high school (91.2 percent) remains higher than that for either black students (82.7 percent) or Hispanic students (60.9 percent), black students have shown the largest percentage gain from 1973 to 1993 (a 29 percent increase). The comparative increases for white students and Hispanic students were 8.6 percent and 16.4 percent, respectively. In considering the relationship between recent immigration status, language, and school success or failure, Frase (1992) noted that many Hispanic students face special challenges in school that help explain their lower graduation rates. She stated that 45 percent of the Hispanic population between the ages of 16 and 24 in 1989 were born outside the United States. In addition, she noted that 73.9 percent of Hispanics in the same age range in 1992 reported that Spanish was the language spoken in their home.

Socioeconomic Status

Figure 6-2 illustrates the association between socioeconomic status (SES) and high school completion. Socioeconomic status is divided into three categories: low (bottom 20 percent of all family incomes), middle (middle 60 percent), and high (upper 20 percent). Across the three successive cohorts of students (1973, 1983, and 1993) who were in grades 10 to 12 and between ages 15 and 24, a smaller proportion of low

Figure 6-1

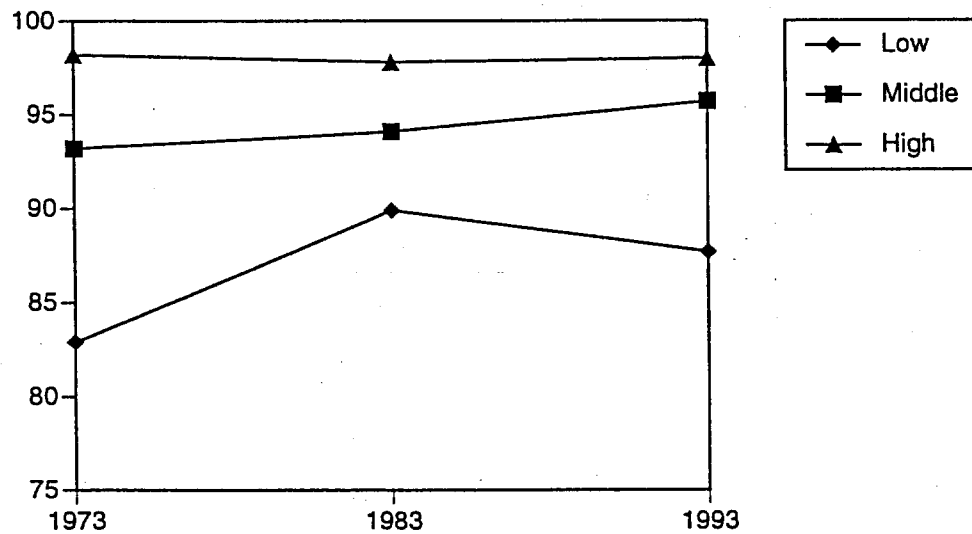
The Percentage of 25- to 29-Year-Olds Who Have Completed High School, by Race or Ethnicity



SOURCE: Livingston, A. M., & Miranda, S. (Eds.). (1995). *The condition of education, 1995*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Figure 6-2

Percentage of High School Students in Grades 10 to 12, Ages 15 to 24, Enrolled the Previous October Who Were Enrolled Again the Following October, by Family Income



SOURCE: Livingston, A. M., & Miranda, S. (Eds.). (1995). *The condition of education, 1995*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

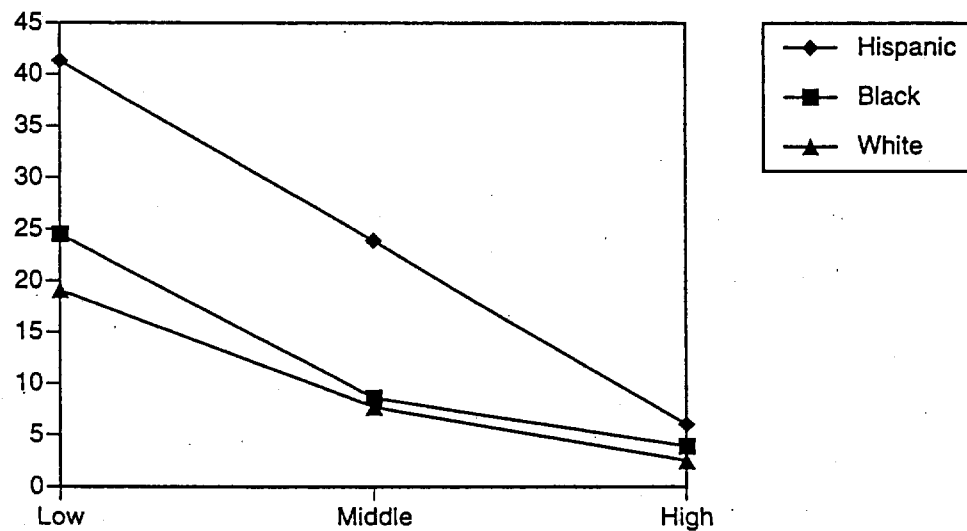
NOTE: Low income is the bottom 20 percent of all family incomes; high income is the top 20 percent of all family incomes; and middle income is the 60 percent in between.

