

Risk and Resilience in Childhood

An Ecological Perspective

2nd Edition



Mark W. Fraser, Editor



NASW PRESS

National Association of Social Workers
Washington, DC

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School Failure: An Eco-Interactional Developmental Perspective

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Many students in public schools today experience difficulty adjusting to school and acquiring the social and academic skills necessary for pursuing advanced education and training. As a result, the opportunity for students to function 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. The rates of unemployment in 1999 were 52 percent higher for high school dropouts than for high school graduates (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Poverty and welfare dependency become a way of life for many, especially for females and their children; almost half of families on welfare are headed by a school dropout (Bowen, Desimone, & McKay, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). For others, the future is even bleaker; for example, poor academic achievement has been associated with higher mortality rates, higher incidence of suicide, increased criminal behavior, higher incidence of intravenous drug use, and more frequent admissions to state mental hospitals (Kaplan & Peck, 1997; Kasen, Cohen, & Brook, 1998; Mahoney, 2000; Obot, Hubbard, & Anthony, 1999; Rumberger, 2004).

In addition to school dropout, we define school failure as inclusive of poor social and academic performance while a student is in school. Dropout may be the culmination of chronic school failure, but it is also possible that a student may stay in school while failing to display the necessary academic or social school involvement to achieve success. The effect of school failure has consequences for society as well as for the individual, including loss of national income, lower family and individual incomes, higher unemployment, loss of tax revenues, earlier involvement in sexual intercourse, higher risk of sexually transmitted disease, increased likelihood of school-age pregnancy, increased use of and demand for social services, increased crime, reduced political participation, and higher health care costs (Carnahan, 1994; Decker, Rice, Moore, & Rollefson, 1997; Manlove, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In addition to these concerns, business leaders have noted that many students either graduate or leave

*The authors would like to thank the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation of Miami, Florida, and the BellSouth Foundation of Atlanta, Georgia, for their support of the development of the School Success Profile. The authors would also like to thank David Sheaves of the H. W. Odum Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Lawrence Rosenfeld, professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for their statistical assistance in preparing this chapter.

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 waste of human capital places a heavy burden on the U.S. economy and 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 children, the family system, the community, the economy, and the general well-being of society.

The heightened interest in school dropout and school success by researchers, politicians, educators, business and community leaders, and consumers comes at a time when dropout rates are declining. In 1900 roughly 4 percent of the population completed high school; by 1950 the school completion rate rose to 50 percent; and as of 1999 the high school completion rate for all adults 18 to 24 years old in the United States stood at approximately 86 percent (Carnahan, 1994; Kaufman, Kwon, Klein, & Chapman, 2000). Kaufman and colleagues (2000) estimated that in 1999 more than three in four students (77 percent) graduated from high school with a diploma while the remainder (23 percent) dropped out of school. Of those 18 to 24 year olds who did drop out, a portion eventually completed a GED or other high school equivalency, and when this group is included in the 1999 total high school completion rate, the 86 percent is reached.

This chapter focuses on the 23 percent of young adults who drop out of high school without receiving a diploma, as well as those who may remain in school but are not functioning adequately. High school completion is only one indicator of school success. Many students graduate from high school without the preparation needed for continuing their education or for successful entry into the job market (Decker et al., 1997; Warburton, Bugarin, Nunez, & Carroll, 2001). These students are not considered to be among the ranks of successful students and therefore are included in the focus of this chapter.

RATIONALE AND CHAPTER FOCUS

Given positive trends in high school completion for the past 100 years, why does school success remain an important concern in America today? As discussed earlier, school failure has severe consequences for individuals and society (Rumberger, 2004). 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. Furthermore, school failure seems to affect poor and minority individuals at disproportionately higher rates than economically stable and nonminority populations. We will return to this point in a subsequent section of this chapter.

This chapter considers resiliency as being derived from a composite of protective factors that promote successful adaptation to the challenges and demands faced by children in school, in the family, in the neighborhood, 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, an eco-interactional developmental (EID) perspective is used to explain variations in levels of educational resiliency.

At the center of an EID 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, the development and implementation of the School Success Profile (SSP), an assessment instrument for guiding social work interventions for students at risk of school failure, is discussed.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

THE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL FAILURE

Although school dropout should not to 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 successfully 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 average, and low achievement test scores. Therefore, the school failure problem is not only preventing school dropout, but also focusing on the larger issue of 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 it is inclusive of the total population of school-age youths, that is, school dropouts, academically marginal students (interior dropouts), and students who are currently functioning at acceptable educational levels or higher. In addition, the emerging issues surrounding the current emphases on end-of-year testing or high-stakes testing for students at all levels may apply pressure—individual and institutional—for students to leave school rather than to remain as marginal students who may not be promoted. Furthermore, these issues may encourage school administration to reconceptualize this type of “pressured” dropout as a necessary loss in an effort to raise the pass rate of the end-of-the-year test and heighten the academic rating of particular schools (Hauser, Simmons, & Pager, 2000).

Our perspective on school failure encompasses school dropout (physical absence), as well as poor attendance, psychological absence, low achievement, and grade retention. It is possible to construct a simple typology of school failure by treating physical presence and psychological involvement in school as dichotomous variables.¹ Physical school dropout is a dichotomous variable that assesses whether a student is physically enrolled (present) or withdrawn (absent). Poor attendance, low achievement, and grade retention are 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.

¹This typology is adapted from the work of Pauline Boss (1988) on boundary ambiguity.

For these students, dropping out of school merely formalized their psychological withdrawal, manifesting in poor attendance, low achievement, and grade retention. For example, data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 suggest that a high percentage of students who leave school drop out, in part, because they are failing and could not keep up with their schoolwork (U.S. Department of Education, 1992). These students may be unlikely to return to a traditional school setting.

The second group involves students who physically drop out of school but who are psychologically invested in their education and who, while attending school, evidenced at least satisfactory academic progress. It is likely that these students drop out of school because of situational circumstances or structural constraints such as pregnancy. For example, a number of females who participated in NELS and who dropped out of school reported a family-related reason for dropping out of school; they became pregnant, became a parent, got married, or had to support the family or care for a family member (U.S. Department of Education, 1992). In the context of social support and encouragement, students in this group are likely either to return to school to complete their education or to 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 resourcing by school officials and who, without intervention, are likely to join the first group of students.

The fourth group of students who represent what may be described as school success completes this logical typology—students who are both physically and psychologically involved in school. This cell provides a bridge to move from a pathological model of school failure to a salutogenic or strengths model of school success, which is oriented toward 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 successfully into alternative educational or career opportunities that will increase their economic prospects.

ASSESSMENT OF VULNERABILITY: A PROFILE OF SCHOOL FAILURE

Although no student is immune to school problems, certain students are more vulnerable to academic problems and poor psychosocial adjustment in school. One may identify specific demographic groups in which membership has been empirically shown to be a risk marker. Racial and ethnic minority youths, youths from lower socioeconomic families, and sexual minority youths experience higher rates of academic failure and dropping out. Students who are members of more than one of these groups may be at even greater risk of school failure due to cumulated risk factors. First, the issues of race and class will be considered.

RACE AND CLASS

Students from racial and ethnic minority groups and lower socioeconomic backgrounds possess two composite group effects that are highly confounded with one

another and are related to other predictors of school failure, such as family structure (for example unemployed parents, parental education level, single-headed household, number of children residing in a household; Hauser et al., 2000; Mulkey, Crain, & Harrington, 1992). These contextual variables serve as proxy indicators for more specific situational and behavioral factors that are related to variation in school failure. Each variable is associated with the system of opportunities and constraints that individuals experience in society, as well as the normative system of values and beliefs that informs behavioral choices (Bowen & Pittman, 1995).

Rumberger (2004) summarized two explanations for the achievement gap among racial and ethnic groups: (1) a resource disparity perspective and (2) a socio-cultural perspective. The resource disparity perspective holds that the discrepancy of personal and community resources and social capital may explain the higher school failure and dropout rates for racial and ethnic minorities. The sociocultural perspective suggests that variance across a culture, values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors concerning education, and a student's and family's role in supporting education can explain the gap in school success and achievement. For African American students, research suggests that racial identity, socialization (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999), and the parents' beliefs about education (Greif, Hrabowski, & Maton, 1998) have a protective effect on students' functioning.

In the following analysis of *Current Population Survey* data from the U.S. Census Bureau, we examine dropout rates as an indicator of school failure across racial or ethnic group and socioeconomic status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).²

Racial or Ethnic Group

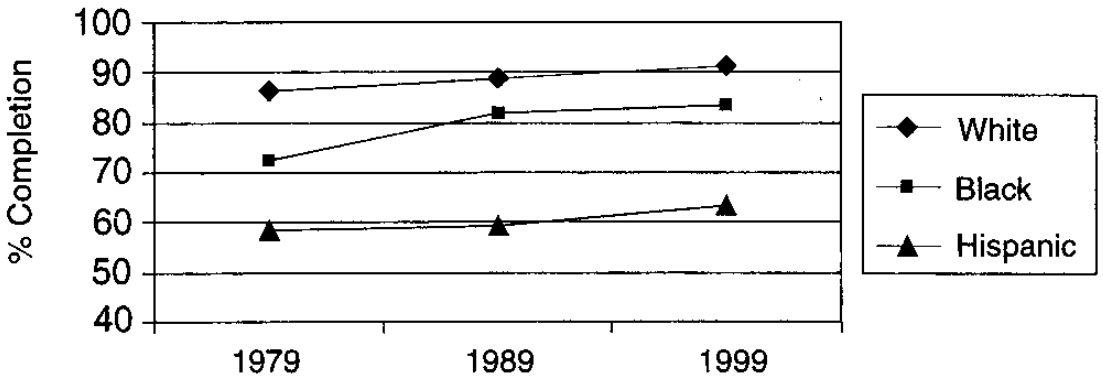
When the percentages of 18 to 24 year olds who completed high school are compared by racial or ethnic group identity in 1979, 1989, and 1999, small increases are evident in the high school graduation rates of white, black, and Hispanic students (see Figure 5-1). Although a higher proportion of white students (91.2 percent) continues to graduate from high school than either black students (83.5 percent) or Hispanic students (63.4 percent), black students have shown the largest percentage gain over the 20-year time period (10.9 percent increase). The comparative increase for white and Hispanic students was 4.6 percent and 4.9 percent, respectively. It should be noted that these high school completion rates include students who graduate from high school with a diploma as well as those youths who pursue alternative methods of completing a high school equivalency (for example, a GED).

Figure 5-2 depicts the rates of high school dropout for all 16 to 24 year olds by race or ethnicity. This measure of dropout is called *status dropout* because it "provides cumulative data on dropouts among all young adults within a specified age range" (Kaufman et al., 2000, p. 2). It is clear from Figure 5-2 that overall minority youth drop

²Gender 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 to 12 to stay in school. Females completed high school at a slightly higher rate in 1999 (87.1 percent vs. 84.8 percent). Female and male students did not differ in their dropout rates (approximately 5 percent event rate) for 1999 (Kaufman, Kwon, Klein, & Chapman, 2000).

Figure 5-1

High School Completion Rates of 18 to 24 Year Olds (Who Are Not Currently Enrolled in School), by Race and Ethnicity



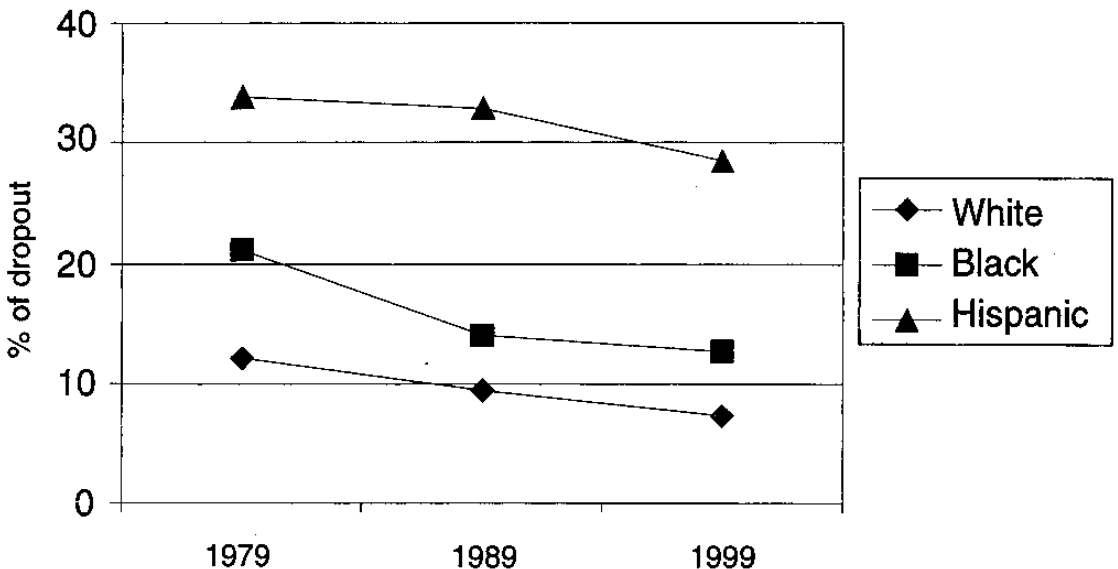
SOURCE: Kaufman, P., Kwon, J. Y., Klein, S., & Chapman, C. D. (2000). *Dropout rates in the United States: 1999*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

out in greater percentages than white youths. Over the past 20 years, white and black youth have had lower dropout rates (7.3 percent and 12.6 percent in 1999, respectively) than Hispanic youths (28.6 percent), who continue to drop out at more than twice the rate of black youths and nearly four times the rate of white youths.