SES students maintained continuous enrollment from one October to the next October. Further, Figure 6-2 suggests that while the continuous enrollment differential between middle and high family income is closing, the gap between students from middle- and high-income families and students from low-income families is widening. These results suggest that children living in families with low SES are five times more likely to drop out of school than those in higher SES families (cited in Carnahan, 1994). It is likely that a stable and sufficient family income provides children with a set of experiences, as well as an opportunity and resource base, that reinforces the importance of education and an orientation toward the future (Livingston & Miranda, 1995).

Wehlage and Rutter (1986) considered the relationship between racial or ethnic group identity and school failure to be spurious, explained by the association between racial or ethnic group identity and SES. After adjusting for SES, they maintained, the relationship between racial or ethnic group identity and school dropout disappears. Support for this conclusion was found in data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, which compares dropout rates among youth ages 16 to 24 by family income and race or ethnicity. As Figure 6-3 shows, racial or ethnic group differences diminish as family income increased. Dropout rates for white, black, and Hispanic youths from high-income families were 2.5 percent, 3.9 percent, and 6.0 percent, respectively; only 3.5 percent separates the lowest from the highest group. For low-income families, the percentages are 19.1 percent, 24.5 percent, and 41.3 percent and the lowest and highest groups are differentiated by 22.9 percent (Livingston & Miranda, 1995).

Figure 6-3

Dropout Rates among Youths Ages 16 to 24, by Income and Race or Ethnicity



SOURCE: Livingston, A. M., & Miranda, S., (Eds.). (1995). *The condition of education, 1995*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

NOTE: Low income is the bottom 20 percent of all family incomes; high income is the top 20 percent of all family incomes; and middle income is the 60 percent in between.

BEATING THE ODDS

Of course, not all students who possess one or more of the risk factors related to school failure actually experience school failure. Whatever their particular adversities, the majority of students graduate from high school, including lower-income Hispanic and black youths. More attention has been paid in recent years to those students who seem to "beat the odds" (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994, p. 46). In the search for protective factors that buffer the potential effects of risks and promote the positive adaptation of individuals, the concept of resilience has been introduced into the literature as a psychological construct (Garmezy, 1993; Wang et al., 1994; Werner & Smith, 1982). Although several behavioral and social scientists have offered nominal definitions of resilience in agreement with Garmezy (1993)—"The central element in the study of resilience lies in the power of recovery and in the ability to return once again to those patterns of adaptation and competence that characterized the individual prior to the pre-stress period" (p. 129)—some authors attempt to define resilience by identifying the selective individual or situational characteristics that promote such recovery. For example, Beardless (1989) considered self-understanding to be the essential feature of resilience: "Resilient individuals have a total organizing conceptualization of who they are and how they came to be" (p. 275). In some cases, authors have attempted to provide more situation-specific definitions of resilience, paralleling Bandura's (1982) treatment of self-efficacy as a more situation-specific concept. For example, Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994) defined educational resilience as "the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments, despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences" (p. 46). Yet, as discussed in earlier chapters, definitional ambiguity is the rule rather than the exception in definitions of resilience. Researchers often fail to distinguish between resilience as an outcome and resilience as a process, as well as between its indicators and its predictors. In critiquing the literature on resilience, Lavee (1995) asked whether resilience implies "being," "doing," or "having."