In considering the relationship between recent immigration status, language, and school success or failure, Frase (1992) argued that many Hispanic students face special challenges in school that help explain their lower graduation rates. Frase showed that 45 percent of the Hispanic population between the ages of 16 and 24 in 1989 were born outside the United States. In addition, Frase noted that 73.9 percent of Hispanics

Figure 5-2

Rates of High School Dropout for All 16 to 24 Year Olds, by Race and Ethnicity



SOURCE: Kaufman, P., Kwon, J. Y., Klein, S., & Chapman, C. D. (2000). *Dropout rates in the United States: 1999*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

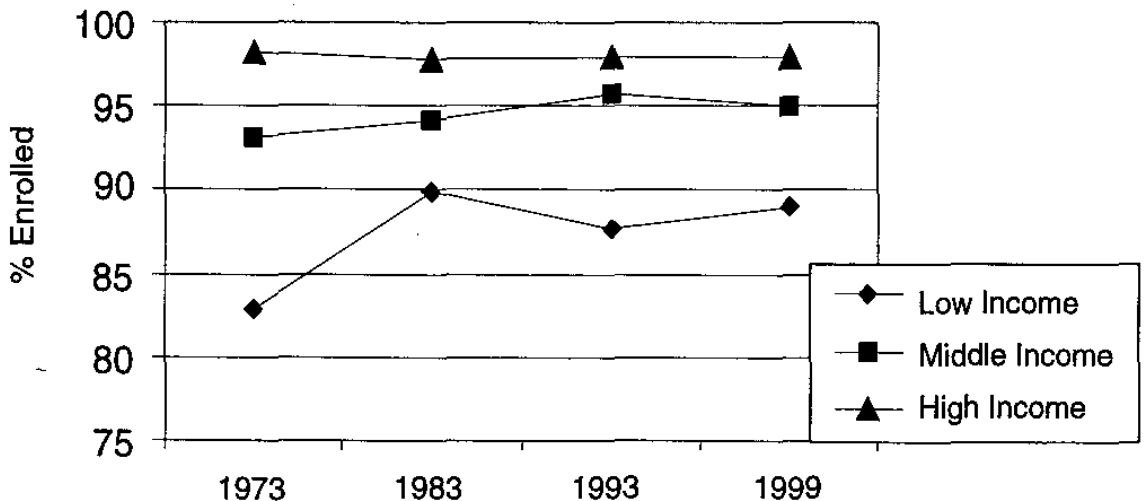
in the same age range in 1992 reported that Spanish was the language spoken in their homes. Kaufman and colleagues (2000) found that in 1999 the dropout rate for Hispanic youths ages 16 to 24 who were immigrants to the United States was 44.2 percent, and the rate for Hispanic youths born within the United States was 16.1 percent. On balance, the data suggest that race and ethnicity are highly associated with school failure. Progress is being made in closing the achievement gap, with black youths making the greater strides. Although Figures 5-1 and 5-2 suggest that the trends are in a positive direction, much remains to be achieved.

Socioeconomic Status

Figure 5-3 illustrates the association between socioeconomic status (SES) and *event dropout*. Event dropout is “the proportion of students who leave school each year without completing a high school program. This annual measure of recent dropout occurrences provides important information about how effective educators are in keeping students enrolled in school” (Kaufman et al., 2000, p. 2). In Figure 5-3, SES is divided into three categories: (1) low (bottom 20 percent of all family incomes), (2) middle (middle 60 percent of all family incomes), and (3) high (upper 20 percent of all family incomes). Across the four successive cohorts of students (1973, 1983, 1993, and 1999) who were in grades 10 to 12 and between ages 15 and 24, a smaller proportion of low SES students, as compared with their middle and higher SES counterparts, maintained continuous enrollment from the previous October to the subsequent October. Further, Figure 5-3 suggests that while the continuous enrollment differential between the

Figure 5-3

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



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

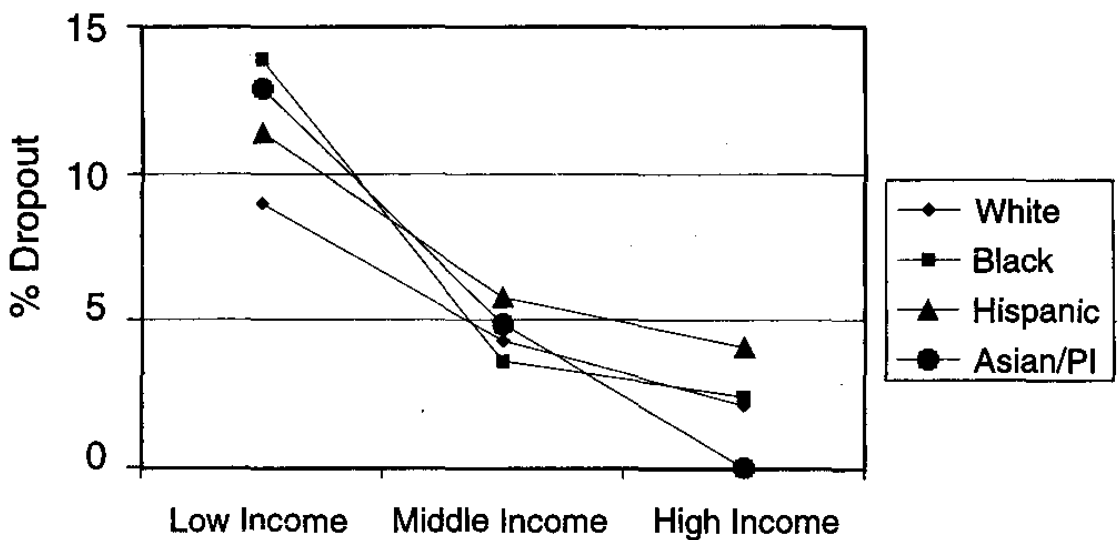
SOURCE: Kaufman, P., Kwon, J. Y., Klein, S., & Chapman, C. D. (2000), *Dropout rate in the United States: 1999*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

middle and high family income students is closing, the gap between the middle and high family income students and the low family income students is consistent, in that the low-income students always exhibit a higher rate of dropout.