TOWARD A NOMINAL DEFINITION OF RESILIENCE

If resilience is a major discriminator between students who succeed at school and students who do not, it seems critical for purposes of intervention to better understand variations in this variable. Thus, this chapter focuses on resilience as a dependent outcome. *Resilience* is defined as a general frame of reference or belief system through which individuals appraise events and situations in the environment. It allows them to define situations from their environment as a challenge and an opportunity and to act with understanding, confidence, and persistence in overcoming or rebounding from the consequences of associated adversities through environmental mastery and individual adaptation. It is conceptualized as a variable that may range from low to high; following the distinction between "primitive" and "higher-order" beliefs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), it is derived more from accumulated experiences than from conformity to external authority, and it is subject to influence from new experiences, reinterpretation of earlier events, and knowledge of the experiences of others.

This definition of resilience parallels definitions of similar constructs in the literature, including Antonovsky's "sense of coherence," Bandura's "self-efficacy," Kobasa's

"hardiness," and Rotter's "locus of control" (see Antonovsky, 1991, for a discussion of the similarities and distinctions among these concepts). Each of these related constructs reflects a "salutogenic" perspective, which focuses attention on explaining health and well-being rather than sickness and pathology. Like resilience, each is best understood in the context of specific stressors faced by the individual at particular points in life (compare Rutter, 1987). Sense of coherence, self-efficacy, hardiness, and locus of control may be conceptualized as manifest indicators of resilience. Benard (1991) used a similar conceptualization when she wrote that the profile of the resilient child included "social competence," "problem-solving skills," "autonomy," and "sense of purpose and future" (pp. 3-6). This idea may be especially attractive because operational measures have been developed for each of these related constructs.

Why are some children more resilient than other children when confronted with stressors and risk factors in their environments? Newspapers are filled with stories about children who somehow seem to rise above their problematic situations. On the other hand, there are also stories about other children who fail to thrive or who fall victim in even the most advantageous situations. How do we understand such differences in the outcomes that children experience? The following discussion of the ecological-interactional-developmental perspective attempts to address this issue of individual differences.

AN ECOLOGICAL-INTERACTIONAL-DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

The study of individual differences has been informed by two rich traditions in the behavioral and social sciences: the "human factors" approach and the "situational" approach. The human factors approach focuses attention on those more-or-less stable and enduring features of individuals, including needs, values, expectations, beliefs, motives, traits, feelings, abilities, and attitudes (Chatman, 1989). From this perspective, individual outcomes are best understood as reflecting variations in the internal characteristics of individuals.

From the situational perspective, individual differences are explained by considering individuals in the context of the social structures that frame and inform their individual orientations and behavioral choices (Bowen & Pittman, 1995). Such biographical, social, political, economic, and historical forces are typically viewed as more dynamic than individual-level features and are therefore more open to change and intervention.

Although studies of resilience reflect the perspectives of both human factors and situations, the additive and interactive nature of individual and situational variables also needs to be addressed to develop explanatory and predictive models of resilience. In social work and other fields, the interplay between the features of individuals and the features of their situations is often captured from the perspective of a person-environment fit. Yet to fully comprehend this complex interplay it is necessary to conceptualize the nature of the situation beyond the immediate environments of the individual (neighborhood, school, friends, and family) to include broader structural and normative influences. Such a viewpoint is perhaps best seen in the ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garbarino, 1992). Also, the nature of the fit between person and environment must be conceptualized as dynamic to reflect the ways that

the individual and the situation, as well as their interaction, change and evolve over time. Each of the components of the ecological-interactional-developmental perspective is discussed below.

AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In capturing the process of mutual adaptation and accommodation that takes place between individuals and their environment, a person-environment fit perspective by definition reflects an ecological approach. As defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979), "The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded" (p. 21). Bronfenbrenner conceptualized the environment as a set of four regions, each of which is embedded within the next and defined from the perspective of their proximity to the individual: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

The *microsystem* is the environment in which the person directly participates and interacts (activities, roles, and relationships), such as neighborhood, school, family, and friends (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Because children's experiences in the microsystem most directly shape their views of the world and are incorporated into their beliefs about self (Garbarino, 1992), events in the microsystem play a decisive role in contributing to the development of resilience in children.

The *mesosystem* represents the connections between the microsystems in which children participate. Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted that the mesosystem "comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (p. 25). An important mesosystem for adolescents is the relationship between their parents and friends. Strong and positive connections between various microsystems provide a supportive context for the child's development; weak connections or the existence of value conflicts between various microsystems may place the child at a disadvantage for developing those attitudes and behaviors that are associated with developmental success.