In 1990 the President of the United States was joined by the governors of the 50 states in issuing educational goals for the United States to meet by the year 2000. Among these goals was a demand to meet a 90 percent standard for graduation rates for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). Although Figure 5-3 suggests that the nation is close to realizing this goal, children and youths who are in the lowest 20 percent family income bracket have not yet reached and maintained this standard. A stable and sufficient family income is likely to provide children with a set of experiences, as well as opportunities and resource bases, that reinforce the importance of education and an orientation toward the future (see chapter 2; U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

In discussing the relationship among racial or ethnic group identity, SES, and school dropout, 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 concluded that the relationship between racial or ethnic group identity and school dropout disappeared. From data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), dropout rates among youth ages 16 to 24 by family income and race or ethnicity were compared, and the results are supportive of Wehlage and Rutter's conclusion. As seen in Figure 5-4, racial or ethnic group differences diminish as family income increases. Dropout rates for white, black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander youths from high-income families are 2.1 percent, 2.4 percent, 4.1 percent, and 0 percent, respectively; only 4.1 percent sep-

Figure 5-4
Event Dropout, by Race, Ethnicity, and Family Income



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

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (2000), *Current population survey*, October 1999. Washington, DC: Author.

arates the lowest from the highest group. For low-income families, the 1999 dropout percentages are shown in Figure 5-4 as 9.0 percent, 13.9 percent, 11.4 percent, and 12.9 percent, respectively. The lowest and highest groups are differentiated by 4.9 percent. The greatest reduction in dropout rates for all racial or ethnic groups was between the low family income categories and the rates for the middle family income groups. Clearly, for white, black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students the higher the income, the lower the dropout rate.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Students

Sexual minority students, or gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) youths, comprise a third demographic group in which membership serves as a risk marker. GLBT youths have recently drawn increased attention from researchers and school practitioners as experiencing higher rates of multiple risk factors for school failure. Among the risk factors identified as affecting GLBT youths are harassment, social isolation, stigmatization, violence, family disruption, depression, suicide, substance abuse, homelessness, and general health problems (Lock & Steiner, 1999; Marinoble, 1998; McFarland & Dupuis, 2001). Given this list of risk factors affecting multiple developmental domains—social, psychological, familial, and physical—it is not surprising GLBT students experience a higher rate of school failure.

Many of the risk factors affecting GLBT youths appear to share the common etiology of homophobia and heterosexism. GLBT students often experience the effect of homophobia or heterosexism as conflict with their families and as harassment by peers at school and other settings. Psychological and physical health problems may result when conflict and oppression are internalized.

Although few schools would tolerate hate speech or behavior toward racial, ethnic, or religious minorities, words such as “queer” and “fag” continue to be heard regularly in our nation’s schools (Smith & Smith, 1998). A setting that tolerates harassment or worse of GLBT students supports an environment for negative outcomes including school dropout. Several authors describe a pattern in which school personnel ignore, discount, or even participate in the harassment and rejection of GLBT students (Anderson, 1997; Fontaine, 1998; Smith & Smith, 1998). In the context of identifying programs to reduce harassment of GLBT students, Henning-Stout, James, and Macintosh (2000) proposed a three-level definition of harassment, including individual, group, and sociocultural harassment. Individual and group harassment are self-explanatory, and all groups who are marginalized within a setting suffer from this form of harassment, including GLBT students. However, sociocultural harassment occurs in an environment in which “overt and covert . . . negative and harmful stereotypes about homosexual people” (Henning-Stout et al., 2000, p. 182) are left unrecognized or unchecked by those in positions of authority.

RISK FACTORS AND SCHOOL FAILURE

Risk can be broadly defined by “the presence of one or more factors or influences that increase the probability of a negative outcome for a child or youth” (Richman & Fraser, 2001, p. 2). These risk factors may have a biological or ecological etiology or

a combined biopsychosocial origin. Therefore, risk may be conceptualized as individual attributes or conditions existing within the environment. At the individual level, conditions include biological factors (for example, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, low birthweight) and individual social characteristics (for example, having a risk-taking temperament). Ecological or contextual factors include parental loss (for example, divorce, separation or death) and living in an impoverished neighborhood with a high crime rate (see chapter 2 for a full discussion of risk, protection, and resiliency). Identifying which risk factors or cumulation of factors are correlated with or predictive of negative school outcomes for children and youth is critical to developing effective interventions for impacting school failure (Richman & Fraser, 2001).

One of the more important developments in research examining school-related outcomes is the increasing emphasis by researchers on risk factors in the social context (Nash & Bowen, 1999; Pollard, Hawkins, & Arthur, 1999). This includes risk factors at multiple levels in the ecology of the student, including the family, the peer group, the school, and the neighborhood. When school failure is viewed in context rather than by focusing only on the demographic and personal characteristics of students, the focus shifts from profiling the individual to addressing broader situational concerns.

Recent research examining the relationship between risk factors in the neighborhood and school-related outcomes is a case in point. For example, Bowen and Bowen (1999) found that students' reports of neighborhood danger were associated with their self-reported attendance, trouble avoidance at school, and grades. As reports of neighborhood danger increased, students' difficulties increased. In a subsequent analysis, Bowen, Bowen, and Ware (2002) presented evidence showing that neighborhood social disorganization exerts a direct negative effect on educational behavior and an indirect negative effect through decreasing supportive parenting behavior and educational support from parents.

Research is helping not only to identify aspects of the social environment associated with school failure, but also to determine for whom and under what circumstances these social contextual factors pose more challenge. Bowen and Bowen (1999) noted that students experiencing the highest level of neighborhood and school danger are those of color, those from families who struggle economically, and those who live in urban areas—characteristics that are highly confounded. Continued research is needed to identify the risk profiles of students at highest risk of school failure; the operation and interaction of risk factors over time for specific groups of students, including the operation of complex risk chains; and the protective factors buffering the impacts of specific risk factors on school outcomes.

BEATING THE ODDS

Of course, not all students who may possess one or more of the risk factors related to school failure actually experience school failure. Whatever their respective adversities, the majority of students graduate from high school, including GLBT youth and lower-income Hispanic and black youths. In recent years, there has been increasing attention paid 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 as a psychological construct (Garmezy, 1993; Wang et al., 1994).

A number of behavioral and social scientists have offered nominal definitions of resiliency. Garmezy (1993) suggested that “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). Vance (2001) defined resiliency as “the ability of a person to rise above significant adversity and have a reasonably successful life course, avoiding serious psychiatric disorder, substance abuse, criminality, or social-relational problems” (p. 44). In some cases, authors have attempted to provide more situation-specific definitions of resiliency. For example, Wang and colleagues (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). Perhaps the critical part of many of these perspectives on resilience is that resilience is fashioned and exists in the presence of risk or adversity; this idea is consistent with the broad definition of resilience offered by Richman and Fraser (2001), which states that “Resilience is not necessarily based on individual characteristics; it occurs at the nexus of high risk and exceptional resources, whether these resources are personal or environmental in nature” (p. 7).

TOWARD A NOMINAL DEFINITION OF RESILIENCY

If resiliency is a major discriminator between at-risk students who succeed at school and those who do not, it seems critical for the purposes of intervention to better understand variations in this variable. Clinicians need to be able to identify individual and ecological characteristics that have a high potential for building and supporting resilience. Practitioners can then develop strategies of intervention that target the development and maintenance of these characteristics of resilience.

Resiliency is defined for this review as a general frame of reference through which individuals appraise and react to events and situations in the environment. It allows children and youths, when confronted with stressful situations, to construct socially adverse situations as challenges and opportunities and to access adequate amounts of available individual and environmental resources. Resiliency is demonstrated and becomes observable as youth respond with understanding, confidence, persistence, and resourcefulness in rebounding from the consequences of adversities through environmental mastery and individual adaptation.

As reflected in the work of Benard (1991, p. 2), the elements or characteristics that comprise this resilient frame of reference may include the following: social competence, autonomy, a sense of purpose, contextual factors, and problem-solving skills (Benard, 1991; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1999). Social competence involves individual flexibility as well as the ability to demonstrate empathy, communicate effectively, and express the facility to develop positive relationships with adults and peers. Autonomy includes individual feelings of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-discipline. A sense of purpose consists of the ability to be planful, to be goal directed, and to maintain healthy expectations. Contextual factors include perceptions of living in a safe environment—home, school, and neighborhood—and having accessible and supportive peers and adults. Problem-solving skills allow youths to evidence some control over their ecology, exercise planfulness, and develop a variety of potentially successful

solutions to various problematic issues. This frame of reference relates to both internal and external factors and realities in the life of a child or youth. The characteristics of resiliency can help focus practitioners as they consider strategies of intervention that will build resilience and support school success.

Our definition of resiliency parallels definitions of similar constructs in the literature, including Antonovsky's (1991) "sense of coherence," Bandura's (1986) "self-efficacy," Kobasa's (1979) "hardiness," and Rotter's (1975) "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, as compared with sickness and pathology. Like resiliency, each is best understood in the context of specific stressors that are faced by the individual at particular points in the life span (Rutter, 2001). A sense of coherence, self-efficacy, hardiness, and locus of control may be conceptualized as manifest indicators of resiliency—an approach similar to that used by Benard (1991) in describing the profile of the resilient child. This may be an especially attractive idea because operational measures have been developed for each of these related constructs.

Why are some children more resilient than others 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. However, there are also stories about other children who fail to thrive or fall victim to in even the most advantageous situations. How do we understand such differences in the outcomes that children experience? The following discussion of the EID perspective attempts to address this issue of individual differences.

AN ECO-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 the more or less stable and enduring features of individuals, including needs, values, expectations, beliefs, motives, traits, feelings, abilities, and attitudes (see 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 understood through viewing persons in the context of the social structures that inform their individual orientations and behavioral choices (Bowen & Pittman, 1995). Such biographic, social, political, economic, and historical forces are typically viewed as more dynamic than individual-level features and, therefore, more open to change and intervention.

Although studies of resiliency reflect both "human factors" and "situational" perspectives, it is increasingly recognized that the development of explanatory models of resiliency requires the study of both the additive and interactive nature of individual and situational variables. In social work and other fields, the interplay between the features of individuals and the features of their situations is often captured from a person-environment fit or interactional perspective.

Yet, to fully comprehend this complex interplay, it is necessary to conceptualize the nature of the situation beyond the immediate environments of the individual (for example, neighborhood, school, friends, and family) to include broader structural and nor-

mative influences (Bowen & Richman, 2002). Such a viewpoint is perhaps best seen in the ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garbarino, 1992; Germain & Gitterman, 1995). Also, the nature of person and environment fit must be conceptualized as dynamic to reflect how the individual and the situation, as well as their interaction, change and evolve over time—a developmental or transactional perspective. Last, an understanding of resilience requires more than an understanding of risk factors. The balancing and moderating influence of assets and protective factors is also an important focus—a salutogenic perspective. Each of these aspects of the EID perspective is discussed below.

AN INTERACTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

An interactional perspective focuses on the “goodness of fit” between the characteristics of individuals and the characteristics of their environments. 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 EID perspective assumes that resiliency is a consequence of favorable goodness of fit over time, which “promotes continued development and satisfying social functioning and sustains or enhances the environment” in the presence of adversity (Germain & Gitterman, 1995, p. 817).

At least two levels of “fit” can be specified: needs–supplies and demands–competencies (Caplan, 1987; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982). 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 few children “beat the odds” in environments—such as those living in war-torn countries—that are so chaotic that basic needs for safety and security cannot be guaranteed.

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 (for example, student) that have associated 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 both overdemanding as well as underdemanding in the context of a child’s abilities. Children who lack the competencies to meet environmental demands may experience feelings of self-doubt, frustration, hopelessness, and despair. However, children who face situations that fail to challenge them and mobilize their skills and capabilities may experience boredom. They may seek out experiences that have negative implications for their development, personal well-being, and social functioning, as well as negative implications for their host communities. In either of these incongruous situations, prevailing over adversity—resilience—is unlikely.

These two types of person–environment fit are not necessarily independent from one another. For example, Kulik, Oldham, and Hackman (1987, p. 179) 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.” It is also important to distinguish between the objective reality and the reality as perceived by the child (Caplan, 1987). Children’s views of themselves as well as perceptions of their environments may be more or less congruent with assessments by independent observers. Yet, it is the subjective reality to which children respond and which forms the basis for their development of resiliency. Last, the nature of person–environment fit must be seen as dynamic. Both the environment and the child change over time. We can think of child development as the efforts of children and their parents to find the best level of fit between themselves and their environments in the context of developmental tasks (Germain & Gitterman, 1995).

AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Encompassing 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. Bronfenbrenner (1979) 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. Risks and protective factors operate at each level.

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 resiliency in children.

The mesosystem represents the connections between the microsystems in which children participate. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 25) noted that the mesosystem “comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates.” 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 to develop those attitudes and behaviors that are associated with developmental success.

The child does not directly participate in the next setting, the exosystem; however, events in the exosystem reverberate to influence situations and circumstances in the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 25) 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.” For example, a sibling’s experience at school or a parent’s experience at work will impact the developing youth even though the child does not directly participate in the specific environment.

The macrosystem is the most distal environment from the developing child and reflects the broad ideological and institutional patterns in society. It is important to underscore that the "environment" goes beyond the immediate environments that individuals inhabit to also include 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 (for example, national policies that tolerate families living in poverty) place a child at developmental risk and provide a poor context for the development of resiliency.

A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

From a developmental perspective, children are not 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. Masten and colleagues (1999) operationalized resilience as an adaptive response to a threat to healthy development, which involves an interplay between the characteristics of individuals and their environment. 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 resiliency.

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 non-normative times, such as pregnancy during the teenage years, may spill over to disrupt progress along parallel trajectories. For example, a pregnancy may lead to a school change or changes in peer relationships.

A developmental perspective focuses attention not only on the present, but also on the past and the anticipated future. Children and youth have a developmental past, a history that informs and constrains their present situation. Children who have been abused or neglected may carry emotional scars into future relationships with adults. Children and youth also have some level of future orientation and anticipation about their lives, which may be imbued with positive or negative expectations. Some students who drop out of school may see little chance of graduating in the context of their current performance. The dynamic pushes and pulls from past experiences and future expectations provide an important context in which children experience the present.