The child does not participate directly in the next setting, the exosystem; however, events in the exosystem reverberate to influence situations and circumstances in the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined the *exosystem* as "one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (p. 25). For example, a sibling's experience at school or a parent's experience at work will affect the developing youth even though the child does not directly participate in the specific environment.

The *macrosystem* is the environment most distal from the developing child and reflects the broad ideological and institutional patterns in society. It is important to underscore that the "environment" goes well beyond the immediate environments that individuals inhabit: it also includes the economic, political, and sociocultural environments (Jessor, 1993). Forces in the environment that limit opportunities for children or weaken the operation of environments at the lower levels (national policies that tolerate families living in poverty, for example) place a child at developmental risk and provide a poor context for the development of resilience.

AN INTERACTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

An interactional perspective focuses on the "goodness-of-fit" between the characteristics of individuals and the characteristics of their environment. Goodness-of-fit is a variable that ranges from favorable to unfavorable, and its evaluation is made in the context of the individual's development and within the broader sociocultural-historical milieu (Germain & Gitterman, 1995). The ecological-interactional-developmental perspective assumes that resilience is a consequence of favorable "goodness of fit" over time, which "promotes continued development and satisfying social functioning and sustains or enhances the environment" (Germain & Gitterman, 1995, p. 817).

At least two levels of fit can be specified: needs-supplies and demands-competencies (Caplan, 1983, 1987; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982; Harrison, 1978; Moos, 1987). First, individuals have certain needs related to their physical and psychological survival. For example, Maslow's (1954) hierarchy includes needs that are physiological, social, and affiliative, as well as needs for safety and security, esteem and recognition, and self-actualization. Maslow suggested that individuals are motivated to meet these needs and that needs at a higher level are not motivating until needs at the lower level are satisfied. The first type of fit considers these needs in the context of the opportunities, resources, and supplies available in the environment to meet them: the needs-supplies fit. It is likely, for example, that children find it hard to develop resilience in environments that are so unpredictable and chaotic that basic needs for safety and security cannot be met.

The second type of fit considers the level of congruency between demands and requirements from the environment and a child's competencies, capacities, and skills for meeting these demands: the demands-competencies fit. Like their adult counterparts, children occupy social positions (student, for example) with intrinsic expectations for performance that tend to become more ambitious as children move across the developmental life span. At the same time, children have certain competencies at particular developmental points that are based on the interplay of heredity, learning, and maturation. A goodness-of-fit is achieved when children are faced with demands from their environment that are appropriate to their abilities. It is important to note that environments may be overdemanding as well as underdemanding in the context of a child's abilities. Children who face environmental demands that they lack the competencies to meet are likely to feel self-doubt, frustration, hopelessness, and despair. On the other hand, children who face situations that fail to challenge them and mobilize their skills and capabilities may become bored and seek out experiences with negative implications for their own development, well-being, and social functioning. The resulting behaviors also have negative implications for their host communities. In either of these incongruous situations, the development of resilience may be impaired.

These two types of person-environment fit are not always independent of each other. For example, citing Caplan (1983), Kulik, Oldham, and Hackman (1987) concluded that "reducing the demands of the environment in order to provide a better match with the person's abilities may result in a lessened capacity of that environment to satisfy the person's needs for growth and development" (p. 279). It is also important to distinguish between the objective reality and the reality as perceived by the child (Caplan, 1987; Harrison, 1978). Children's views of themselves as well as their perceptions of their environments may be more or less congruent with assessments by independent observers. Nevertheless, it is their subjective reality that children respond

to and that forms the basis for their development of resilience. Last, the nature of person-environment fit must be seen as dynamic. Individuals are constantly working to increase the level of fit between themselves and their environments through coping strategies that are directed toward the environment, self, or both (Germain & Gitterman, 1995; Harrison, 1978).

A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

From a developmental perspective, children are not just passive agents within their environments. They act, as well as react, in response to their surroundings. The nature of this interaction and its consequences for the individual and society must be understood from a perspective that captures the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments over time, which Werner and Smith (1982) described as "the shifting balance between risk, stress, and protective factors in the child and his caregiving environment" (p. 133). This continuous interaction between individual and environmental forces over the course of a child's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development provides the context and experiences for the development of resilience.

From a developmental perspective, it is important to focus on the timing as well as the nature of events in a child's life (Rutter, 1989). For example, the ability of children to understand and cope with parental divorce depends in part on their developmental maturity (Richman, Chapman, & Bowen, 1995). Events that happen at nonnormative times, such as pregnancy in the teenage years, may spill over to disrupt progress along parallel trajectories, such as education.

The ecological-interactional-developmental perspective provides a broad conceptual lens from which to view resilience as a dynamic construct. It also offers some clues about the types of experiences that may promote the development of resilience in childhood, which is directly associated with school success and is a buffer between individual and situational risk factors and school success.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION, EARLY INTERVENTION, AND TREATMENT

The areas or environments of strength regularly identified in the research as characteristic of resilient children include the individual, the family, the peer group, the school, and the community (Benard, 1991; Wang et al., 1994). Practitioners who want to intervene with students who are at risk of school failure might find it helpful, from an ecological-interactional-developmental viewpoint, to assess, with the client, the individual student (addressing values, beliefs, skills, and competencies, for example), his or her interactions with the various layers of the ecosystems, and his or her developmental stage. The goal is to begin to develop interventions that support and strengthen the student and the microsystems in which the student is embedded. We believe that the most efficient course for the practitioner is to attempt to intervene in the social environment to effect change in the individual student, as outlined by the ecological-interactional-developmental perspective. That is, the practitioner should work with the family, peer group, school, and community to produce positive change and to help promote the development of resilience within the student. As discussed by Antonovsky (1991), the

environment needs to provide the student with three types of protective conditions—stability, load balance, and participation.

STABILITY

A consistent finding in the literature is that stable, close, and caring relationships between parent and child, as well as supportive relationships outside the family, play a protective role in the development of resilience (Werner & Smith, 1982; Wyman et al., 1992). Coleman (1988) referred to the strengths and supports that individuals have available from these relationships as "social capital," a resource that may be accumulated and, if needed, mobilized to meet internal needs and respond to external demands. Although the parent-child relationship is an important source of social capital for children, social capital may come also from sources both within and outside the household environment, as well as from linkages between the microsystems in which children are embedded (Coleman, 1988). The stabilizing and supportive role of teachers (Bingham, Heywood, & White, 1991; Werner, 1990), the peer group (Felsman, 1989), the school (Offord, 1991), the extended family and neighbors (Tracy, Whittaker, Boylan, Neitman, & Overstreet, 1995), and the community (Brook, Normura, & Cohen, 1989) for building resilience is documented in the literature.

LOAD BALANCE

Load balance for children and youths concerns how well the demands of the environment fit with the capabilities of the individual student (Antonovsky, 1991). The ecosystem in which the student is embedded can provide care and support or it can be a source of risk and stress. Each youth may or may not possess the individual competencies or resources to respond to the stressors presented. For example, parent employment may require that a child be left at home without adult supervision for several hours after school. The concept of load balance would examine whether or not the child is capable of managing that time alone at home. Rutter (1987) suggested that one way to achieve a good load balance is to shield children against risk factors in their environment. Other researchers (Chess, 1989; Wallerstein, 1983) noted that when one environment is highly stressful (the family, perhaps), children need to cope with that negative situation by seeking greater support from other microsystems (peer group, teachers and school, or the community, for example).

PARTICIPATION

Research suggests that resilience is encouraged and developed when children and youth have opportunities to meaningfully participate in and contribute to the environments that embody their microsystems. When families, schools, peer groups, and community all communicate the expectation that children and youths can and will handle their responsibilities successfully and participate in valued ways, the youths respond by developing a sense of autonomy, independence, heightened social competence, and—in a word—resilience (Benard, 1991; Wang et al., 1994; Wehlage, 1989). Werner and Smith (1982) describe this sense of involvement and participation as developing and enabling the social relationships that provide meaning for life and a reason for caring.

The three types of interactive protective conditions that arise from interaction of the student with her or his environment—stability, load balance, and participation—can provide keys and direction to planning interventions that help students at risk for school failure move toward greater resilience. These three protective conditions, together with the focus on the family, school, peer group, and community, can help practitioners and educational specialists begin to design intervention strategies that will strengthen a student's social competencies, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and sense of purpose.