A SALUTOGENIC PERSPECTIVE

A salutogenic perspective addresses factors that push children toward positive outcomes, like resilience. This perspective, which is similar to the strengths perspective in social work (Cohen, 1999; Delgado, 1997), helps counterbalance a focus on risk factors alone by addressing assets and protective factors that increase the probability that children will experience healthy developmental outcomes. Researchers have devoted a significant amount of attention to identifying and classifying protective factors

associated with positive outcomes when children are confronted with risk. As discussed in Chapter 2, these protective factors cluster into three categories: (1) individual temperamental qualities, (2) family affective characteristics, and (3) external support network characteristics (Waller, 2001; Werner, 1990).

Of the many protective factors and processes that have been associated with helping children overcome or avoid negative outcomes associated with exposure to risk, support from adults has been identified across a number of investigations as one of the more important protective factors in the adaptation of children (Nash & Bowen, 1999; Richman, Rosenfeld, & Bowen, 1998). The critical role of parents and adult caregivers in fostering children's development and ability to overcome life's adversities (Steinberg, 2001), the "centrality of the teacher" in supporting student achievement (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000), and the critical role of neighbors as supportive resources and agents of social control in child development (Bowen, Bowen, & Cook, 2000) affirm an additive model of support and the importance of multiple and diverse adults in the lives of children.

In sum, the EID perspective provides a broad conceptual lens from which to view resiliency as a dynamic construct. It also offers clues about the types of experiences that may promote the development of resiliency in childhood, which is viewed from the perspective of this chapter both as directly associated with school success and as a buffer between individual and situational risk factors and school success.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT, PREVENTION, AND INTERVENTION

The domains that are regularly identified in the research as capable of promoting educational resilience—if functional and serving as areas of strengths—include the individual, the family, the peer group, the school, and the community (Benard, 1991; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1999). Practitioners interested in intervening with students who are at risk of school failure might find it helpful, from an EID viewpoint, to work mutually with the client to make an assessment of the individual student (addressing values, beliefs, skills, and competencies, for example); his or her interactions within environmental contexts; and his or her developmental stage. The goal is to begin to develop interventions that support and strengthen the student individually and the microsystems in which the student is embedded. The most efficient course for the practitioner is to attempt to intervene in the social environment to effect change in the individual student; that is, the practitioner should work with the family, peer group, school, and community to produce positive change and help promote the development of resiliency. As discussed by Antonovsky (1991), the environment must provide the student with three types of protective conditions—(1) stability, (2) load balance, and (3) participation.

STABILITY

Stable, close, and caring relationships between parent and child, as well as the supportiveness of relationships that children experience with others outside of the family, play a crucial role in the development of resiliency (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1999;

Werner, 1990). 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 in meeting internal needs and responding to external demands. Although the parent-child relationship is an important source of social capital for children, social capital may come from sources both within and outside the household environment as well as from linkages that exist between the microsystems in which children are embedded (Coleman, 1988; Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000). Supportive relationships between parents or adult caregivers and other adults in the lives of children hold the potential to provide consistency in norms and experiences, which creates a stable and secure foundation for child development.

LOAD BALANCE

Load balance for children and youths involves determining how well the demands of the environment fit with the capabilities of the individual student (Antonovsky, 1991). On the one hand, the ecosystem in which the student is embedded can provide care and support; on the other hand, 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 has to do with whether or not the child is capable of managing that time alone. 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) note that in situations where one environment is highly stressful (the family, perhaps) children often cope with this negative circumstance by seeking greater support from the other microsystems (for example, peers, teachers, or community).

PARTICIPATION

Research suggests that educational resiliency is encouraged and developed when children and youths who are at risk have opportunities to participate in and contribute to their environments in a meaningful way. When families, schools, peer groups, and communities communicate the expectation that youth can and will successfully handle their responsibilities and participate in valued ways, the youth respond by developing a sense of autonomy, independence, heightened social competence, and greater resilience (Benard, 1991; Wang et al., 1994). For example, recent research has highlighted the protective value of students' participation in school activities outside of class work (Mahoney, 2000). Werner and Smith (1982) described 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 characteristics of person-environment fit that promote positive developmental outcomes in children—(1) stability, (2) load balance, and (3) participation—can also provide keys to planning interventions. Together with a focus on the contextual areas of family, school, peers, and community, ideas of stability, load balance, and participation can help practitioners and educational specialists begin to design interven-

tion strategies that strengthen children's social competencies, autonomy, sense of purpose, and problem-solving skills.

A PRACTICE PLANNING FORM: ASSESSMENT TO INTERVENTION

The Practice Planning Form (see Figure 5-5) can be used to inform the design of interventions to build resilience and to increase school success by promoting the development of protective conditions within multiple ecological contexts. A matrix may be constructed by crossing the four ecological domains (family, school, peer group, and community-neighborhood) with the three protective conditions (stability, load balance, and participation). The practitioner may plan strategies that affect each appropriate intersect and ultimately influence the resilience characteristics listed on the right of the Planning Form, which were adapted and expanded from the work of Benard (1991). 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 in an attempt to increase a student's meaningful participation in school activities. The important practice issue here is that the practitioner assesses the student's environment for areas of strength or potential and then works together with the student to develop practice strategies that target the identified intersect. The intent is to foster positive developmental outcomes for all children at risk to promote greater individual resilience. Examples of such targeted interventions are provided in Figure 5-5, in which each of the intersects is completed with a potential intervention strategy.