A PRACTICE PLANNING FORM

The practice planning form depicted in Figure 6-4 can be used to target the ecological systems (family, school, peer group, and community) listed at the left of the form with interventions that promote the interactive protective conditions of stability, load balance, and participation. The practitioner can plan strategies that address the relevant intersects, which will ultimately influence the individual resilience factors listed at the right of the planning form. For example, in the family-stability intersect, the practitioner might plan interventions that attempt to enhance stability and caring within the family; in the school-participation intersect, the worker might intervene to try to increase a student's meaningful participation in school activities. The important point is that the practitioner must assess the student's environment for areas of strength or potential and then work with the student to develop practice strategies that target the identified intersect. This process should produce greater individual resilience. Examples of such targeted interventions are shown in Figure 6-4; each of the intersects displays a potential intervention strategy.

It should be remembered that nothing takes the place of professional expertise and judgment. The examples given in the practice planning form are probably most relevant for middle and high school students who are still engaged in school and are developmentally on target. They are provided as examples only—the practitioner must assess the client and his or her ecosystem and stage of development in planning and implementing appropriate and mutually acceptable interventions that will promote stability, load balance, and participation.

ASSESSING RISK AND RESILIENCE: THE SCHOOL SUCCESS PROFILE

Professionals who attempt to intervene with their clients to foster resilience may need to evaluate their progress. Increased accountability can be a critical aspect of program planning and development and often helps to ensure that programs use resources in the most efficient and effective manner. Many initiatives in schools function without outcome measures, but a measurement instrument can prove useful in some instances for monitoring the progress of program participants.

In 1992 BellSouth Foundation awarded a grant to the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to work with representatives from Communities-In-Schools (CIS) at the national, state, and local levels to develop and field test assessment instruments that local CIS representatives can use to monitor their success in achieving objectives. CIS is the largest dropout prevention program in the

Figure 6-4
Practice Planning Form

	Stability	Load Balance	Participation
Family	Home visit—Intervene with family to develop more positive relationship between student and his or her parent(s)/guardian. Parent education—Invite parents to meeting where the importance of family stability is discussed and explored.	Home visit—Work with the student and family to develop a reasonable set of expectations regarding free time versus supervised time. Explore the student's role as a main provider of family child care and try to negotiate a lower load balance of responsibility.	Parent and student education intervention—Invite parents to a meeting where the importance of their child participating in family life is discussed and explored. Brainstorm with students and families on how this goal might be accomplished.
School	Teacher and staff intervention—Provide the teachers and administrative staff with a training and renewal program that emphasizes the direct correlation between a student's positive relationship and attachment to teachers and staff and his or her successful school performance.	Teacher intervention—Work with teachers to understand the family overload that student may be facing. Develop ways that the teachers can be more supportive of student, for example, provide an afterschool tutoring program that allows the student to complete homework in a less stressful environment.	Teacher and staff intervention—Work with teachers and administrators to encourage student participation in school activities and recognize the importance of seeing students as consumers. Support students in their choices and stand as a role model in valuing student participation.
Peer Group	Social support group—A student social support group could develop out of a tutoring or an intramural program. The goal is to have peers become supportive of each other as they deal with issues such as pregnancy/parenting, family stress or disengagement, or academic concerns.	Peer group stress audit—Work with students in groups to evaluate their peer involvement. What is gained by their involvement with their peer group (for example, belonging or support) and what stress might be increased because of their peer group affiliations (for example, exposure to violence, conflict with parents)?	Psychoeducational peer discussions—Develop time-limited discussion groups where students are invited to share their experiences and expertise concerning how they deal with problems they face (for example, drugs, violence, sexuality, and grades).
Community	Volunteer program—Involve the student in a community volunteer program similar to Big Brother or Big Sister. Try to get a one- or two-year commitment on the part of the volunteer and the student.	Neighborhood safety and involvement assessment—Work with neighborhood leaders (for example, police, public housing officials, school administrators, youths, and residents) to develop a list of common safety and neighborhood involvement issues. Use this list as the basis for creating a community task force to generate solutions.	Community group involvement—Work with community organizations to reach out to youth and encourage them to become involved in community projects (such as Habitat for Humanity), volunteer in homeless shelters, tutor younger children, or participate on planning boards.



- Individual Resiliency Outcomes**
- **Social Competence**
 - flexible
 - empathy and caring
 - communication skills
 - visualize and generate alternatives
 - develop positive relationships
 - **Problem-Solving Skills**
 - alternative solutions
 - planning skills
 - **Autonomy**
 - sense of power
 - self-esteem
 - self-efficacy
 - impulse control and self-discipline
 - adaptive distancing
 - **Sense of Purpose**
 - healthy expectations
 - some control over one's environment
 - goal directedness

SOURCE: Richman, J. M., & Bowen, G. L. (1997). *The Communities-in-School Evaluation Project: The development of the School Success Profile*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

nation. The School Success Profile (SSP) is a survey questionnaire developed by Bowen and Richman, coprincipal investigators for the project, to help program staff describe those students selected for program participation; inform the process by which each student is provided a comprehensive program of academic services, social services, and employment and life-skills training; monitor changes in program participants over time; develop effective and responsive programs; and increase accountability to the major stakeholders.

Consistent with an ecological perspective, the SSP emphasizes students' perceptions of their four primary microsystems: neighborhood, school, friends, and family. It is designed to be used with middle school and high school students (11 to 18 years of age), and it results in two profiles: the Social Environment Profile and the Individual Adaptation Profile (see Figure 6-5). Each subdimension on the SSP has a positive label (neighborhood satisfaction, for example) and scores are coded to range from negative (low) to positive (high).

Special care was taken to keep the wording of instructions and survey items and response formats simple and to avoid highly sensitive subjects and questions that may violate community sensitivities. The SSP has been successfully field tested in middle schools and high schools in North Carolina and Florida. Validity and reliability of the measures on the SSP have been empirically established and supported.

The SSP is designed to yield group or program and individual profiles by school. The group score is scaled from 0 to 100 on each profile subdimension, which represents the percentage of the maximum score possible (average score across students divided by the maximum score possible). Each middle school is compared to a summary score representing the combined score from other middle schools, and each high school is compared to the combined score from other high schools. For example, if the average student score for George Washington Middle School on "neighborhood safety" is 75 percent and the combined average for other middle schools is 85 percent, students in George Washington Middle School reportedly feel less safe in their neighborhood than "average" middle school students. Practitioners can accordingly assess the areas of greatest concern and the relative level of risk factors for each individual student and the program or group as a whole.

The information on the group profile alerts practitioners to areas that may warrant group interventions and allows them to plan change strategies in these areas. Site coordinators are encouraged to meet with students who completed the SSP to discuss group findings and their validity, however, before using results from the SSP to plan interventions.

The SSP compiles a two-page individual profile in addition to a group profile, a feature that distinguishes it from other student profiles. The first page is the social environment profile; the second page is the individual adaptation profile. Information at the bottom of each page includes the student's ID number, gender, race or ethnicity, age, grade level, and proportion of valid responses.

Individual profiles are not scored in the same way as group profiles. Students receive a standard score on each profile subdimension (a T-score) that reflects their individual score in the context of scores from other students at the same grade level. Scores on each profile subdimension range from 20 to 80, with the average score being 50. Any score above 50 means that a student did better than average when compared

Figure 6-5

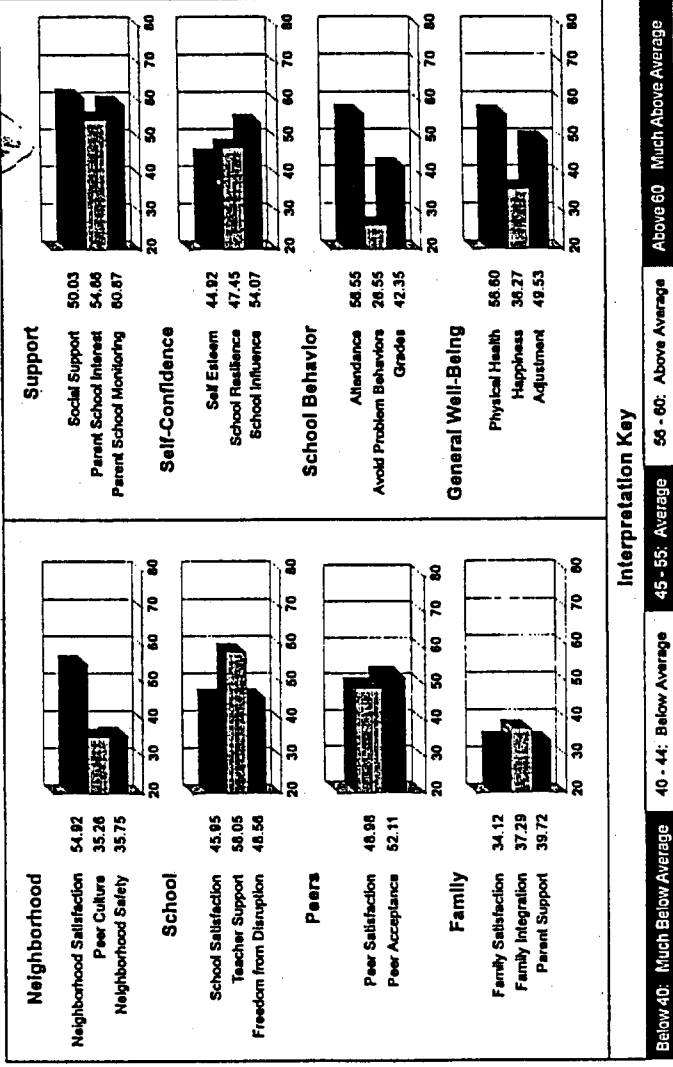
School Success Profile: Social Environment and Individual Adaptation Profiles