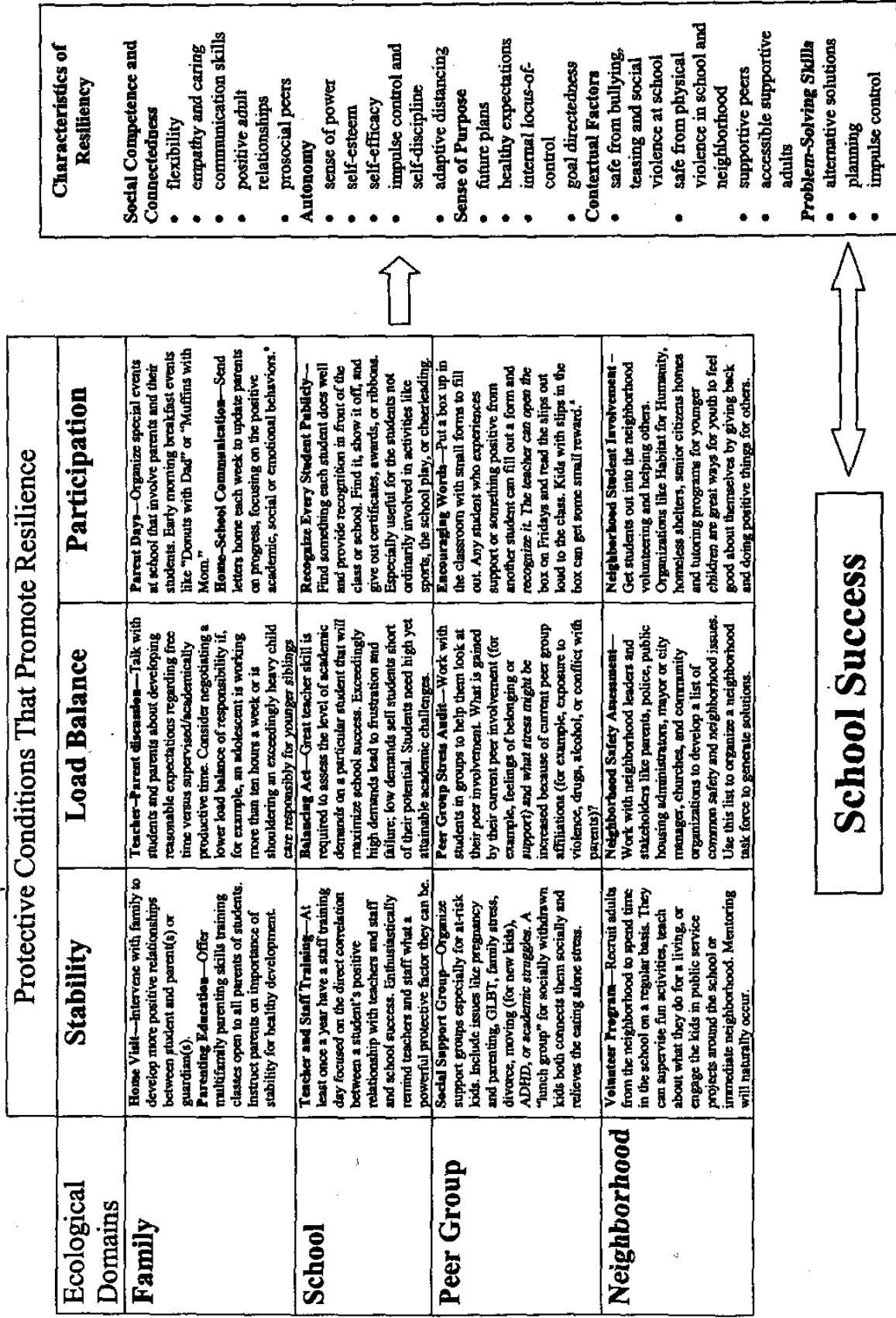
The interventions in the Practice Planning Form are provided as examples only. Practitioners, using their professional expertise and judgment, should assess the ecosystem, the client, and the client's developmental stage as appropriate. Mutually acceptable and developed interventions can then be planned and implemented to promote stability, load balance, and participation.

ASSESSING RISK AND PROTECTION: THE SCHOOL SUCCESS PROFILE

Professionals who attempt to intervene with their clients to foster resilience may need to evaluate their progress. Increasing such accountability can be a critical aspect of program planning and development. Assessment often helps to ensure that programs use resources in the most efficient and effective manner. A number of programs and products exist that provide ecological assessments of youths and their families for informing the design of intervention and prevention strategies. For example, Communities That Care (CTC; Hawkins, 1999) offers the CTC Youth Survey, which provides a youth needs assessment report; the report serves as a guide for building strong communities that can support children and families. The Search Institute (2003) also provides a survey for students and uses an asset-building model that results in the Profile of Student Life report, which can be used to develop relevant and appropriate programs and interventions that support students and families. Although many initia-

Figure 5-5

Practice Planning Form



* Adapted with permission from techniques used by Kara A. Rosenfeld, a teacher at Efland-Checks Elementary School in Efland, North Carolina, and Mary C. Fletcher, a fifth-grade teacher at North Chatham School in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

tives in schools continue to function without discernible outcome measures, the SSP (Bowen, Woolley, Richman, & Bowen, 2001) has proved highly useful for informing interventions and monitoring the progress of students over the school year.

In 1992 BellSouth Foundation awarded a grant to the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to collaborate with Communities-In-Schools (CIS) representatives at the national, state, and local levels to develop and field test assessment instruments that local CIS staff may use to monitor their success in achieving objectives. CIS is the largest private nonprofit network in the United States devoted to promoting high school graduation and success among students at risk of school failure. In 1995 the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and in 2000 the National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) joined the BellSouth Foundation as a stakeholders in this work. The SSP was developed as one such assessment instrument.

The SSP is a hard-copy, optical scan, survey questionnaire with 220 multiple-choice items designed to inform the process by which comprehensive programs of academic services, social services, and employment and life-skills training are provided to middle school and high school students. The SSP is useful in monitoring changes in program participants over time, developing effective and responsive intervention programs, and increasing accountability to the major stakeholders. Although the SSP was designed in partnership with CIS, the survey is currently used in a variety of educational settings. (For a more detailed description of applying the SSP to school intervention, see Bowen, Woolley, Richman, & Bowen, 2001.)

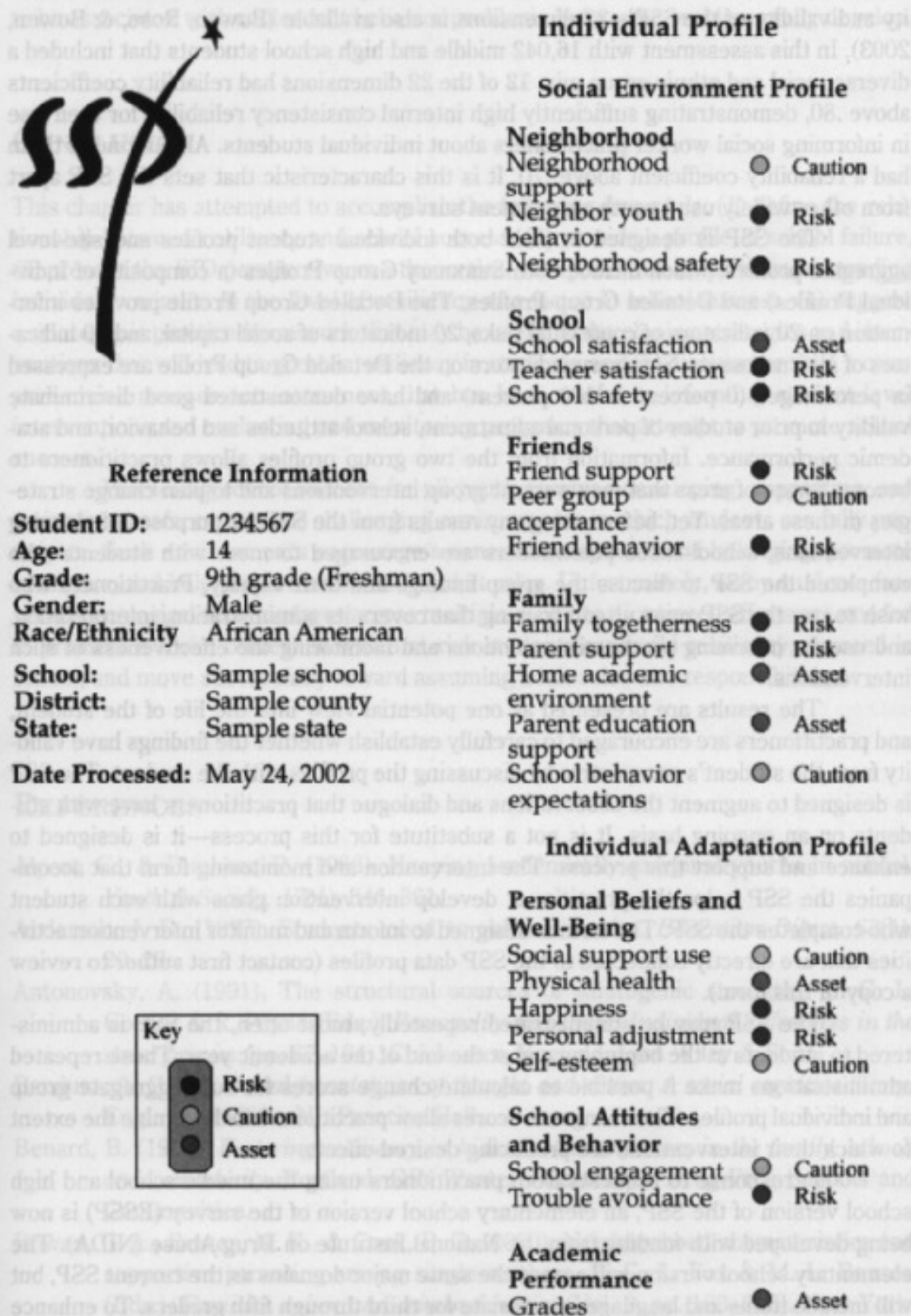
Consistent with an EID perspective, the SSP places emphasis on students' perceptions of their four primary microsystems: (1) neighborhood (35 items), (2) school (55 items), (3) friends (26 items), and (4) family (47 items). In addition, the survey includes modules assessing the demographic profile of students (nine items) and their health and well-being (48 items). Based on their responses, students receive a one-page summary (see Figure 5-6), which includes a Social Environment Profile and an Individual Adaptation Profile. Twenty-two core dimensions are currently assessed on the SSP, which have been associated in the literature with middle school and high school students' outcomes. Each dimension is assessed by a minimum of three summary items.