School Success Profile

Social Environment Profile

Individual Adaptation Profile



SOURCE: Richman, J. M. & Bowen, G. L. (1997). *The Communities-in-School Evaluation Project: The development of the School Success Profile*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

with other students; any score below 50 means that a student did worse than average. Of course, "better" and "worse" are relative terms. Because all components on the SSP are coded from low to high, the higher the score, the better; the lower the score, the worse. A key to interpreting scores is shown on the profile.

The SSP is designed to be administered more than once. Most often, students are given the SSP at the beginning and end of the academic year. These repeated administrations make it possible to calculate change scores for both group and individual profiles. These change scores help practitioners determine the extent to which their interventions are producing the desired effects.

Site coordinators are encouraged to meet with each student who completes the SSP and review the profile results. These results, of course, represent only one way to look at the life of the student, and practitioners should take care to establish whether the findings have any validity from the student's perspective. The SSP is designed to augment practitioners' ongoing observations of and dialogue with students. It is not a substitute for this process—it is designed to enhance and support that process. The intervention planning and monitoring form that accompanies the SSP helps the practitioner develop intervention plans with each student who completes the SSP. The form is designed to inform and monitor intervention activities that are directly connected to the data in the social environment and individual adaptation profiles (see Figure 6-6).

Two requirements help ensure the quality of the SSP experience. First, practitioners who wish to use the SSP must attend a two-day training session to learn about its administration, interpretation, and use in informing practice interventions and monitoring the effectiveness of those interventions over time. Second, students must get parental consent before the SSP is administered.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to accomplish the following five goals: to define the relationship between resilience and school success, to provide a profile of school failure, to present the ecological-interactional-developmental perspective as a theoretical viewpoint that helps explain individual variation in the level of resilience as a factor in school success, to suggest a practice framework that may help develop strategies and interventions leading to greater resilience in students, and to describe and discuss the SSP, an assessment instrument that has been useful in evaluating and monitoring programs and interventions that attempt to promote school success and increased levels of student resilience.

Promoting school success for all children and youth requires developing, supporting, and maintaining safe, caring, and challenging environments in which students can participate fully and gain a sense of acceptance and belonging as they prepare to assume adult roles. Many human services professionals, educators, and business and government leaders have joined together to find effective methods of helping our youth maximize their potential. Continued efforts are needed to promote a social context in which students can build resilience, succeed in school, and move successfully into adult roles and responsibilities.

Figure 6-6

School Success Profile: Intervention Planning and Monitoring Form



Student's first name and initial of last name _____

School _____

SSP ID # _____

A. Targeted Individual Adaptation Area(s) for change (☑ all appropriate areas):

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Support | Self-Confidence | School Behavior | General Well-Being |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Self Esteem | <input type="checkbox"/> School Attendance | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> P-S Interest | <input type="checkbox"/> School Resilience | <input type="checkbox"/> Misbehavior Avoidance | <input type="checkbox"/> Happiness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> P-S Monitoring | <input type="checkbox"/> School Influence | <input type="checkbox"/> Grades | <input type="checkbox"/> Adjustment |

B. Targeted Social Environment Area(s) for change (☑ all appropriate areas):

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Neighborhood | School | Friends | Family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfaction | <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfaction | <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfaction | <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfaction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peer Culture | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Peer Group Acceptance | <input type="checkbox"/> Integration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Safety | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Support |

C. After reviewing the Individual Adaptation and Social Environment profiles with the student, please list the three or four areas you and the student have checked ☑ (in sections A and B above), and chosen to target for intervention and change during the next several months.

Area 1. _____

Area 2. _____

Area 3. _____

Area 4. _____

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