The 14 social environmental dimensions (see Figure 5-6) are results that can be targeted for intervention and prevention planning as a means to influence student results associated with individual adaptation. Each dimension on the SSP has a positive label (for example, "Neighborhood Support") and scores on each dimension represent a continuum of protection ranging from red (potential risk) to yellow (some caution may be warranted) to green (potential asset). A student's score on a particular dimension is calculated by aggregating his or her answers to the questions in that particular scale. The ordinal, color-coded cutoffs for each dimension were determined based on comparison to national norms, criterion analysis, and expert review. Reference information about the school and child is included on the left side of the profile form.

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 includes no questions about illegal behavior, substance abuse, sexual activities, or issues of child abuse that may place students or families in self-incriminating situations. Validity and reliability of the measures on the SSP have been empirically supported across a number of research inves-

Figure 5-6

School Success Profile



SOURCE: Bowen, G. L., & Richman, J. M. (2001). *School Success Profile*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina (Available http://www.uncssp.org/use_sampleindividualprofile.asp).

tigations (see Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Bowen, Bowen, & Cook, 2000; Bowen & Chapman, 1996; Bowen, Richman, Brewster, & Bowen, 1998; Nash, 2002; Nash & Bowen, 1999; Richman, Rosenfeld, & Bowen, 1998). A comprehensive assessment of reliability and validity of the SSP's 22 dimensions is also available (Bowen, Rose, & Bowen, 2003). In this assessment with 16,042 middle and high school students that included a diverse racial and ethnic group mix, 12 of the 22 dimensions had reliability coefficients above .80, demonstrating sufficiently high internal consistency reliability for their use in informing social worker practitioners about individual students. All but one of them had a reliability coefficient above .70. It is this characteristic that sets the SSP apart from other widely used youth assessment surveys.

The SSP is designed to yield both individual student profiles and site-level aggregate profiles, which include both Summary Group Profiles (a composite of Individual Profiles) and Detailed Group Profiles. The Detailed Group Profile provides information on 20 indicators of contextual risks, 20 indicators of social capital, and 20 indicators of internal assets. Summary indicators on the Detailed Group Profile are expressed in percentages (0 percent to 100 percent) and have demonstrated good discriminate validity in prior studies of personal adjustment, school attitudes and behavior, and academic performance. Information from the two group profiles allows practitioners to become aware of areas that may warrant group interventions and to plan change strategies in these areas. Yet, before using any results from the SSP for purposes of planning interventions, school-based practitioners are encouraged to meet with students who completed the SSP to discuss the group findings and their validity. Practitioners who wish to use the SSP must attend training that covers its administration, interpretation, and use for informing practice interventions and monitoring the effectiveness of such interventions.

The results are presented as one potential view into the life of the student, and practitioners are encouraged to carefully establish whether the findings have validity from the student's perspective by discussing the profiles with the student. The SSP is designed to augment the observations and dialogue that practitioners have with students on an ongoing basis. It is not a substitute for this process—it is designed to enhance and support this process. The intervention 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 SSP data profiles (contact first author to review a copy of this form).

The SSP may be administrated repeatedly; most often, the SSP is administered to students at the beginning and at the end of the academic year. These repeated administrations make it possible to calculate change scores for both aggregate group and individual profiles. The changes in scores allow practitioners to determine the extent to which their interventions are producing desired effects.

In response to requests from practitioners using the middle school and high school version of the SSP, an elementary school version of the survey (ESSP) is now being developed with funding from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). The elementary school version will assess the same major domains as the current SSP, but will include items and language appropriate for third through fifth graders. To enhance its ability to sustain children's interest, the form will be computerized with graphics and audio features. Because of concerns about the reliability and validity of self-report

data from young children, some ESSP data will be collected from parents and teachers. The elementary version will be rigorously tested throughout its development. The ESSP will allow school-based practitioners to address risk and protective factors known to be associated with adolescent behavior problems before the problems fully develop.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to accomplish the following five goals: (1) define the relationship between resiliency and school success, (2) provide a profile of school failure, (3) present the EID perspective as a theoretical viewpoint that helps in understanding individual variation in the level of resiliency as a factor in school success, (4) suggest a salutogenic practice framework that may be useful in developing strategies and interventions that will lead to greater resiliency in students, and (5) discuss the SSP, a comprehensive assessment instrument that has been useful in informing student-level interventions and evaluating and monitoring programs that attempt to promote school success.

Promoting school success for all youth involves developing, supporting, and maintaining safe, caring, and challenging environments in which students can fully participate. Such environments encourage a sense of acceptance and belonging, promote resilience, and help prepare students for adult roles. Unfortunately, many students face serious ecological disadvantages across multiple contexts. Continued efforts are needed to promote a social context in which at-risk students can build resiliency, succeed in school, and move successfully toward assuming adult roles and responsibilities.

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